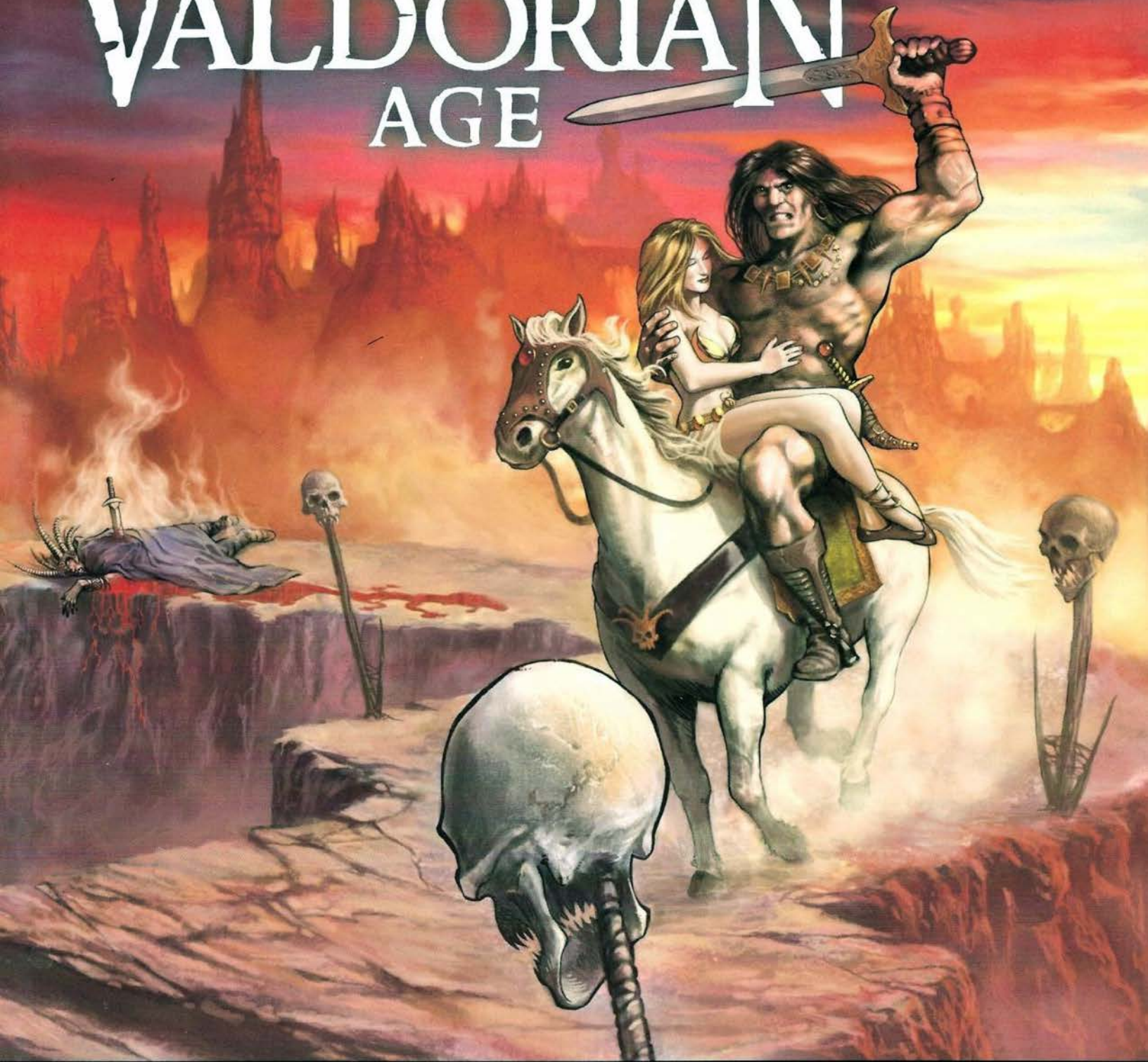


A sourcebook for
**FANTASY
HERO**

THE VALDORIAN AGE



ALLEN THOMAS

THE VALDORIAN AGE



Allen Thomas

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A Setting Book for *Fantasy Hero*

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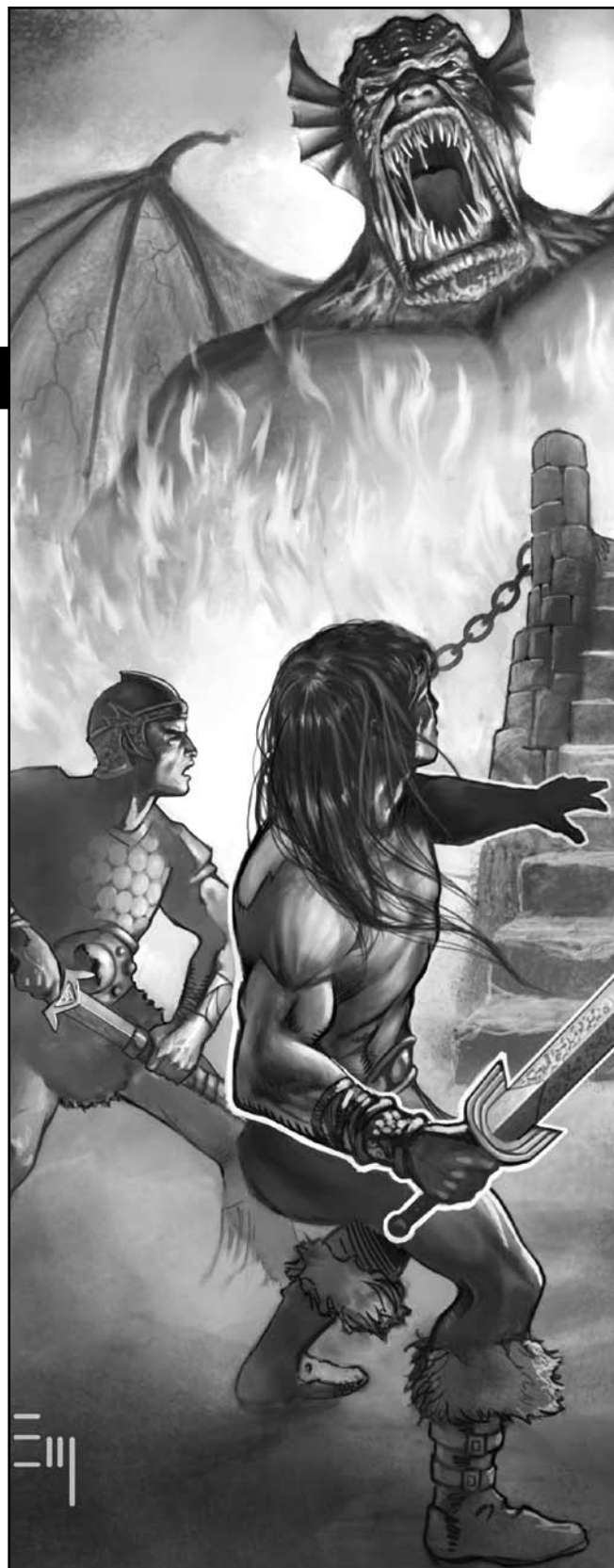
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INTRODUCTION



Mighty-thewed warriors with flashing blades. Cities full of people, each one looking out only for himself, and more than a few of them highly-skilled thieves. Corruption and venality among guardsmen, the nobility, and the priesthood. Eerie wizards using complex rituals to summon foul beings from other worlds to serve their whims. Ancient races from before the ken of Men lurking in the dark and forgotten places of the world. Lost and crumbling cities, filled with both treasure and unimagined peril. All this, and more, you can find in the pages of *Swords And Sorcery Fantasy*.

The Valdorian Age presents just such a world for your *Fantasy Hero* gaming enjoyment. It describes a setting different from most Fantasy roleplaying worlds — one where magic is not common and powerful, where few people are noble-hearted and true, and where even the boldest and most skilled adventurers rarely find and keep vast amounts of treasure. While it's undoubtedly a place of heroes — a world where one skilled man, armed with nothing but a sharp sword and his own unbeatable determination, can make a real difference in the course of events — it's also a place where survival and riches are often esteemed more highly than valorous deeds.

WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK

Chapter One describes the heart of the world of Il-Ryveras: Elweir, the vast, sprawling, stinking city that sits at the confluence of the Serpentine and Worm Rivers. Filled with adventures enough to last a lifetime, it's the primary focus of most Valdorian Age campaigns... or at least their starting point.

Chapter Two, *The Known World*, goes beyond Elweir to review the other realms and cities of Il-Ryveras: the kingdom of Abyzinia; the barbarian lands of the Crumble; the mighty empire of Valdoria; the pirate-filled archipelago of Naraat; and many more. But have no fear! Much of Il-Ryveras remains unexplored and

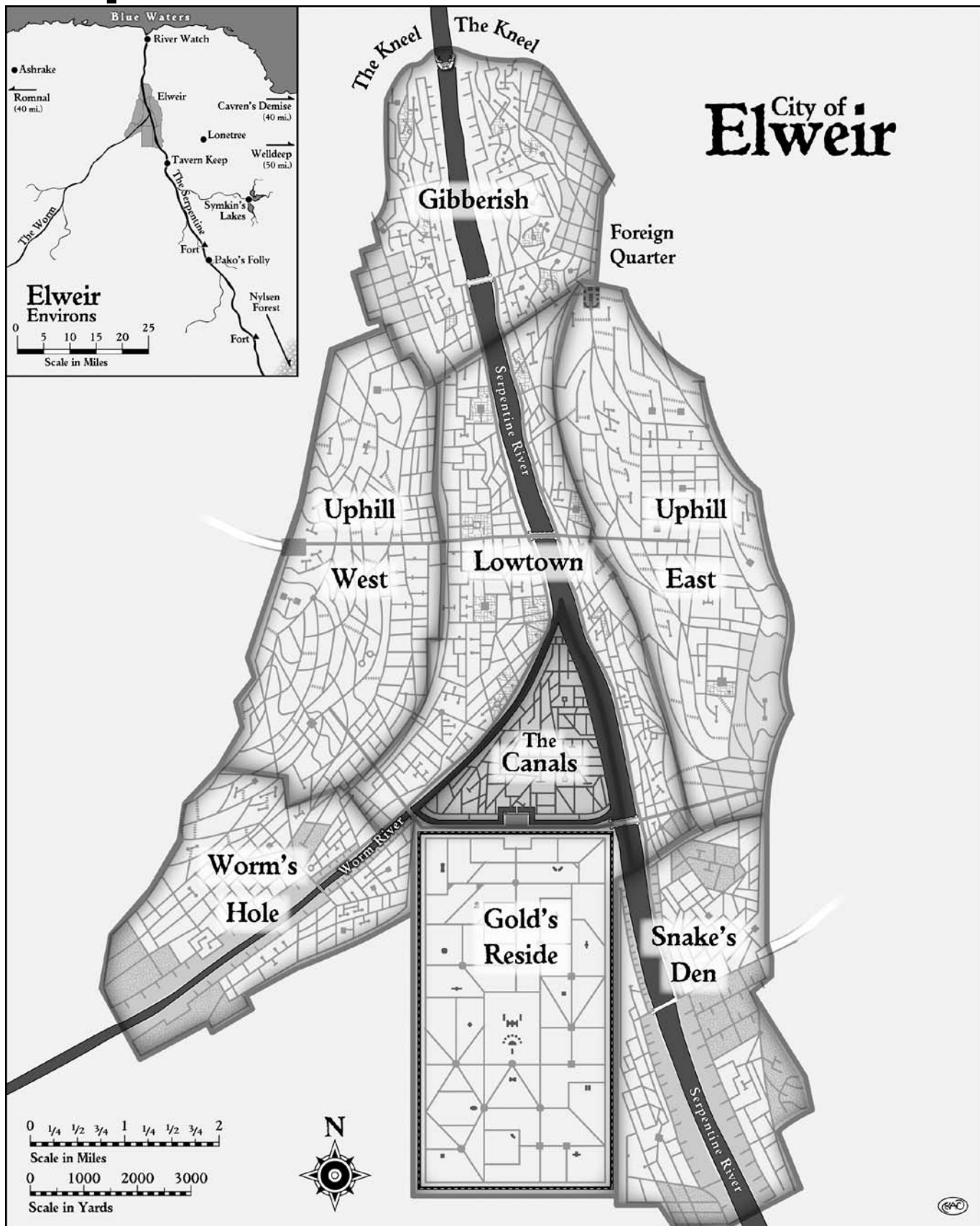
unknown to men, giving your heroes the chance to carve new kingdoms for themselves out of the wilderness, if they're so inclined.

Chapter Three, *Swordsmen And Sorcerers: Character Creation In The Valdorian Age*, consists of several sections. First it covers character creation basics: starting Primary Characteristics for Valdorian Age characters, character archetypes, Package Deals specific to the world of Il-Ryveras, and a general review of Skills, Talents, and the like (including special rules for Normal Skill Maxima). Second, it describes the many forms of the *Fighting Tricks* Skill, a key Skill for many characters, and what heroes can do with it. Third, there's a section of special rules and options for Valdorian Age combat. This section also covers weapons, armor, and other equipment. Last but not least, Chapter Three describes *sorcery*, the strange magic of the Valdorian world.

Chapters Four and Five are for the GM only; players shouldn't read them without the GM's permission. Chapter Four includes general advice for GMing the Valdorian Age, including suggested campaign types (with plot seeds for each) and *The GM's Vault*, which has all the secret and/or correct information related to what you've already read in Chapters One and Two. It also discusses the whys and wherefores of the rules changes established for *Valdorian Age* games, so that GMs who want to alter things can understand what's going on and make appropriate decisions. Lastly, it describes what happens during the rest of the Valdorian Age, in case the GM prefers another timeframe for his Valdorian campaign. Chapter Five rounds out the GMing section of the book with character sheets for the beings sorcerers summon to work their magic and for some key Elweirnian NPCs your heroes might encounter.

So strap on your trusty blade, put on your boots, and keep one hand on your purse — it's time to seek adventure, riches, and fame in the dark and dangerous world of *The Valdorian Age*!

chapter one:



THE CITY OF ELWEIR

HISTORY



THE YEARS

Elweir uses the Valdorian calendar (page 16) to mark the days and years. Year one on that calendar is the birth of Valdor, the hero-founder of Valdoria, so the time of the setting is the year 1023 Valdor's Advent (VA) which a Valdorian says thusly: "In the year of our freedom, one thousand, twenty-three."

An Elweirnian simply says, "One thousand, twenty-three." Or if he wants to insult a Valdorian, he says, "In the year of Valdor's shameful death, nine hundred, forty-one" — anyone with half an education knowing Valdor died in bed at the age of 82.

In terms of modern man the year is circa 41,000 BC.

History? What do you need to know about history for? All you need to know about history is a thousand years ago Valdor, the last hero, was killed in his bed by his plotting mistresses and then the gods turned their backs on us. They got disgusted with our murdering ways and washed their hands of us poor mortals. Ever since then, we've all been sliding into the abyss, and leading the way for all the world's fall, the first pebble in the rock slide down the slope into the bottomless pit we call tomorrow, is this cursed city of sin and wickedness some folk call Elweir....

Ask a resident of Elweir how old the city is. He'll answer that Elweir is as old as mankind itself, and if it's not so old as that, then nothing before the city's founding is very important, so what's it matter? But the earliest reference to a place called Elweir is found in the libraries of Abyzinia, a kingdom truly as old as mankind. It's an entry in a ship's log written two thousand years ago that reads: "Sailed upriver the Serpentine today. Near the shore was a collection of mud huts where barbarians lived. They called the place L'weer. The barbarians seemed friendly and we traded wine for furs. Later that night they snuck aboard and tried to murder us. We killed the ones we caught and set fire to their homes."

As sea captains from Abyzinia are fond of pointing out, little has changed since those days. The inhabitants of Elweir have just developed more sophisticated and effective methods of parting an honest captain from his coin.

It's true that people have lived in the region where the Serpentine River debouches into the Gulf of Blue Waters for as long as anyone has kept records, but the current city is the third to stand on the spot. The first city was razed by Cynthian riders over fifteen hundred years ago, back when those horsemen ranged far from their home on the plains. The second city, founded a couple of decades later, was destroyed during the three years of flooding that followed Valdor's murder, during the period of catastrophe and calamity the gods sent as punishment for mankind's faithlessness. The third city was built atop the water-scoured bones of the second after

WHY THE TITLE PRINCE?

Elweir is nowhere called a principality — in most official documents it's referred to as a city-state — but its ruler carries the title of Prince. The story behind this title is a humorous one, involving both a long-dead King (the only king of Elweir) and his son, Elweir's first ruling Prince, and it is told in a doggerel that children often sing:

*There was a lord of Elweir,
Named Ahdrunken Two-beer,
who felt his title slight.
"For my regal head," he said,
"it's simply much too light!"*

*He changed his name to king,
and so we'd call him sire,
he paid us with a ring.
"For an ale," we did hail,
"you're the king of everything!"*

*Ahdrunken had a pretty son.
Ahfeel Too-vain was his name
And he wasn't nearly so much fun.
"A king is far too old," he told,
"A prince I am, a prince I remain!"*

*So Elweir has a Prince,
But no Princedom does exist
'Long the banks of the Snake.
"And you get out!" we do shout,
"If king or lord is what you take!"*

Historically speaking, the king referred to is Adrucken, who ruled from 589 VA to 623 VA and was the last lord of Elweir. In his dotage, he anointed himself king and threw a city-wide festival in honor of his coronation. His son, Aveel, is still remembered for his legendary vanity (and for discontinuing the coronation festival started by his father). Aveel felt only wrinkled old men with scraggly grey hair were kings, so he kept the title prince, and since then every other ruler of Elweir has taken the same title.

the Serpentine and Worm Rivers had receded and returned to their bed, and it's the third city that still stands to this day — as it has stood for nearly nine hundred years.

Not that the average resident knows anything about those other cities. Most people in Elweir don't remember past their own lifetimes — history and other scholarly pursuits are not activities they hold very highly. The old timers say everything began to change thirty years ago — changed for the worse, everything was better in the days of their youth — with the rise of the Bandit Lords. But to understand current goings-on in Elweir requires going back three hundred years to the Tour of Erich the Last Warmaker, Emperor of Valdoria.

686 VA: EMPEROR ERICH'S TOUR

As had been the custom since the day six hundred years before when Valdor's son, Oeric the Heir, assumed the throne after his father's death, the newly crowned emperor of Valdoria — Erich, later called the Last Warmaker — set off on the Tour.

During his Tour a new emperor traveled the length and breadth of Valdoria visiting his liegemen. As he traveled he took their oaths of loyalty and gathered their second, third, and younger children — whatever child was not the heir to his father's title — and those young nobles' retainers. From these men the emperor formed a conquering army, and when he reached the borders of the empire, he waged war on his neighbors and conquered their lands. The emperor gave rulership over these newly-seized lands to the young nobles in his army, their rewards commensurate with their performance on the battlefield.

In this way Valdoria both reminded its far-flung nobles of their true allegiances and avoided much of the strife that resulted from matters of noble succession. Power-hungry second and third sons had an opportunity to seize lands of their own to rule, and this helped the empire remain vital for hundreds of years.

On the Tour of Erich the Last Warmaker, Valdoria expanded eastward, coming only forty miles away from the border of Elweir before the army stopped. In that year the inhabitants of the city proclaimed the end was nigh. Erich had, at best, thirty years of life left to him. When Erich died and his son came to rule, the next Tour would take the Valdorian army into Elweir and likely beyond.

Though the rule of the Valdorian Emperors was far from harsh — unforgiving and moralistic, perhaps, but never despotic and always fair — Elweir's wealth depended on its remaining near to Valdoria, but still independent of the empire's laws. As Valdorians were wont to say, "to breathe the air of Valdoria is to breathe the air of freedom": any slave stepping foot within the boundaries of the empire was a free man. The economy of Abyzinia, the other great power in the world, depended on slaves, and more importantly Abyzinian sea captains depended on slaves to row their barques across the Blue Waters. Any Abyzinian captain dropping anchor in a Valdorian port suddenly found himself without slaves to row his barque back. The freemen of Valdoria had an ingrained, soul-deep duty to give slaves their freedom. The nobles of Valdoria could not simply look the other way, since their hero-founder had given them their freedom so long ago, and it was the proclamation of Valdor himself that all slaves in Valdoria are free. Any noble who ignored that proclamation would find himself thrown down by the freemen under his rule.

So there sat Elweir between two empires, a city where slaves were still slaves, and it profited from being the sole location of trade between Valdoria, whose merchants came overland or down the Worm River, and Abyzinia, whose merchants came five miles up the Serpentine River from the Gulf of Blue Waters.

After Emperor Erich's Tour, it seemed to the residents of Elweir that a world-ending threat loomed, implacable and unavoidable, thirty or so years in their future. People were often heard to grumble in those days, "To breathe the air of Valdoria is to breathe the air of poverty."

703 VA: ORON THE CONCILIATOR

For what happened in the year 703 when Oron was crowned emperor and made his Tour of Valdoria, the Prince of Elweir took credit — and so did the priests, the aldermen, the river and sea captains, several prominent thieves and cat burglars, and one tavernkeeper. Some residents of Elweir, ever dubious of anything a person says, claimed it was the Abyzinians who deserved credit, and others said it was the sorcerer Largisse Foom, who made his home in the city in those years.

Whatever the case, when Oron's soldiers came within sight of the city, they set up camp and their tents and pavilions spread from horizon to horizon. Then the Emperor made a triumphal entrance into the city, him and his entourage riding the entirety of the Prince's Roads, both along the east and west banks of the rivers, so all of Elweir's residents could see him. Once he arrived at the palace, Oron earned his epithet "the Conciliator" and signed a truce with the Prince of Elweir. The truce came to be called Oron's Peace, and in it the Emperor agreed that Valdoria would never conquer the city — that Elweir would always remain free of imperial rule.

Oron's Tour marked the beginning of the end for the custom of the Tour. Today, in 1023 VA, three centuries later, no emperor has left the confines of Valdoria's capital city, Revanna, for several generations. But at the time Oron's actions were unbelievable — for a Valdorian Emperor to make peace instead of war, especially on a godless and sinful place such as Elweir, was unprecedented. To this day all of Elweir celebrates that day as the holiday Oron's March.

The truce held for all those centuries, with the Duchy of Romnal the closest the empire ever came to Elweir. In the end it was a Prince of Elweir who broke the truce, not one of the Valdorian Emperors.

989 VA: THE RISE OF THE BANDIT LORDS

Law-abiding farmers, hard-working tradesmen, and merchants who, if not exactly honest, were no more dishonest than those elsewhere — all of these had long inhabited the lands west of Elweir. Before the Tour of Erich the Last Warmaker, independent city-states and small farming communities spread far-flung across the land, and for the last three hundred years the border of the Valdorian Empire, where law-breaking was not countenanced, had only been thirty miles away. But the lands east of Elweir have always been sparsely populated and a different matter entirely.

Elweir stands on the hills along the banks of the Serpentine, and as one travels east, the grassy hills descend into a foul and reeking swamp called Cavren's Demise. No one knows who Cavren was, let alone why he'd go to such a terrible place to die, but the swamp has been called that as far back as

SONG OF THE BANDIT LORDS

A piece of doggerel Elweirnian children sing about the Bandit Lords:

*Pillaging Pitt has one eye
He never sees enough.
Jac Plunder rides like thunder
He takes all our stuff.*

*The Bandit Lords are riding.
They'll kill your ma and pa.
They'll take you to the swamps
And drown you in the flood.*

*Lord Rape has two swords
One for boys, one for girls.
Lady Slaughter is his daughter
Both she kills just for thrills.*

*The Bandit Lords are burning
All the boats on the river.
They'll take you in their band
And make you spit up blood.*

*Cat A'Killer needs no man
'Less she's got his tongue.
Hanging Hyr has a rope
And sends you on a plunge.*

*The Bandit Lords are coming
Into wealthy Elweir town.
They'll take you far away
And bury you in the mud.*

minds and chronicles recall.

In the west Cavren's Demise stretches from forty miles east of Elweir to the foothills of the Desert's Teeth, the mountain range that bounds the Blowing Wastes, and from the Blue Waters in the south to the Cynthian Plains in the north. The swamp is mile upon mile of fallen trees covered in slime, bubbling waters and quicksand, and fell beasts that look to have no place in this world. For time out of mind the swamp has served as a refuge for outcasts: desperate men who fled the harsh justice of the Cynthian riders and the nomads of the wastes, criminals too evil to stay even in Elweir or pirates too depraved to remain in the Maggot Isles (and that's depraved indeed), and sometimes aberrant Valdorians and wanderers from the icy plains of Amyklai.

Despite the presence of these evil men, Cavren's Demise was never truly a threat to Elweir. All wise men knew to stay far away from the swamp, and the refugees lurking there never ranged far from their hidey-holes. But that changed in 989 AD when the Bandit Lords came to rule the swamp.

At first their existence was just a rumor — evil and depraved villains for the stories bards and other ne'er-do-wells told, whose existence only the children believed in. The Bandit Lords had colorful names — Lord Rape, Lady Slaughter, Jac Plunder, Pillaging Pitt, Hanging Hyr, Cat A'Killer — and these unlikely sobriquets seemed further proof they were just an invention of the storytellers to frighten children and earn a little more coin. But the truth was something was happening in Cavren's Demise. Overland caravans from the east, never common, became fewer and fewer over the years... and then,

ten years after bards first told of the Bandit Lords in melodramatic whispers and hushed words fraught with fear, came the Parade of Burning Boats.

The Bandit Lords had finally grown brave enough to attack the barges sailing the Serpentine. For nearly a week burning ships arrived in Elweir, drifting into the city in ones and twos each night. Their crews were gone and only the captain remained on board — tied to the front of his barge, his flesh charred black from the flames.

The events of that week panicked the river captains, for the Bandit Lords jeopardized their trade, and eventually their panic reached all of the city's residents with new rumors of the Bandit Lords marching on Elweir coming every night. Urged on by the river captains, the Prince assembled a ragtag army of conscripted men, mercenaries, and city guardsmen. With the Prince in the lead trying hard to look comfortable in his armor — he was a brave fool if nothing else — the army marched out of Elweir to much fanfare.

Two nights later, somewhere to the southeast of the city, the Bandit Lords ambushed the army, routed the men, and murdered the Prince.

1000 VA: THE RANSOM DEMAND

After the rout of the Prince's army, a ransom demand from the Bandit Lords arrived in Elweir. The Bandit Lords stated that unless they were paid sixty pounds of gold yearly, they would march into the city and take what they wanted, putting the rest to the torch and killing anyone they found. Their demand came just as the riots, which had started after news of the ambush reached the city and made people fear for their lives, were threatening to spill out of Lowtown and into the other neighborhoods.

The new Prince — only sixteen years old and unprepared to rule Elweir in the best of times, let alone the worst — listened to his advisors and agreed to pay the ransom. To the populace he presented himself as the savior of the city and soon quelled the riots, but in truth he had mortgaged the city.

It is often said that gold is the blood of Elweir — a maxim that everyone, from the lowliest beggar to the wealthiest of the Fifty Families, knows and believes — and because the Prince agreed to pay the Bandit Lords, he was leeching the blood from Elweir. To make matters worse the Bandit Lords, as any extortioners would, raised the ransom every year. No man can stand a leeching for long, and soon the Prince found himself held responsible for draining the blood of Elweir.

1021 VA: THE TREATY WITH ROMNAL

In the winter of 1021 the Prince died in a hunting accident. With him were some of his chief advisors including the Chief Magistrate of Gold's Reside, Capra Lustshine; the Prince's Chancellor, Fawn Speckmore; the Royal Exchequer, Sandover Reed; and the Prince's son and heir, Summerset.

While they were hunting pheasant, an errant arrow missed its mark and found its way into the Prince's throat. All of his companions claimed they had fired at the same time, and none knew who had

fired the arrow that had struck down the Prince.

It was an unhappy accident that no one believed, but the folk of Elweir never believed anything. Besides which, no one was willing to question the circumstances too closely for fear of earning the wrath of some of the city's most important men. The period of mourning soon began — so soon after the Prince's death it was as if someone had made the arrangements for his burial before the Prince was even dead. During the mourning period Lothar Coeur, Duke of Romnal, came to pay his respects in a gesture most found surprising, and on the last day of mourning, much to everyone's shock and dismay, the new Prince brought Elweir into the Valdorian Empire, although technically only as a protectorate of the Duchy of Romnal.

Since the days of Oron the Conciliator, Valdoria had changed. With each subsequent emperor who didn't leave the capital city, the duchies, baronies, and counties that made up the empire grew more independent. Already, over the last hundred years, border fights had broken out between neighboring provinces, and the hinterlands of Valdoria were consumed with internal fighting — mostly diplomatic squabbles and small-scale skirmishes between over-enthusiastic young noblemen, but these skirmishes always threatened to become larger conflicts. All it would've taken was one important son of the nobility to die before a father driven mad with grief declared war on his neighbor.

Despite their independence, none of the provinces had acted on their own to sign treaties with other nations until the Duke of Romnal accepted Elweir as his protectorate. Even in the language of the treaty, no mention is made of Valdoria — the agreement was solely between the Duke and Prince. It was an unprecedented act, and one that many observers say marks the end of the Valdorian Empire. Whatever its ultimate repercussions the treaty between Elweir and Romnal has, without a doubt, created turmoil among the Duchy's neighboring provinces that still goes on to this day — some want to band together and avenge this wrong done to the Emperor (and split the Duchy among themselves), others want to sign their own treaties with Romnal.

The treaty between the two states was called Summerset's Pledge, although it soon became known as Summerset's Bill of Sale, for most felt the Prince had sold Elweir into the Valdorian Empire. The reason behind the treaty was simple, something even the lowliest fishmonger could understand: the tribute paid to the Duchy was much less than the ransom paid to the Bandit Lords, and in return for the tribute, the Duke dispatched his men to guard the Serpentine and promised to protect Elweir from the Bandit Lords' reprisal. Of course, no dealings with Valdoria can be based only on coin, and the Prince agreed that Elweir would enforce some of the laws and traditions of Valdoria,

ELEVEN PRINCES

The children in Elweir recite a piece of doggerel that lists the last ten Princes, as well as the current one, and the notable deed they performed during their reign — notable, at least, in the minds of the common person. This list spans the last three centuries.

*Symkin was a simpleton,
Who liked to sail the lake.
And Finch died a fish,
Who drowned in the Snake.*

*Blote was a sot,
Who drank till tin was silver.
And Dutton was a glutton,
Who somehow lost his liver.*

*Dovlyn was a lover,
Who died in bed (y'know how).
And Hasherd was a bastard,
Who never found his cow.*

*Granger was a stranger,
Who made a good marriage.
And Forlyn was a lazy man,
Who insisted on a carriage*

*Mehki was no soldier,
Who can guess where he now lay?
And Fife was a mark,
To the bandits he paid and paid.*

*Summerset's a bonny lad,
Our favorite Prince for now,
But he sold us down the river,
Gave away poor Elweir town.*

Historically (the dates of each's reign in parenthesis): Symkin (739-755) was more a simple man than simple, and preferred the rural life to that in the city. He is remembered for the purchase of Symkin's Lakes. Finch (755-759) dove from Founding Stone Bridge during a Prince's Day celebration, claiming he could swim like a fish, and then promptly drowned. Blote (759-785) did like to drink, but is remembered most for devaluing Elweir's currency. Dutton (785-837) ruled well into his dotage; in the weeks before he died, he grew convinced that someone was stealing his liver (his favorite food) from his plate and insisted Elweir be turned upside-down in search of the thieves. Official records state Dovlyn (837-864) died peacefully in his sleep, but everyone knows there were also six women in bed with him when he died. Dovlyn never married, but had many sons — Hasherd was the one he named heir (much to the consternation of the Fifty). Hasherd (864-907) obsessed over discovering his mother's identity, but never did. Many claimed to be his mother, since it would have entitled the woman to live in Gold's Reside, but all claims were proven false and some were absolutely ridiculous — the most ridiculous being the cow herder's old wife who claimed Hasherd was the son of one of her cows. Granger (907-940) married Hasherd's daughter, Miki, and as the former Prince's sole son-in-law became Prince upon Hasherd's death. Granger would never say what land he hailed from. Forlyn (940-976) insisted on traveling only in a carriage and would go no place in Elweir where he couldn't ride in one (like Lowtown). The Bandit Lords killed Mehki (976-1000), Summerset's grandfather, in 1000 VA and only returned his head to Elweir. Fife (1000-1021) paid the Bandit Lord's ransom. Summerset (1021-present) signed the treaty with Romnal.

although modified so they didn't threaten the source of Elweir's wealth.

1023 VA: TODAY IN ELWEIR

Today Elweir's status is uncertain. Is the city a part of Valdoria? Or is it an independent city-state allied with the Duchy of Romnal? And can Duke Lothar make such promises without consulting the current Emperor of Valdoria, Alric the Unmoved?

The Duke's soldiers fight the Bandit Lords upriver the Serpentine, and anyone traveling beyond Snake's Den can see the workmen laboring to build a castle — one intended to house the Duke's men, not soldiers from Elweir, and according to rumors also intended to mark the new eastern border of the Duchy. Does this mean Elweir is an island of independence within the Valdorian Empire? Considering the empire's history, that hardly seems likely. Then again what of the truce Elweir signed with Oron the Conciliator guaranteeing the city's independence? But since the treaty with Romnal makes no mention of Valdoria could that mean Oron's Peace doesn't apply?

Adding to the confusion, Elweir doesn't conform to all the laws of Valdoria... but then again, there have been changes. Slaves are still slaves in Elweir — but no Elweirnian can own slaves, nor can slaves be bought or sold within the borders of the city. However, one must only step fifty yards past the border of the city, walk a short distance east into the Foreign Quarter, to see the slave market still doing a brisk business. Also, the practice of sorcery is outlawed — but men and women rumored to be sorcerers still make a home in the city, and so long as they don't practice sorcery, they're welcome to stay.

And these are only two of the most noticeable changes — there are many conflicting laws and inconsistent loopholes that came about because of the treaty. The enforcement of law in Elweir has always been arbitrary, the magistrates open to bribes to look the other way, but now no one even knows what exactly the laws are.

How long will it be until the Duchy claims complete and total sovereignty over Elweir? Already the Duke holds much influence with the Prince, and already Elweir modifies its legal code to conform more with the traditions and laws of Valdoria — could this be a slow conquest by degrees? And even if it doesn't mean the Duke is slowly taking over Elweir, will the Duchy's soldiers defeat the Bandit Lords, or might those evil men make good on their promise to put Elweir to the torch?

All these questions confront the current residents of Elweir, and they're far too complicated for a common man to understand, let alone answer — so most people don't attempt to answer them. But there's one final question on everyone's mind that many folk do spend a great deal of time considering:

Despite the changes the treaty has brought about, the pursuit of wealth continues, but how much longer will that be true? How long will it be until "to breathe the air of Valdoria is to breathe the air of poverty" — the saying from centuries ago, revived in these modern times. Because of this uncertainty, people pursue wealth with a more furious intensity than ever before, because one way or another this might be the last chance they get to make their fortunes.

OVERVIEW



Like any good criminal with a long history of stealing folk's coin, Elweir's got a lot of names — the City of Six Bridges, the Gateway to Blue Waters, the City of the Colossus, the Treasure Chest, the Toll House, the River Chains, the Thieves on the River — but most of us who've lived here long, when we call it a name we can say in polite company, we just call it the Murk.

Elweir lies in the north-central part of Sarth, the southern continent on this side of Il-Ryveras, a world the gods long ago abandoned to its fate. Though not the largest city in the world — that honor falls to Revanna, the capital of Valdoria, or Y'sathor, the largest port city in Abyzinia, depending on whom you ask — Elweir is the most cosmopolitan, the most wealthy, and perhaps the most infamous.

All men and women know the name of Elweir. Even in the icy wastes to the far south in the lands of Amyklai, or in the pine forests of the far north in the lands of Khor, the barbarians have heard of the city and listened in astonishment to stories of Elweir's wealth and its residents' greed.

Elweir is a city where a man can make his fortune or lose his life over a handful of bits — one is as likely as the other — and any bard can tell an endless litany of cautionary tales about a poor outlander who came to the city with high hopes for the future, only to lose his life over the price of a mug of ale. Despite these warnings people from all over the world still come to the city seeking their destiny... and if seeking one's destiny is too noble a cause for a place like Elweir, then most are content simply to seek their fortune.

CLIMATE

I've heard bards say how "sultry" Elweir is. They should save their sultry for the doxies and witches and noble ladies in their stories, because there ain't nothing sultry about the Murk. It's hot, just hot. Less hot in the winter than the summer, but still hot — so hot it can drive a man to murder.

Elweir is hot and humid nearly all year around. Snowfall is exceedingly rare, maybe one or two days of flurries during the depths of winter over the course of a decade, and never any accumulation.

Rain, however, is common. During the Spring and early part of the Summer, the rain falls in sheets blown by high winds and gales strong enough to tear shutters and shingles from the buildings. In the neighborhoods nearest the rivers, the cobbled streets often flood, with standing water reaching the ankles after long rains. The streets of hard-packed dirt, especially the ones in Lowtown, turn to sucking mud.

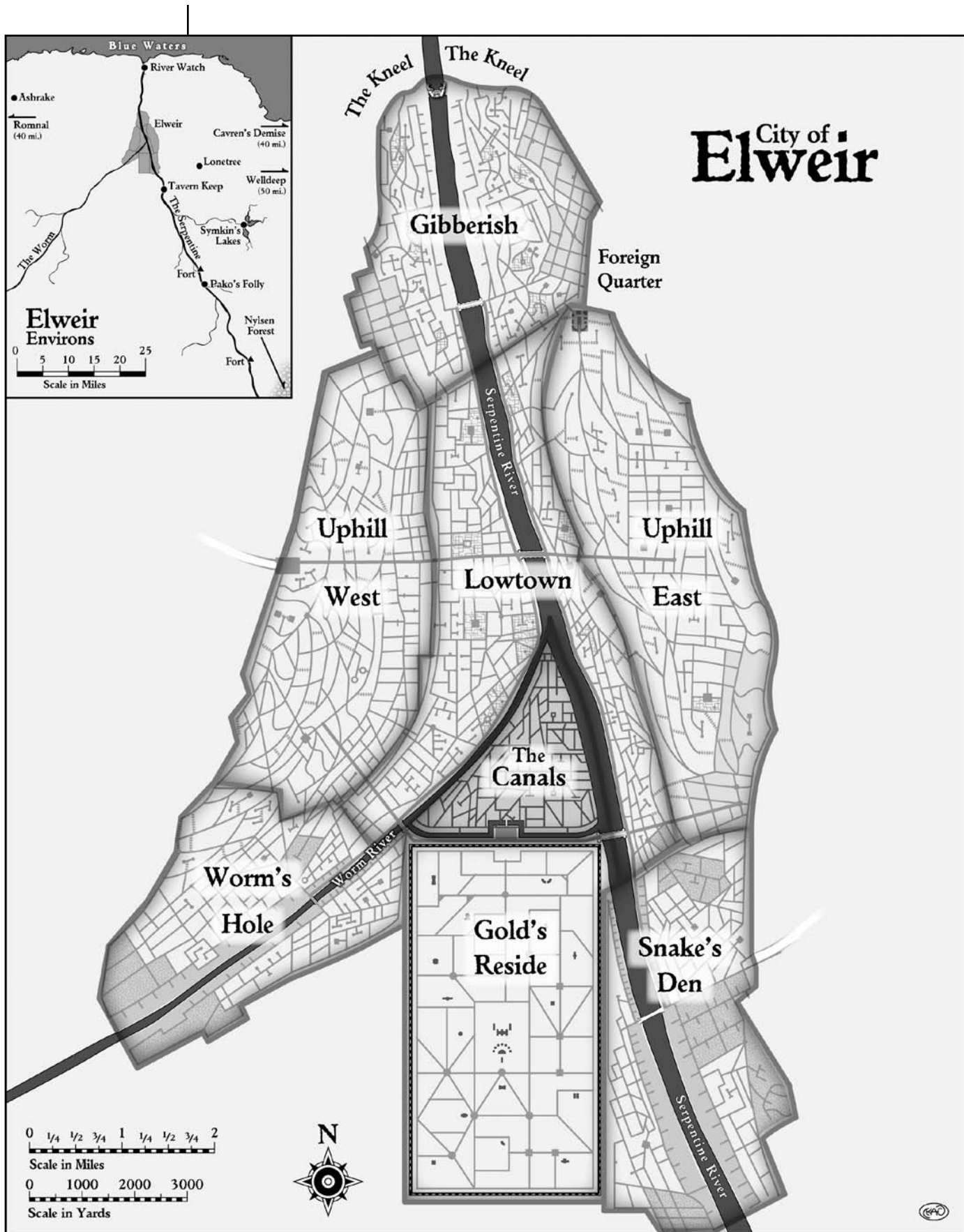
For the remainder of the Summer, once the rains have stopped, it becomes unbearably hot and humid, making all people long for the rains to return. On these days a brief rain in the mid-afternoon is common, but this rainfall never cools off the city — it only serves to make it more humid.

During the Autumn and Winter, it drizzles and mists. Even on days when it doesn't rain, mists rise from the Serpentine and Worm Rivers during the early morning and evening hours and envelope Lowtown and the other neighborhoods on the river in a dense, choking haze. These frequent rains and the river mists contribute to Elweir's nickname, the Murk.

TEMPERATURES IN ELWEIR

Here are average temperatures in Elweir, though days that fall outside the average are not unheard of. Some other statistics: average humidity is 70%; and average rainfall is 70 inches per year.

Season	Temperature Range
Winter	55°-70° F
Spring	65°-80° F
Summer	80°-95° F
Autumn	65°-80° F



GEOGRAPHY

Stretching fifteen miles from north to south and six miles from east to west at its longest and widest points, Elweir sprawls across the gently rolling hills that make up the Serpentine River valley. The hills in the surrounding area were long ago cleared of trees and are now dark green with lush grass. Though the Prince has never ordered an official census of the city's population, most estimate the population somewhere between seventy-five and a hundred thousand for the city proper, from the rundown tenements in Lowtown to the majestic palaces of Gold's Reside. The gods only know how many more people inhabit the surrounding area, but all of them, from folk living in the squalor of the Kneel to the farmers in the rural villages upriver from Elweir, depend on the city for their livelihood.

THE SERPENTINE RIVER

The Serpentine is a broad, fast-flowing river that runs over two-thirds the length of the continent of Sarth, starting in the far south and ending in the north at the Gulf of Blue Waters. From bank to bank it measures nearly a thousand feet (152") wide where it runs through Elweir. At Elweir, the average depth of the river is thirty feet (5"); it reaches a hundred feet (15") deep at its center.

The Serpentine is the single most important contributor to the city's wealth, since trade goods come downriver from the lands of Amyklai, Graecoria, Three Fingers, and the Cynthian Plain, and Abyzinian sea captains come upriver from the Blue Waters, where the river debouches into the sea.

The headwaters of the Serpentine lie somewhere in the Cold Peaks, but their exact location is a mystery. Bards frequently tell fantastical tales of brave heroes journeying the length of the Serpentine to discover its source. In these tales, the purported headwaters run the gamut from the center of the Il-Ryveras to the divine abode of the Old Gods; sometimes the heroes meet tragic ends, sometimes they find their heart's desire.

THE WORM RIVER

The Worm is a river that flows into the Serpentine, passing through a long portion of Valdoria from its headwaters at Lake Veer, fifteen miles north of the Smoldering Sea. At three hundred feet (46") across, the Worm is much narrower than the Serpentine, and its muddy waters also flow less quickly, hence its name. Compared to the Serpentine, the Worm is a very dull and stodgy river, and those captains that sail it have the same reputation as the river itself. Where it passes through Elweir, the average depth of the river is fifteen feet (2.5"), and it reaches forty feet deep (6") at its center.

THE SIX BRIDGES

The Serpentine and Worm split the city of Elweir into three portions, and connecting these portions are six bridges. Four of the bridges span the Serpentine, and all of these are

wonders of the world, their construction either accomplished via sorcery in ancient times or with architecture so hard to understand it might as well be sorcery. The other two bridges span the Worm, and these are more mundane than the other four, something a contemporary engineer might accomplish with enough time, materials, and manpower. All of the bridges stand from fifteen to twenty feet (2.5-3") above the surface of the river, allowing barges traveling between the three portages in Elweir to pass below.

The Prince's Bridges: These three bridges are a part of the Prince's Roads (described below). One bridge connects Gold's Reside to the west bank of the Worm; this is called Worm's Bridge. Another connects Gold's Reside to the east bank of the Serpentine; this is called Snake's Bridge. The final bridge crosses the Serpentine and connects the two parts of Lowtown; this is called the Lowtown Bridge. The Graecorian architect Tolemos designed the three bridges five hundred years ago when the Prince's Roads were established, and they resemble as a series of stacked narrow arches, each three feet wide. At the center of these narrow arches is a larger arch that provides a tunnel for barges carting goods from Gibberish to Snake's Den or Worm's Hole, and vice versa. The bridges are each twenty feet (3") wide.

The Creaking Bridge: This bridge crosses the Worm River and connects the two parts of Worm's Hole. Made of wood, it's named for the loud creaking groans that come from it as people and carts make their way across the span at all hours of the day and night. The Creaking Bridge constantly needs repair. The bridge is fifty feet (7.5") wide.

Foom's Bridge: The southern-most bridge on the Serpentine, Foom's Bridge was created by sorcery. Elementals working at the bidding of the ancient sorcerer, Largisse Foom, constructed the span in the course of one night. A free-standing arch of unmortared white stone, the bridge appears an impossible construction (and an engineer will tell anyone who asks that it is wholly and completely impossible)... but it has stood solidly, not even requiring repairs, for centuries. The bridge is fifty feet (7.5") wide.

Founding Stone Bridge: The northern-most bridge on the Serpentine, Founding Stone Bridge's creation predates Elweir's founding — it's one of the reasons the city founders built a city here (hence the name "Founding Stone"). The bridge connects the two parts of Gibberish. Made of stone and its length decorated with metal statues of humans in strange armor — fluted plates with spiraling horns rising from greaves and the shoulders — who stand at attention with their hands resting on the hilts of their long-bladed swords, the Founding Stone comes from a time before history. Most assume the builders of the bridge are the same who constructed the Colossus of the South (described below), and they made it with sorcery lost to man. Like Foom's Bridge, Founding Stone never requires any repairs. The bridge is a hundred feet (15") wide.

THE RIVER CHAINS

Running below the Creaking Bridge, Foom's Bridge, and Founding Stone Bridge are immense chains of iron. These chains prevent ships from passing through the city and force them to dock in Elweir. This creates Elweir's monopoly on maritime commerce, since many sea-faring vessels in the world of Il-Ryveras could travel up the broad and deep Serpentine, rather than stopping in Elweir at one of the city's three portages to trade their goods. Ships traveling downriver the Worm must dock in Worm's Hole; those traveling downriver the Serpentine, in Snake's Den; and those traveling upriver the Serpentine from Blue Waters, in Gibberish. A brisk, but humble trade goes on with small barges carting goods on the rivers within the city, generally to and from one of the three portages — in this way goods are transported between the sea and river captains.

THE EMBANKMENTS

Walls of mortared stone line the banks of the two rivers within the city proper. Ranging from 10 to 15 feet (1.5-2.5") high, these walls serve as embankments that keep the river from flooding the city. Throughout the section that stretches through Lowtown, protruding from the embankments are many small platforms, reached from narrow steps leading down from the tops of the walls. Tied up to these platforms are small rowboats the fishermen use. During the day, while the boats are on the river and the fishermen drag their nets, other people sit on the platforms with a hook-and-line and fish. Located at various points along the walls are large, round openings — these are drains for the sewer system that keeps the lower parts of Elweir from flooding too badly. The openings are four to six feet (.5-1") in diameter.

THE COLOSSUS OF THE NORTH

Marking the northern border of Elweir, just beyond Gibberish, is an immense statue that straddles the Serpentine River. The river narrows unnaturally here to four hundred feet (60") wide and the statue is, from his knees to his upraised arm, a thousand feet (152") tall — so tall that as the sun passes through the sky, it casts the shadow of the Colossus across the northern parts of Elweir.

The statue depicts a kneeling man, one knee planted on the east bank, the other on the west. The man is obviously in pain, and his head strains to look upwards, as if he wishes to see the heavens. One arm is raised above him, and encircling the man are two gigantic serpents. The whole statue is of a material similar to bronze but much stronger, and inscribed on the bases on either side of the river is a maxim written in archaic Abyzinian. Though few Elweirnians can read the text, all know what it says: "Man rises, only to fall."

No modern man could make such an immense statue, and like the Founding Stone, no records tell of the statue's creators (although every bard has a story or three about its creation, where the creators run the gamut from the gods, to the *Drin-drish*, to the race of men that preceded the current

inhabitants of Il-Ryveras — a race nearly godlike in its abilities and sorcery). The Abyzinians claim their ancestors constructed the statue at the beginning of the Age, and their ruler, the Witch-Queen Zenobia T'numbra, knows its purpose. Far to the south, straddling the Clashing Channel that leads from the Smoldering Sea to the Iceswept Ocean, is a second colossus called the Colossus of the South. This statue depicts a man wreathed in flames, and rumor says its base has the same inscription.

THE PRINCE'S ROADS

Cobbled with smooth paving stones and forty feet (6") wide, the Prince's Roads are a safe haven in the lawless neighborhoods of Elweir. Because Lowtown and other less-than-savory places lie right in the heart of the city, the Prince's Roads allow law-abiding souls to make their way through Elweir without fear. The city guard accepts no bribes on the roads and ruthlessly keeps the peace here. This only applies to the Prince's Roads proper — anyone stepping foot from the Roads becomes fair game for unsavory elements of the city. The act of tempting someone to step from the Prince's Roads is called "baiting," and generally involves an attractive woman pretending to be in distress (but there are many variations on this, from children crying that they've lost their way, to old-timers falling down and pretending to suffer convulsions).

From north to south, the Prince's Roads run along the western banks of the Worm and Serpentine and along the eastern bank of the Serpentine, passing through Lowtown and connecting Worm Hole and Snake's Den to Gibberish. From west to east, the Prince's Roads pass through Lowtown, connecting Uphill West and East at two spots: one of which runs directly through Lowtown across the Serpentine; the other connecting Uphill West and East to the Canals and leading directly to Hawker's Square.

Criminals fleeing those of their ilk who wish to do them harm, often run to the Prince's Roads to escape — "hiding behind the Prince's apron," in the argot. When someone needs a city guard, the swiftest way to find one is often to go to the nearest part of the Prince's Roads, since the guard patrols the Roads incessantly at all hours of the day and night.

THE NEIGHBORHOODS

The city has divided itself into eight neighborhoods. Each of these is more than just an administrative district — their inhabitants are distinct and separate, almost as if from different worlds entirely in some cases. Though no walls separate the neighborhoods (except for the one that keeps Gold's Reside apart from the rest of the city), telling what neighborhood one has entered is as simple as looking at the buildings and residents.

Briefly, here's what each of the eight neighborhoods is like. See *Neighborhoods*, beginning on page 34, for more information.

THE CANALS

Lying at the center of Elweir on a triangular portion of land where the Worm flows into the Serpentine, the Canals is the oldest and smallest neighborhood in the city. Despite the Royal Mason's best efforts, it's sinking into the river — the streets long ago flooded, becoming the canals that connect the locations. The only proper streets are narrow walkways and alleys that run a short distance between buildings.

The Canals holds an odd mix of people — permanent foreign embassies, ancient families that long ago fell out of the Fifty, the wealthiest criminals, the occasional sorcerer. It's a spooky place most of the time, since the mists from the rivers gather thickest here and rarely disperse for long.

GIBBERISH

Lying along the northern part of the Serpentine, Gibberish is where sea captains who sail the Blue Waters tie up their ships and off-load their goods. Its name comes from the many foreign tongues spoken in the streets. The neighborhood contains many inns and taverns — and other, more disreputable places — and for its criminal endeavors is second only to Lowtown. Anything a sailor could want while on shoreleave can be had in Gibberish, no matter how exotic the addiction he's picked up in far-off lands.

GOLD'S RESIDE

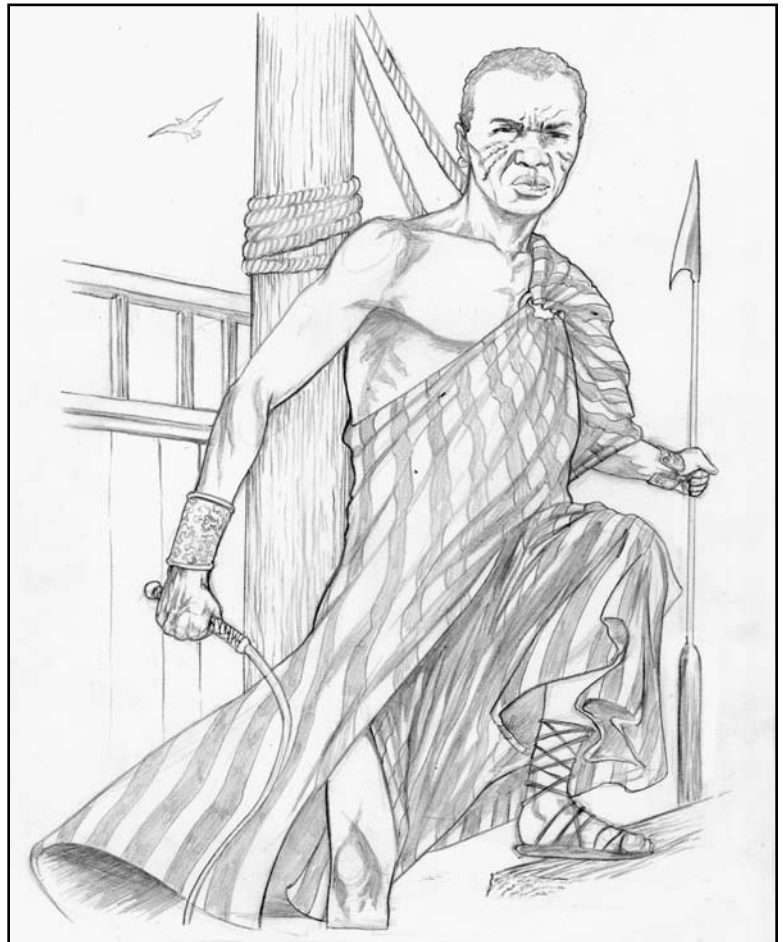
The Prince, the Fifty Families, and headquarters for the Royal offices are in Gold's Reside, making this the wealthiest of the eight neighborhoods. Because of its palaces and their sprawling estates, it's also the largest. The Gleaming Wall, a twenty foot (3") tall bastion of gold-flecked marble, surrounds the place to keep the rabble out. A single archway leads into the Reside from Hawker's Square, and a company of guardsmen always stands at the entrance. No one can simply enter Gold's Reside — all who would pass inside its walls must prove they have a reason to be there.

LOWTOWN

Lowtown is the heart of Elweir, for the mood of Lowtown is the pulse of the city. A tavern stands on every corner, and in every tavern someone plots to make his fortune, while someone else spills tears in his ale over lost hopes. Gangs of thugs roam the streets, serving as a training ground for those with grander illicit ambitions than mere thuggery. Lowtown is the most populous neighborhood in Elweir, and its streets teem with people at all hours... most of them up to no good.

SNAKE'S DEN

Lying along the southern portion of the Serpentine, Snake's Den is where captains of barges that sail upriver the Serpentine make port and unload their cargo. Though not nearly as wild and exotic as Gibberish, Snake's Den still holds many taverns that cater to sailors, providing what most call simple sins for simple men. It has a reputation for having the best bards and storytellers (mainly



because the ones in Gibberish often speak in a language no one understands). It's also known for being a rough part of the city — although more for the brawling, than the murders that take place in Lowtown — because of the barbaric outlanders from the south who stay here between berths.

UPHILL EAST

Uphill East is a sleepy neighborhood filled with modest but well-kept homes, small shops staffed with friendly workers, and quaint inns that charge far too much coin for a comfortable bed. Many clerks who work in the Prince's various offices and other city workers make their homes here, and during the day the streets are filled with mothers and children going about their chores, their fathers away at work in Gold's Reside or one of the portages.

UPHILL WEST

Uphill West is notable for Caravan's Rest, where overland merchants from Valdoria arrive to sell their goods, and as the neighborhood where artisans ranging from weavers and tailors to armorers and silversmiths keep their shops. Not as quiet as Uphill East, its inhabitants are still law-abiding (some say that's because they live so close to Valdoria) and considered dull, since it's often difficult to get them to talk about anything other than work.

WORM'S HOLE

Lying along the Worm, Worm's Hole is the third of the three centers of maritime commerce in Elweir; it's often called Little Valdoria. In general, people consider it the least interesting of the three, since its captains carry on all their trade with Valdoria (which makes for the least profitable sort of waterborne commerce) and the neighborhood bears the marks of that moralistic empire's heavy influence. A large portion of its residents were born in Valdoria, and the rest of its residents spend much of their time doing business with Valdorians.

THE OUTLANDS

The Outlands are villages and other places near to, but outside, Elweir proper. Most of these are within a day's ride of the city and are technically under the rule of the Prince. But sometimes a community ignores one of his edicts, claiming that a proclamation only applies to the city of Elweir. The exception is the Kneel, a shantytown to the north that has sprung up of its own accord — the Prince has never officially acknowledged its existence. Sometimes the Prince encourages this legal separation between Elweir and the Outlands for his own ends, typically by explicitly stating an edict only applies to the city (such as the case of buying and selling slaves in the Foreign Quarter). Sometimes it becomes a matter of dispute (such as taverns being open during Godstime). The vast majority of communities in the Outlands are villages where farmers and herders make a home. They sell their goods — vegetables, grains, ales, and meat, mostly — in Hawker's Square, thus helping to provide the city with sustenance.

Here are a few details about the most important parts of the Outlands; see *The Outlands*, beginning on page 59, for more information.

The Foreign Quarter: A small community right on the edge of Uphill East, the Foreign Quarter is a political expediency. Here reside foreign expatriates whom the Prince does not wish to acknowledge for fear of alienating a kingdom that carries on profitable trade with Elweir. In elegance of homes and wealth of residents, it's second only to Gold's Reside. Lately it has also become the home for the new slave market, relocated from Gibberish after the Prince proclaimed slavery illegal in Elweir.

The Kneel: The Kneel is a shantytown of makeshift hovels that lies immediately to the north of Gibberish. It's called "the Kneel" because it surrounds the Colossus of the North. This is where the flotsam and jetsam of Elweir — those who have lost every coin, their health, and sometimes even their very minds — wash up when the city rejects them.

Lionwatch Castle: The stated purpose of Lionwatch Castle, which lies a mile southeast of Snake's Den, is to guard Elweir from the Bandit Lords. Not yet completed, the castle will hold soldiers from Romnal, and many rumors and suppositions exist about what will happen when the castle is fully garrisoned. Most mark that day as the last of Elweir's independence.

CALENDAR

Moons... months... we're all so confused in Elweir, what with becoming a part of Valdoria and all, we don't even know what to call the damn Moons... I mean months.

Since 1021 VA, Elweir has used the Valdorian calendar to measure the weeks and months.

The Valdorian calendar (see accompanying text box) is based on the solar cycle and has twelve months, each ranging from 28 to 31 days. The calendar is taken from the *Drindrish*, those sorcerous overseers of the inhabitants of Valdoria who held mankind as their slaves a millennia ago, and depends on advanced calculations impossible for the astrologers of today to understand. Because of this, Heir's Month has 29 days every four or eight years, the actual year dictated by the star-charts seized long ago from the inhuman tyrants. The Valdorian year begins in the dead of winter.

The twelve Valdorian months are named after the first twelve emperors of Valdoria and serve as a mnemonic device to remind each Valdorian of the empire's early history. The months chart the first three and a half centuries of Valdoria's empire — from the days when Valdor the Founder led the uprising against the tyrannical *Drindrish*, through the early emperors who expanded the empire, then finally the illegitimate emperors who usurped the throne, until that family was put to the sword by Alrich the True Emperor and he returned Valdoria to greatness.

A Valdorian week has seven days. Each of the days is named after one of the seven Old Gods. The first day of the week is Pythos — the rest, in order, are as follows: Erebos, Anyu, Kypris, Poteidan, Enodia, and Aides.

THE OLD CALENDAR

Before 1021, Elweirians counted the years by Valdorian reckoning, but used their own calendar based on lunar cycles to measure the length of months. Since maritime commerce plays such a vital role in the city and the phases of the moon play such a vital role with tides, this calendar helped everyone involved in river and sea trade keep track of what was going on with the tides.

Back then each month was called a Moon. Originally there were twelve Moons to a year, each approximately 28 days long. Five hundred years ago, when trade with Valdoria became more frequent, the Elweirians added a thirteenth Moon to extend the year so that it ended nearer the Valdorian year. The first month was called First Moon, the second, Second Moon, and so on. Some called the last month, Thirteenth Moon, the Prodigal Moon. Most sailors considered that a time of ill-luck, sacred to the dark goddess Enodia, and only mariners desperate for coin accepted a berth on a ship setting sail during the Prodigal Moon.

A month began on the first sighting of the New Moon — the first evening the slender crescent was visible after sunset being the first day of a new month. The Royal Astrologer was responsible for making this observation and officially recording the first day of a month. The holidays Elweir celebrates were inserted into the calendar, because a lunar cycle is inconsistent, and they fell on days when 28 days had passed, yet the Royal Astrologer still hadn't sighted the New Moon.

Many Elweirians, especially those directly involved in sea trade, still reckon by Moons instead of the Valdorian months, and measure the duration of a month by the phases of the moon.

HOLIDAYS

Elweir's holidays are described below. Once these holidays (except Godstime) were celebrated relative to the phases of the moon, but now they have assigned days on the Valdorian calendar.

New Year: As on most holidays, no one labors on New Year, which takes place just after Thirteenth Moon and now on the first day of Founder's Month. On New Year people sit huddled over their cups in taverns and inns, drinking through the long night. This somber celebration is punctuated by tales of woe from the drinkers. One drinker cries out a bad thing that happened to him during the last year, then tells everyone present the story. Once he finishes his sad tale, the rest of the drinkers shout out ways the unfortunate event could have been even worse, the stories growing more wild and improbable as the drinkers grow more drunk. Elweirians believe that by imagining the very, very worst that could have happened, they can make things seem not so bad for the rest of the year. (Whether this works is a frequent topic for argument on New Year.)

Oron's March: Taking place after Second Moon and now on the first day of Conqueror's Month, this holiday celebrates Oron the Conciliator's entry into Elweir three hundred years ago. The main feature of Oron's March is a parade that runs along the Prince's Roads. The Prince finances the parade; the common people judge how well the Prince rules by the extravagance of his parade.

Minstrels, jugglers, and other entertainers march at the front of the parade; at the center are a troupe of actors performing the role of Oron and his generals; and at the end is the current Prince and his retinue. To truly win the love of the people, the Prince must arrange for the marchers to throw candies and sweetmeats into the crowd. If the Prince fails to impress (meaning, fails to provide enough candies and sweetmeats), onlookers shout catcalls at him and throw rotten vegetables and fruit. Some past Princes have attempted to skimp on the parade and use the city guard to stop the abuse, but none have truly succeeded because the guardsmen have as much of a sweet tooth as anyone else.

The Revel: Taking place after Fourth Moon, now starting on the first day of Philosopher's Month, the Revel is the wildest holiday in Elweir. It typi-

VALDORIAN CALENDAR

Season	Valdorian Name	Number Of Days
Winter	Founder's Month	31 days
Winter	Heir's Month	28 (or 29) days
Spring	Conqueror's Month	31 days
Spring	Law-Maker's Month	30 days
Spring	Philosopher's Month	31 days
Summer	Wanderer's Month	30 days
Summer	Emancipator's Month	31 days
Summer	Vanquished's Month	31 days
Autumn	Coward's Month	30 days
Autumn	False Emperor's Month	31 days
Autumn	False Heir's Month	30 days
Winter	True Emperor's Month	31 days

cally extends over the course of four days. Everyone spends the entire time drunk, sleeping wherever they happen to pass out, and when they wake however many hours later, they immediately set off in search of more drink. The streets are filled with itinerant entertainers who travel to the city from far and wide for the Revel, since everyone knows the more drunk a man, the more generous with coin he becomes. Wise captains from other kingdoms attempt to schedule their arrival in Elweir either before the Revel (so they and their crew can participate) or after the Revel (so they don't waste their time and coin stuck at anchor in Elweir, unable to sell their goods or even offload them because of everyone's gone "a-reveling," as it's called in Elweir). The exception to this is captains with cargo of wine, ale, or spirits — they find the best time to arrive is early on the third day of the Revel. It never fails that some inn- or tavernkeeper is forlornly traveling the wharves along the Serpentine and Worm in desperate search of drink to replenish his cellars.

Prince's Day: Taking place after Sixth Moon, now on the first day of Emancipator's Month, Prince's Day is a day of reversals. The Prince and the heads of the Fifty Families disguise themselves as commoners — tinkers, minstrels, sometimes even beggars and cutpurses — and journey to Lowtown in the early evening. As the Prince and the other nobles journey through the city, they pick out individuals at their whim — sometimes for an unwarranted kindness or a particularly sharp insult, sometimes for no discernable reason at all. These are taken back to Gold's Reside by guardsmen and feasted at the palace of the person who picked them out. The Prince and Fifty Families spend a great deal of time and coin preparing for this, and they lock up all valuables, close up their families (especially their daughters) in distant wings of the palace, station guards at the exits of the feast hall to make sure no one wanders around, and so on. Of course, it never fails that some enterprising commoners go someplace they shouldn't... and some curious daughters of the nobility sneak their way into the feast hall.

In the rest of the city, the residents don masks and disguises, further helping to hide the Prince and other nobles, and spend their time wandering the streets, singing songs and swigging from jugs of wine or ale. Unmarried women give the local

OTHER COINS

Drindrian Suns: The *Drindrish*, the ancient race who once ruled Valdoria, used gold coins. These coins, broad as a man's palm, are exceedingly rare. One side of the coin shows the angular face of a *Drindrish* — a sharp, pointed chin; high, upward-sweeping cheekbones; upward slanting eyes; pointed ears. The other side shows a stylized Sun. It is illegal to possess Drindrian Suns in Valdoria, and anyone finding a coin must turn it over to nearest noble, who will recompense him in good Valdorian silver (or so the law claims). One sun is worth a thousand coin.

Naraatian "Tinny": From the islands of Naraat, this silver coin is officially called a crown. Merchants call them "tinnies," because they're well-known for being more tin than silver, and no merchant worthy of the name accepts Naraatian coin. One side shows a crown; the other side a Naraatian curragh. A tinny is worthless to anyone but a fool — and a fool thinks it's worth one coin.

Tharestani Emir: From the desert land of Tharestan, this silver coin is about half the size of a Valdorian or Abyzinian coin. One side shows the profile of the emir who reigned when the coin was minted; the other side shows a slender tower topped by an onion dome. One emir is worth two bits (.5 coin).

Urethian "Blackie": From the island kingdom of Ureth-Kalai, this silver coin is officially called a talon. It's called a "blackie" because for some reason the silver

beggars a kiss on the cheek and a crown made of flowers, and it's considered good luck for a reveler to buy these kings for a day a drink or a meal. A child born nine months after this day is often called a son (or daughter) of the Prince, and is said to be blessed with good luck.

In the morning the Prince and the Fifty Families return to their homes. Anyone caught still on the premises — and there are usually quite a few, since the wine flows fast and plentiful during the feast in a palace — has to run the gauntlet out of the palace. The proper residents wield cudgels and provide a brutal reminder of the guest's station in the life as he flees for home.

Rivers' Day: Falling after Eighth Moon, now the first day of Coward's Month, Rivers' Day is when the inhabitants of Elweir honor the rivers that provide for their city's wealth. The day is an ancient custom, and on it, the inhabitants purchase or make small boats. Only one or two feet long, these boats are either carved from driftwood or fashioned by woodwrights in Uphill West. Some sport a sail made of a rag, but most resemble primitive canoes and the like. The boats of the Fifty, however, are grand affairs — precise models of Abyzinian barques and Valdorian triremes right down to the small wooden figures representing the rowers and sailors. Sometime during the day or night, the owner of the boat sets his toy vessel in the Serpentine or Worm River and lets it sail downriver to Blue Waters (these small boats can sail over the river chains under the Founding Stone Bridge). Traditionally, a boat's owner places a coin or two in it as an offering to Poteidan, but with the disappearance of the gods this custom has fallen out of favor. Now an owner may place a lit candle in the boat or else a scribe-written note that lists his wishes or desires. Children often turn Rivers' Day into a race — groups of them assemble at one point on the river, loose their rudely carved ships, and run along the embankments to see whose boat reaches a certain point first (typically the border of the neighborhood or some other easily-identified point). Adults often join in the fun, making wagers on which boat will win. Like many holidays in Elweir, people spend the rest of the day drinking.

Harvest: Though no one in Elweir farms, they still celebrate the Harvest because during this time barges come downriver the Serpentine and Worm, or ships come across the Blue Waters, laden with grains and other crops. This surfeit of food means lower costs, so everyone celebrates with a feast. The feast takes place after the Tenth Moon, now on the first day of False Heir's Month, and everyone eats as much as he can. Families extend invitations to those without families of their own, and inns welcome almost anyone to come inside and partake of the food they've laid out. The Prince finances a feast for the homeless and beggars that's served outside the armories in Lowtown and Gibberish, and at the southern edge of the Kneel.

Godstime: Godstime, the last week of the year on the Valdorian calendar, has become a bone of contention between Elweir and Romnal. Valdor-

ians celebrate the holiday with reverence and somber contemplation of the gods, and they hold it the most important of all the holidays. Elweirians are something less than reverent and have often neglected to celebrate the holiday at all. The Duke has pressured the Prince to enforce the celebration of Godstime, and so far the result of this is all taverns and other places that sell drink must close for the week... a law that no one, from the lowliest beggar to the wealthiest among the Fifty Families, appreciates. Furtive drinking establishments — the cellars of inns, private residences, the backrooms of shops — have sprung up in the wake of this proclamation, and taverns in the Outlands, their owners arguing that they stand outside the city and thus can ignore the Prince's proclamation, have profited greatly.

The Fifty Families have even pooled their resources to build a pavilion and cottages just south of the border of Elweir, where they can go and celebrate the holiday as a holiday should be celebrated — with wine and spirits, banquets, and festivities. Located near Lonetree, a village of shepherders half a day's walk to the southeast of Elweir, this construction is called the Winter Palace, and the architects estimate they will finish it by the upcoming Godstime. The majority of the Fifty have plans to retire there for the week.

Traditionally, each of Godstime's seven days are dedicated to one of the Old Gods, whichever god the day is named after. During the evening a person must visit a temple dedicated to the god(s), spending his time in contemplation of the deity while a priest presides over a worship service. Most annoying to the residents of Elweir, the worshipper must make an offering — usually in coin — to the temple.

CURRENCY

*Let me teach you a little song my dear
ol' Ma taught me when I was a sprout:
coin! coin! coin! Gimme, gimme coin!
Coin! coin! coin! All I want is coin!
Coin! coin! coin! All I need is coin!*

*Good ol' Ma — she always made sure
her kids knew what was important....*

The units of currency in Elweir are coins, bits, and slivers. For the value of these units of currency in relation to the prices listed in *Fantasy Hero*, see page 110 in Chapter Four.

COINS

In theory a coin is minted of nearly pure silver, but such is rarely the case. Many kingdoms have become notorious for using an alloy containing more tin, nickel, or other white metal than silver. A merchant must be aware of the precise alloy used by each kingdom if he is to make

a profit trading from one kingdom to another. To make matters more confusing still, not all coins from one kingdom are of equal value, since one king might be a greedy man who devalues his kingdom's currency to fill his own coffers, while the next ruler or the previous one is an honest man and the coin minted during his reign is perfectly acceptable. (Devaluation of the Elweirnian coin a little over a century ago during the rule of Prince Blote is precisely the reason the city no longer mints its own coin, since merchants simply stopped accepting the currency. Because so much coin flows into the city from elsewhere, the next Prince decided to cease minting coin and rely on the currency of other kingdoms.)

The preferred units of exchange involving coin in Elweir are the Valdorian imperial and the Abyzinian *argele*, since both of these coins are pure silver and have been for time out of mind. Both are equal in size: round, as broad as three fingers, and weighing .5 ounces. The imperial has the profile of the emperor who ruled when the coin was minted stamped on one side, and a broken chain stamped on the obverse. The Abyzinian *argele* has the sigil of the reigning Sorcerer-King or Witch-Queen stamped on one side (the sigil of the current Witch-Queen, Zenobia T'numbra, is a hawk in flight), and a demonic face stamped on the obverse.

Merchants often demand a higher price if a potential customer insists on paying in coin not minted in Valdoria or Abyzinia. In conversation, a person who says coin means either an imperial or *argele* — Elweirnians don't discriminate between the two. Coin in the singular is also the generic term for money, profit, financial gain, and the like. Phrases like: "make some coin," "steal a man's coin," "not a coin to his name," "coin-poor," and "paid good coin" are all commonly heard.

BITS

Bits are most common in day-to-day purchases, such as those carried on at the market or in a tavern. The terms, bit and quarter, are interchangeable, and both are the same: a silver coin quartered into triangular pieces of equal size. Due to their day-to-day usage, few people worry much about the value of a bit — it's a matter of good faith on the part of both parties in a transaction that a bit is worth a bit. Of course, trying to pay with a bit obviously not made of silver is unacceptable and cause for an altercation.

SLIVERS

A sliver is a slender slice of silver, usually made by shaving silver coins. Slivers exists as unit of exchange for two reasons. First, they're easily hidden on one's person — concealed in hollow boot heels or sewn into tunics and cloaks, as well as numerous other places — and in these godless times a person can never hide some

wealth too carefully. Second, many individuals seeking to deceive merchants shave their silver coins, and the practice produces an abundance of slivers. Shaving coins is a crime punishable by death in Elweir, but to prove guilt requires either that a person possesses a shaved coin — and in these cases the magistrate often just "confiscates" the shaved coin and sends the person on his way — or a person is caught red-handed shaving a coin. Possessing slivers is not proof of guilt, and this legal loophole guarantees slivers' continued use, since even honest men like to have a few slivers because they are easy to hide.

Few merchants in Elweir accept slivers. Instead a person must go to a usurer and exchange his slivers for bits and coin. To determine the value of slivers, the usurer produces scales and measures their weight. (The prudent customer has his own scales, to verify the usurer's measurement.) The weight corresponds directly to their value — .5 ounces of slivers equals one coin — although the exact value is the subject of discussion between usurer and customer. In addition, the usurer charges a fee for his services: a country bumpkin typically pays 10% of the value of his slivers, whereas a fellow with dirt on the usurer might pay as low as 2%.

GOLD

Gold is a rare commodity in Elweir, and the rest of the world too. If one can believe the stories, gold once flowed like rivers across the world, every man with a pouch full of gold pieces and he spent them on such mundane goods as a night's lodging or a bottle of wine... but where all this gold has gotten to, no one can say because it's surely gone now.

In the world of Il-Ryveras, gold is almost solely the purview of rulers, nobility, and wealthy merchants — and merchants only use gold as a unit of exchange among themselves. Anyone else attempting to trade gold is viewed with suspicion, as either a foreign prince in disguise (best-case scenario) or a criminal (worst-case scenario and most common).

Gold is measured in ounces and pounds, and kingdoms mint bars weighing anywhere from six ounces to two pounds. Each bar is stamped with the sigil of the nation that minted it, and no matter which kingdom minted the bar, no one accepts gold without scrutiny to make sure it's pure... which is to say, no one accepts gold without some warning. If a customer suddenly pulled a bar of gold from his pouch, the merchant he was dealing with would likely call the nearest magistrate to investigate.

One ounce of gold is worth roughly 400 silver coins (although no usurer pays full value for gold that comes his way, since most gold a usurer sees is ill-gotten loot).

tarnishes to dull black very quickly. Among sailor these coins are considered bad luck (like anything from Ureth-Kalai). One side shows a raven baring its talons, the other a fire-wreathed mountain peak. A blackie is worth one coin.

FREEHOLDS

A freehold means an individual (or in some cases a group) owns the land free and clear — in other words, he doesn't make yearly rent payments to the Prince. There are very few freeholds in Elweir. One cannot purchase a freehold — the Prince must grant the freehold, usually in return for some extraordinary deed. Some of the freeholds in Elweir are:

- The three guild halls for the river and sea captains. The guild, as a corporate body, owns these.
- The Sinking Tower, former home to the sorcerer Largisse Foom.
- All the temples and shrines to the Old Gods.
- Little Romnal in the Canals.
- The Graecorian Academy in Uphill East. Originally granted to Tolemos for building the bridges on the Prince's Roads, it's been handed down through the centuries from instructor to instructor.

PROPERTY

In Elweir there are two forms of documented property: land and ships. The reason for the detailed documentation is that owners of both must pay a yearly tax to the Prince. A third form of property, slaves, is now illegal in Elweir.

LEASEHOLDERS

The Prince owns all the land in the city proper. To generate tax revenue he leases this land to his subjects, who become leaseholders. A lease is typically for a hundred years and passed on from one generation to the next. If a leaseholder lacks an heir, his lease passes back into the possession of the Prince. To buy a lease, a person makes a lump sum payment to the Prince, followed by yearly rent payments. If he defaults on these payments, the Prince takes back the land.

The cost of a lease, as well as the rent payment, depends largely on the neighborhood. They range from a lease for a one-story rundown tenement in Lowtown, which costs a hundred coin and has a rent payment of fifteen coin yearly, to a sea captain's manor house, which costs a pound of gold and has rent payments of two ounces of gold yearly. The Royal Exchequer handles the nitty-gritty of these dealings, with the Prince himself only rarely taking an active role.

A leaseholder cannot make major alterations to the land without approval of the Prince (usually handled via the office of the Royal Masonry). No written definition of "major alteration" exists, but in general any change a passer-by would, without a doubt, notice qualifies — for instance, adding a story to a building is a major alteration, but replacing the shutters with new ones of the same style is not. The leaseholder is solely responsible for maintaining the property, and if something disastrous happens to it, the Prince can at his discretion hold the leaseholder responsible. Typically, this means the leaseholder must pay to have the land restored to its previous condition, and if he cannot, the Prince seizes his assets — and if the assets aren't at least equal in value to the land in its former state, the leaseholder (and perhaps his family, if necessary) is sold into slavery. Enforcement of this law varies from neighborhood to neighborhood — in practice, no one much cares if a tenement in Lowtown burns to the ground, but a sea captain's manor in Gibberish is another matter entirely.

Leaseholders can sell their leases, but the Prince must approve all sales and collects 10% as a tax. Collectively, the Fifty Families own a little over sixty percent of the leases. They hire tavernkeepers, innkeepers, and the like to manage their properties, which serve as the main source of coin for the Fifty.

Land in Gold's Reside is a different matter entirely; see *The Fifty Families*, page 23, for details.

SHIP OWNERS

Any ship owner who makes his home in Elweir must register his vessel with the office of the Exchequer, and he must pay a yearly tax based on his vessel's tonnage. (The tax equals 5 coins per point of the ship's STR.) If the ship owner doesn't pay, the city confiscates his vessel.

When the Prince announced this tax eighteen years ago, the pretense was that the captain is carrying on trade outside the confines of Elweir, which should be taxed just like trade within the city, but in truth the Prince instituted the tax simply because he was desperate to raise the Bandit Lords' ransom. It was expedient at the time, since the captain guilds already possessed records of ship-ownership due to their membership requirements, and captains have a considerable amount of wealth.

Since the signing of the treaty with Romnal, all three captain guilds have argued for the Prince to rescind this tax, but to no avail. The tax is quickly becoming a matter of contention among ship captains, and it's brought the normally quarrelsome guilds closer together than ever before.

SLAVES

Before the treaty with Romnal, the law permitted members of the Fifty Families to keep slaves in their household, captains to own slaves who rowed their barges, and anyone with the coin to buy and sell slaves in the city proper. Elweir had a small, but profitable slave market in Gibberish called Mansblood Square where nobles, slavers, and Abyzinians who needed to replace rowers on their barques could purchase slaves. Slaves from across the Blue Waters and the icy wastes of the far south were exotic goods that brought a high price on the slave block.

Now the Fifty and ship-owners are no longer allowed to own slaves (though that's not to say none of them do...), and slaves cannot be bought and sold within the city limits. The slave market still exists; it relocated to the Foreign Quarter and now foreigners run it.

Unlike in Valdoria, slaves are still slaves in Elweir so long as their owner is not a resident of the city. There are three acceptable proofs of ownership: a brand, a tattoo, or an iron collar showing the owner's mark or heraldry. If a magistrate can find none of these on an accused slave's body, the magistrate proclaims him a free man, regardless of the protests from the owner. Killing or maiming a slave, in every case but self defense, is the same as destroying property: the killer must buy the victim a replacement slave. If the killer cannot afford it, he becomes the wronged party's slave.

RULERSHIP

Government? Government?!?! Crime is more like it — the oldest and most powerful criminal group in the city be the Prince and the Fifty — except the government don't have to bribe the magistrates, unless you count the magistrates' pay, and maybe you'd have the right of it there. Taxes ain't nothing more than extortion — I've paid them both and listen to this old man: they're the same thing.

The government of Elweir is a monarchy. The sole ruler is the Prince, a hereditary title that passes to the oldest son of the deceased Prince. First in line are the sons of the Prince's blood, ranked by their age; in the absence of any sons, then come the son-in-laws ranked by the age of the daughter each son-in-law married. If a Prince dies without sons or sons-in-law, the title of Prince passes to one of the other Fifty Families, usually the one the Prince named before he died. (Only on two occasions has a Prince died without an heir; the matter has never broken into open warfare, but was settled through exchange of coin and threats.)

Various offices handle the day-to-day activities of government, with the Office of the Exchequer considered the most important.

The Nobility

The Prince and the Fifty Families make up the nobility of Elweir. The current Prince is Summerset, eldest and only son of the Signus family.

SUMMERSET, PRINCE OF ELWEIR

Prince Summerset is the nineteenth ruler from his family, a reign that has spanned more than five hundred years. At 21, Summerset is a youthful man with thick black hair, pale skin, and a fine-featured face. Since he's only reigned for three years, most of the populace doesn't quite know what to make of him. However, he has held unbelievably extravagant Oron's March celebrations — at the last one, in addition to throwing candies and sweetmeats into the crowd, the marchers in the parade threw bits, and rumor has it they even threw a small number of gold bars into the crowd. They were only small bars weighing two ounces... but when was the last time a man of Lowtown saw gold in any amount?

These extravaganzas have swayed many to love him, and he is handsome enough that no woman would turn him away. The fact that he's a bachelor only increases the number of women fantasizing about the Prince secretly visiting them on Prince's Day.

Those who don't like the young Prince fall into two camps. One group feels he's a cunning

and conniving ruler who hides his wiles behind his handsome face and diverts blame for his machinations to his cabinet. This camp includes the river and sea captains. The other faction believes the Prince is merely the pawn of his cabinet — a figurehead for the real ruler of the city, whom the majority think is Sandover Reed, the Royal Exchequer. This group includes most of the criminals in Elweir, who always see puppetmasters and shadowy dealings behind everything.

The Prince's Family

Though the Prince remains a bachelor, he has three sisters, an aunt and her husband, and five cousins who all reside with him in the palace. His mother passed away giving birth to the youngest sister.

The sisters range from age twelve to sixteen, and none of them are betrothed — making them the subject of many far-fetched plots to somehow win one as a bride, in hopes the Prince dies without a son. The sisters' names are, from youngest to oldest: Lalizza ("Lally"), Sezannah, and Mylindra.

The Prince's aunt, Holandrah, and her husband, Strat Packmyrtle, are both in their fifties and treat Summerset and his sisters as if they were their own children.

The five cousins, all sons of Strat and Holandrah Packmyrtle and ranging in age from seventeen to twenty-five, form the Prince's entourage and accompany him nearly everywhere. The cousins' names are, from youngest to oldest: Gyr, Jaryd, Mehki, Lorne, and Strat (currently betrothed to the eldest granddaughter of Fawn Speckmore, the Prince's Chancellor).

Prince Summerset currently has no heir.

THE PRINCE'S CABINET

The seven men described below comprise the Prince's cabinet, and all of them but one come from the Fifty Families. These are his closest advisors (although the roles are traditional and not all of them serve as the Prince's *chief* advisors).

Lord Fawn Speckmore, The Chancellor: The oldest member of the cabinet, Fawn Speckmore has served the last three Princes as Chancellor. Obsequious and always agreeing with whatever anyone says, Lord Speckmore is not a useful advisor on important matters, but excels at performing the main responsibilities of the Chancellor: managing affairs at court and the Prince's appointments, and remembering everyone's name. A slender, elderly man in his seventies. Lord Speckmore has aged gracefully — the only signs of his years are that his left eye droops slightly, and he's developed a slight head twitch when confronted with a situation he doesn't understand.

Lord Sandover Reed, The Royal Exchequer: Many consider Sandover Reed the power behind the throne in Elweir. When he was first appointed to the office five years ago, the Bandit Lords' ransom was an impossible burden for the city to bear. Somehow (and captains are quick to tell a person how: the yearly tax on their ships), Lord Reed raised the funds. Now, with Elweir no longer



paying the ransom, the treasury overflows with gold. Lord Reed is a large man with flaming red hair — he hardly looks like someone who would spend his hours counting coins — and is known to laugh often and loudly.

Sir Tyche Longlass, The Royal Astrologer: Traditionally a sorcerer, or at least someone with considerable sorcerous knowledge, has held the office of Royal Astrologer. In the case of Sir Tyche, no one knows if this holds true. The man himself has never come forward and stated he's a sorcerer — but he gained his office less than a year ago after the Prince instituted the law against practicing sorcery in Elweir, so perhaps his silence is intentional. In truth, no one even knows what the Royal Astrologer does anymore. The main reason people knew of him was he announced when a Moon began, but now Elweir uses the Valdorian calendar. Sir Tyche is a young man with a shock of wild brown hair, nervous eyes, and a narrow, pointed nose. His predecessor, Lord Varnius Grimble, stepped down soon after the prohibition against sorcery. Lord Grimble's resignation came as no surprise, since he was reputedly a sorcerer of the first water.

Capra Lustshine, Chief Magistrate Of Gold's Reside:

Capra Lustshine is the only member of the cabinet who does not come from the Fifty Families, and his chief role is to advise the Prince on legal matters, specifically how the public will receive a given proclamation. For more details on Magistrate Lustshine, see page 41.

Sir Monshun Windlock, The Royal Mason: Monshun Windlock, the Royal Mason, oversees the Royal Masonry. The Masonry performs all the repairs

and general upkeep needed to maintain the river embankments, stonework at the portages, sewers, armories, bridges, and roads. It's a dull position, but of the utmost importance to Elweir's continued existence. The Royal Masonry is the smallest of the governmental offices, employing only twenty clerks and a hundred masons full-time, with manual labor hired temporarily as a project requires it. Sir Monshun is a quiet and taciturn man with thinning black hair and dark eyes. He rarely has much to add in council unless it pertains to stonework.

Lord Drake Saltbraid, The Portmaster: Drake Saltbraid oversees the Port Authority, the largest of the governmental offices in Elweir (see page 24). Despite being a former sea captain, one raised to the Fifty only fifteen years ago, Lord Saltbraid has little sympathy for the captains, and even less sympathy for their complaints about the tax on ship owners. Lord Saltbraid is a short, stout man with a weatherbeaten face who's far less polished and refined than his peers among the Fifty. He speaks his mind, and his language is blustery, liberally sprinkled with curses. His arguments with the captains in the guild halls, and the language he uses to express his opinions, are legendary throughout Elweir. After each such encounter, common people spend the next week or so repeating Lord Saltbraid's curses and oaths. Lord Saltbraid is fast friends with Lord Reed, and most consider Saltbraid the Exchequer's right-hand man.

Sir Yrvenus Hollow, The Divine Advisor: Yrvenus Hollow is the first Divine Advisor included in the Prince's cabinet in three hundred years. The last one was during the time of Oron the Conciliator,

before he signed the truce with Elweir, and was appointed to help transition Elweir into Valdoria when the Prince thought Oron planned to conquer the city. Sir Yrvenus's appointment was made to appease the Duke of Romnal, who felt the Prince and his advisors were too godless. No one in the cabinet trusts him; they all feel he is far too close to the Duke and especially the Duke's ambassador, Sir Ravning Coeur. Sir Yrvenus's only commendable quality is that of birth, and as a member of the Fifty, he at least understands the noble prerogative. Sir Yrvenus is the high priest at the Temple of the Seven in Gold's Reside, and he and his priests also tend to the ossuary for deceased members of the Fifty. Nominally, he is the highest ranking priest in the city, and other priests of the Old Gods tend to defer to his judgement. Sir Yrvenus is a tall, emaciated, bald man with sunken cheeks and thin lips. His reptilian eyes never seem to blink.

THE FIFTY FAMILIES

The Fifty Families is the collective name for the nobility in Elweir. Numbering over eight hundred, with each family having on average sixteen members, the Fifty all live in Gold's Reside and are that neighborhood's only residents. In fact, the true distinction between the Fifty and the other wealthy residents of Elweir is that the Fifty Families each have the use of a palace in Gold's Reside.

A patriarch (or matriarch) — the oldest person in the family still in his right mind — leads each family. He has the right to exclude anyone from the family. In other words, he can cast any family member out of the house and into the hoi polloi of Elweir. The patriarch's title is Lord (and a matriarch's is Lady) and his last name. The correct form of address for other members of the Fifty is Sir or Dame and his or her first name.

Outside of ownership of a palace in Gold's Reside, the main privilege the Fifty receive is access to the Prince. From the Fifty come the Prince's entourage and his cabinet members. They have the pick of the choicest leases and the right to purchase land outside the city from the Prince, which they then rent to tenant farmers and the like.

The Prince, at his discretion, can cast a family out of the Fifty. He does this if a family continually offends him, but the most common cause of losing status is when a family falls on hard times. Once a family can no longer afford to hold balls and fetes — and they are expected to invite the Prince to at least two a year, with more prominent families giving upwards of six annually — the rumors start. And once a family can no longer afford to dress in a style appropriate to other families' balls and fetes, it's soon cast out of the Fifty.

Though the Prince can cast a family out of the Fifty for whatever reason he chooses, or even for no reason at all, this is very rare. The Fifty are the primary source of rents, and their original purpose was to manage the Prince's property and extract a profit from it. In a way, the balls and fetes a family holds are a means for the Prince to "audit" their finances — in other words, they're proof a family is managing the Prince's property

successfully. If a Prince simply started casting out families for frivolous reason, it would lead to panic among the Fifty and they'd neglect the management of their properties.

After a Prince casts out a family, he confiscates all their possession (including the leases it holds) and elevates another individual in the city to the ranks of the Fifty. Many intangibles inform the Prince's decision concerning who to elevate, but one very tangible quality recommends a person above all others — anywhere from fifty to hundred pounds of gold, payable to the Prince.

Other Advisors To The Prince

In addition to the Prince's cabinet and the Fifty as a whole, two other groups advise the Prince. One group, the aldermen, counsel him on matters pertaining to the neighborhoods that make up Elweir. The other group, the ambassadors, advise him on matters pertaining to other nations in the world.

THE ALDERMEN

Each neighborhood elects an alderman from among the leaseholders in the district. A term of office is for five years, and elections are exciting times when each candidate tries to win the love of the people, generally in the Elweirnian tradition of bribery. Anyone willing to pay the poll tax of one coin and able to prove residency in the neighborhood can vote. Typically proof of residency is the word of a leaseholder or magistrate in the form of a signed document and is available regardless of where a person lives for a couple of bits.

An alderman draws a salary of two hundred coin yearly. He advises the Prince on matters concerning his neighborhood, and tries to obtain royal boons for his constituents. Outside of his pay, the only other privilege an alderman holds is he can request an audience of the Prince. The Prince doesn't have to grant one, but tradition dictates that he should at his earliest convenience and he generally does so.

The position of alderman is a holdover from the past when a lord ruled Elweir, and nowadays the aldermen hold little power in the city. Their main function is to help residents obtain leases from the Prince, since the alderman can speak directly to the Prince. Any resident seeking to obtain a lease first visits his alderman and hires him for a handful of coin to represent his interest to the Prince.

The individuals who currently hold these titles are described in the appropriate section in *Neighborhoods* (page 34).

THE AMBASSADORS

Two ambassadors hold considerable sway with the Prince, and although not officially a part of the court, spend much of their time in the palace. These two don't hate each other — both are noble enough to draw a line between political rivals and enemies — but despite Sir Onaiwu's constant invitations to dine at his residence, Sir Ravning has yet to accept. Both ambassadors live in the Canals.

Sir Ravning Coeur: The third son of the Duke of Romnal, Sir Ravning looks the perfect Valdorian: ruggedly handsome, with a thick head of dark brown hair. He also acts the part — loyal, fearless, upright, and devoted to the Old Gods. The only quality he possesses that isn't archetypical of Valdorians is a native cunning rivaling that of an Elweirnian, which is why his father chose him to go to the city and make sure the Prince stays in line with the treaty. Sir Ravning is the leader of the Duke's Men, described below under *The New Law* (page 28).

Ato ("Sir") Onaiwu Baaku: Like most of his fellow Abyzinian nobles, Onaiwu Baaku is sophisticated, elegant, and a ruthless negotiator. His main priority currently is to make sure Sir Ravning never wields too much influence with the Prince, and he spends his every waking hour entertaining the Prince with stories of and gossip from Abyzinia, all the while reminding Summerset how much profit his city derives from trade with Onaiwu's homeland. The treaty with Romnal caught the Abyzinians totally off-guard, and the pressure on the ambassador to maintain Elweir's independence from Valdoria is immense. In Abyzinia, Onaiwu's proper title is Ato — most in Elweir translate that to Sir.

The Port Authority

Elweir's Port Authority keeps track of the comings-and-goings of ships from Elweir's three portages. The primary duties of the Port Authority are threefold: work with the Royal Masonry on the upkeep of the wharves; log what ships tie up and when, their port of origin, and when they depart; assess the tax for doing business in Elweir on captains. The first two jobs are straightforward, and the Port Authority employs many people to make sure they get done. The third, assessing the tax on captains, has become slightly convoluted as the Prince has striven to extract every coin he can from trade in Elweir.

All trade a ship captain conducts must go through the Port Authority. When a ship ties up, the Authority assigns a city assessor to its captain. This assessor must be present at all "final negotiations" for a ship's cargo (a final negotiation being when payment changes hands). Any captain found concluding a negotiation without the presence of an assessor has his ship and everything aboard confiscated. To ensure the captain does not somehow go behind his assessor's back, only porters in the employ of the Port Authority and under the command of the assessor can on- and off-load a ship's cargo. The assessors also employ spies, typically off-duty members of the city guard, to watch captains as they go about their daily business and ensure no illicit gold changes hands. For example, some captains have tried to reach an agreement on a final price without the assessor's presence, then at the final negotiation pretend the final price is lower to avoid paying the full tax. The assessor has a good sense of what a cargo is worth, but prices fluctuate, and this proved an easy way to save a few coin — until the first captain caught doing this by the

assessor's spy, and the merchant he colluded with, were publically hanged in Gibberish.

The tax is 5% of the cargo's price, whether the cargo was purchased with coin or barter. It costs five coin a day to tie up to a wharf. The assessors are among the most hated men in Elweir... but also among the most resistant to bribery.

THE LAW

The law in Elweir is easy enough understood, lad. Don't get caught, and if you do get caught, pay whatever price the magistrate asks. Some folk — honest folk who don't live in Elweir, that's for sure — might call that a bribe. Others, especially among the city guard, like to think of it as a fine — makes them feel as if they're just performing their duty. Me... I call it like it is. Just like I'd pay my partners the share they got coming, if a magistrate catches me, I pay him his share, too.

The city guard enforces the laws in Elweir, and those laws focus on four basic crimes: murder; theft of property; failure to pay the Prince his due (whether a tax or rent); and conduct offensive to the Prince as interpreted by his lawful agents, the magistrates.

The City Guard

It falls to the city guard to enforce the laws in Elweir. Four ranks comprise the guard: guardsmen, sergeants, magistrates, and chief magistrates. In the case of invasion, the city guard is also Elweir's army... but they're poorly trained as soldiers, since they're not taught to fight in ranks, nor to stand unmoving in the face of a charge.

The guardsmen and sergeants wear a simple surcoat, quartered gold and silver. The quality of this livery depends on the neighborhood, ranging from the threadbare and ragged clothes of the guardsmen in Lowtown, to the impeccable surcoats of guardsmen in Gold's Reside. Magistrates and chief magistrates wear standard clothing, the style and quality depending on the vanity of the individual. To denote their rank, magistrates wear a braid of yellow and white on their shoulder.

Guardsmen: Guardsmen are the rank-and-file of the city guard. They are organized in companies of twenty men, and usually patrol in groups of two or three. Guardsmen come from the ranks of the commoners, and a commission into the guard costs ten coin paid to the neighborhood's chief magistrate. A guardsman carries both a cudgel and either a short sword or short spear (depending on the task at hand), and he wears brigandine and a leather-and-steel cap.

PAY IN THE GUARD

Guardsmen get paid little — the Royal Exchequer knows they're all collecting bribes, so he sees no reason to pay them any more. Bribes add two to four times the amount of a guardsman's pay, and four to eight times the amount of a Chief Magistrate's pay. Members of the city guard can eat at the armories.

Rank	Pay
Guard	1 coin/day
Sergeant	1 coin/day + 10 coin/month
Magistrate	3 coin/day
Chief Magistrate	3 coin/day

Sergeants: Sergeants command the guardsmen, acting as instructors and intermediaries between the rank-and-file and the magistrates. There's one sergeant for each company. Sergeants come from the ranks of the guardsmen. Typically there's no cost for the promotion; the person must only prove his worth to the magistrate and have over a decade of experience.

Magistrates: Magistrates both serve as the officers in the city guard and act as judge, jury, and executioner in criminal matters. There is no set number of magistrates — the Chief Magistrate elevates individuals as they prove themselves worthy — but as a rule of thumb, for every five companies of guardsmen, there's one magistrate. Magistrates are typically relations of one of the Fifty — family members who lack the privilege of living with the family in Gold's Reside, but whom the patriarch likes enough to do a favor. Some rare magistrates rise through the ranks of the guardsmen by virtue of their talent.

Chief Magistrates: Chief magistrates command a neighborhood's complement of city guard, and there is one chief magistrate to a neighborhood. The chief magistrate is answerable only to the Prince, although the Chief Magistrate of Gold's Reside is their *de facto* leader, and if war ever came to Elweir, this Chief Magistrate would become the general of Elweir's army. The Prince promotes a chief magistrate from the ranks of the magistrates, usually whomever the Chief Magistrate of Gold's Reside recommends. The Chief Magistrate of Gold's Reside is promoted from the ranks of the other neighborhoods' chief magistrates.

ARMORIES

Riots have always been a problem in Elweir, and without exception they begin in Lowtown. During the Moldy Bread Riots of 543 VA, when the people feared they would starve to death during a continent-wide drought, the fires that started in Lowtown spread into nearby neighborhoods, threatening the entire city. After that, the Prince ordered the armories built.

Each armory is a small fortress — a low curtain wall, twenty-five feet high, surrounding a keep with offices for the magistrates and tower dungeons, and barracks enough for the armory's complement of guardsmen. Each neighborhood except Gold's Reside has several armories, and most of these form a defen-

sive ring around Lowtown. The armories in Lowtown proper are located at the bridges in that neighborhood in the hope their garrisons can keep the Prince's Roads open during a riot.

Since the construction of the armories, none of the riots have been as bad as those in 543 VA. Five companies of guardsmen are assigned to each armory, and all members of the city guard are welcome to live in the armories. A guardsmen must live in an armory for the first five years of his service, and all sergeants must also reside permanently in an armory. Finally, a magistrate is always present. An armory is named after whatever street fronts it.

The armories are marked on the neighborhood maps with lower-case As.

Crimes

The sections below detail the crimes committed in Elweir, as well as providing the typical punishment for committing the crime and general information about how large a bribe a magistrate expects from the criminal for his freedom.

MURDER

What constitutes murder is simple to understand, but who is murdered and the circumstances behind the act determine the punishment.

The city guard overlooks killing someone in a fight where both sides are held responsible — for instance in a bar fight when witnesses attest that both sides were insulting each other, or in a formal duel when witnesses attest that both sides agreed to the fight — so long as neither side is considered anyone important. In legal jargon these important people are *personages*, and as a rule of thumb anyone who generates revenue for the Prince is a personage. These include: leaseholders; captains (both river and sea); nobles; city guard (special circumstances apply; see *Killing Guardsmen*); foreign dignitaries the Prince has acknowledged; and anyone whose surviving friends and family can pay enough coin to a magistrate to convince him the murder victim was important.

As punishment for killing a personage, the murderer is either sold into slavery — the bereaved claims the profit from the sale, the Prince claims the murderer's possessions, and the magistrate claims the kickback from the slaver — or immediate execution. Executions are held in the courtyard of the armories, and an executioner conducts the beheading when he makes his rounds of the armories in the morning. (Drawing-and-quartermen and hanging also serve as possible means of execution. Most magistrates consider those methods barbaric in this day and age, but a handful of bits can convince the magistrate the murderer deserves a more painful death than simple beheading.)

Execution is the punishment for more cold-blooded killings, such as assassination, regardless of the victim's status in the city — the only problem lies in catching the culprit and bringing him before the magistrate. Barring family connections to the guard and the like, magistrates only investigate the murder of personages. Multiple murders of the

IMPRISONING CRIMINALS

The city guard prefers not to imprison criminals. Most imprisonment is only for one night — only until the slave market in the Foreign Quarter opens, or the executioner arrives at the armory in the morning. This is mainly due to the cost of keeping a man prisoner — even moldy bread costs a bit or two, far too much to spend on thieves. The most common reason for being locked up for longer periods of time is that the magistrate wants something from the prisoner. Some thieves have become good at convincing magistrates they know or have something worthwhile as a way of putting off maiming or execution.

KILLING GUARDSMEN

In the neighborhoods of Uphill East and West, Worm's Hole, and (especially) Gold's Reside, killing a guardsman — whether provoked or otherwise — is an inexcusable offense always punished with execution. But life is much cheaper in the other neighborhoods in Elweir.

First and foremost, the matter of punishment is at the magistrate's discretion. If he has a grudge against the killer, execution is more than likely — it's an inescapable outcome. Second, cold-blooded murder is never overlooked and always punished whether with execution or selling the guilty party into slavery. But if the killer can show he had a reason, reasonable or otherwise, for slaying the guardsman — and bribes the magistrate with between twenty to thirty coin — he often goes free.

That said: sometimes, no bribe is enough to stop a dead guardsman's friends from seeking revenge for the death of a guardsman or sergeant. And if someone kills a magistrate or chief magistrate, death is the only sentence he can hope for.

same type attract the city guard's undivided attention if the killer is costing proprietors coin or the neighborhood seems ready to boil over into a riot. (This was the case several months ago, when the Quiet Smoke stalked Gibberish's streets and murdered nearly thirty people.)

Bribing The Magistrate

The cost of convincing a magistrate to pursue justice — in other words, to impose sentence — in a case of murder is fifty coins (or a service or goods of equivalent value). This amount can go up or down depending on the magistrate's feelings toward the murderer, and most magistrates are open to higher bids to look the other way depending on the specifics of the case. On the other hand, the accused can also bribe the magistrate to find him innocent; the amounts required are similar. Sometimes "bidding wars" break out between the accused and the victim's friends and family.

For a small amount of money — in the range of ten to twenty coins — friends and family of a murder victim can convince a magistrate to investigate. However, such investigations are likely cursory, and this method only achieves results when a city guard already knows who the murderer is and hasn't been bribed to look the other way. Friends and family of the victim are always free to capture the culprit on their own or hire someone to do so. In this case they can bring the culprit, and whatever witnesses they feel necessary, before the magistrate so he can decide the case.

If someone's been sentenced to slavery or death for murder, buying his way out is difficult, since too many people know of the verdict — magistrates aren't willing to be that openly corrupt, since it would cost them their jobs. If the murderer's friends can come up with a plan that keeps the magistrate "in the clear," paying him around 8-120 coins is usually enough to convince him to go along.

THEFT

In cases where a magistrate must determine who owns property, possession is the entirety of the law except in cases of leased land and ship-ownership — both of which are documented, the records held in the Office of the Exchequer — and slaves. (These three are discussed in the section above, *Property*.)

Proving theft of other goods involves catching the thief red-handed and sometimes providing testimony from witnesses. Punishment for theft, regardless of the amount stolen, is maiming: the thief loses first his left hand. If caught a second time, he loses his right hand. On the third time — an admittedly rare occurrence — he is executed.

Avoiding such drastic punishment is as simple as returning the stolen property to the victim and making a bribe to the magistrate equal to ten or twenty percent of the stolen property's value. Usually a magistrate will *not* accept a bribe from the victim of theft to punish the thief, since the magistrate would rather have the thief back on the street — eventually he'll be caught again and have to pay another bribe to the magistrate. (But of course, nothing is impossible if someone has enough coin.)

Punishment for destruction of leased property or a ship is execution. Because both of these types of property provide revenue for the Prince, a magistrate does not accept bribes to overlook this crime.

The city guard is mostly useless when it comes to apprehending burglars, cutpurses, pickpockets, and other thieves. A victim's best bet is to seek revenge or regain his property for himself, and to bribe his way out of a killing if caught. Other options are to hire agents to regain the property and/or get revenge, or simply write off the goods as lost.

FAILURE TO PAY THE PRINCE HIS DUE

The penalties for this are discussed in the sections above, *Property* and *The Port Authority*.

CONDUCT OFFENSIVE TO THE PRINCE

This is a catch-all category that includes violating any proclamations the Prince makes. Mostly it provides a means for a magistrate to harass anyone in the city. Conduct offensive to the Prince runs the gamut from public drunkenness, to speaking too loudly, to giving "evil looks" to a member of the city guard. Whenever a magistrate either wants to hold someone for questioning — whether due to a criminal investigation or because of a personal matter — or to extract some coin from a person in the form of a bribe, he declares that the person in question has committed "conduct offensive to the Prince."

The amount of the bribe needed to get out from under this charge ranges from five to ten coins. If the accused refuses to pay, he's locked in the dungeon for a couple of days. During that time, the magistrate looks for something more damning on the prisoner, but if he doesn't find anything, he simply releases the man. Taking punishment for "conduct offensive to the Prince" too far has resulted in riots in the past, and no magistrate wants to be held responsible for that, since during a riot no one makes any coin and most leaseholders suffer from property destruction and the like.

SHARING THE WEALTH

Most bribes go directly to the magistrate, and then the magistrate shares this coin with the guardsmen and sergeants. This is the accepted practice, and usually guardsmen refuse bribes when a criminal has been caught red-handed and witnesses are about.

If a magistrate fails to spread the coin around among the rank-and-file, eventually he finds himself alone when faced with some vicious criminal or the other, the guardsmen having mysteriously departed. These magistrates almost always come to bad ends.

If a guardsman is discovered spending an unseemly amount of coin, he finds himself ostracized from his fellow guard, and eventually a magistrate questions him about the matter — usually asking the questions with a cudgel.

Determining Guilt

In criminal matters, a magistrate serves as judge, jury, and sometimes executioner. Typically the city guard bring the suspected criminal before the magistrate wherever he happens to be — usually at one of the armories. Any witnesses accompany the city guard and their prisoner. The magistrate listens to the testimony, entertains any and all bribes, and decides the matter on the spot.

When both the accused and the victim are personages, the magistrate typically adjudicates the case in strict accordance with the law — in other words, he does not accept any bribes, for fear of alienating someone else important. When the accused is a noble, the magistrate removes himself from the situation as quickly as possible and sends the matter up the chain of command to the chief magistrate for the neighborhood. Unless he has an axe to grind or is making some sort of political gambit, the chief magistrate immediately sends the matter to the Prince.

Regardless of the crime, personages can appeal a magistrate's decision to the chief magistrate of the neighborhood in which they reside. Nobles and foreign dignitaries the Prince has acknowledged also have the right to appeal a magistrate's decision to the Prince.

A magistrate, even a chief magistrate, has no authority outside his neighborhood. However, a magistrate is far more likely to believe another magistrate than some nobody from the streets of Elweir, and if a magistrate takes some action outside his neighborhood, no one usually objects so long as the person isn't a personage or there isn't some deeper plot going on.

THE EXECUTIONERS

There are two executioners in Elweir, one for the north end and the other for the south. Each morning these men make the rounds of the armories in their district — a task that takes between four and six hours, depending on how many executions or maimings they have to carry out.

An executioner wears a black hood over his head and black clothing. He performs his work with a long-bladed two-handed sword he carries strapped to his back. As he walks the streets, he often gathers a crowd of children behind him who all hope to see an execution.

The executioner in the south, who covers Snake's Den, the Canals, Gold's Reside, and Worm's Hole, is Cut-in-Twain Kurli (a name he picked up when he executed a criminal by cutting him in half at the waist). The executioner in the north, who covers Lowtown, Gibberish, and Uphills East and West, is Two-Stroke Tym (it once took him two strokes to cut through the neck of a big Khorian). Both vary their route from day to day.



The New Law

All confusion over the law in Elweir stems from the *New Law*: a series of proclamations the Prince issued in an attempt to make the city more palatable to the Duke of Romnal and bring its legal customs in line with those of Valdoria. The main issues with the New Law are twofold. First, the proclamations are always compromises — half-measures that leave plenty of loopholes so it's business as usual in Elweir — and that usually muddles things. Second, the presence of the Duke's Men (see below) complicates the situation. If it weren't for them, the magistrates would simply ignore as much of the New Law as they could get away with.

THE LAWS

Here are some of the specific laws in the New Law, either those with the greatest impact on Elweir, or those considered the most ridiculous by the ne'er-do-wells who inhabit the Murk.

Bribery: Bribes are illegal. Of course, the law says nothing about gifts and fines....

Godstime: Taverns and other places that sell drink must close their doors during Godstime (page 18). Serving drink in a private residence is not forbidden, but only if the owners don't charge for the drink — this has led to the custom of exchanging "gifts" during Godstime. Usually the gifts are: one person gives the host coin, and the host gives his guests drink.

The New Gods: The New Gods are false and offerings of coin to these gods are illegal. No shrines or temples to the New Gods may be established within Elweir. The ramifications of this are discussed in *Religion*, page 30.

Sorcery: Though sorcerers may enter the city, and even reside in the city, the practice of sorcery is illegal and punishable by execution. This has led many a false accuser to attribute the practice of sorcery to someone he wants revenge on. The magistrates have given up investigating these ridiculous claims — whenever someone reports the practice of sorcery, they hand the matter over to the Duke's Men. The Duke's Men have yet to execute a sorcerer, but they have delivered many a vicious beating to a false accuser.

Slavery: The effects of this is discussed under *Property*, page 20.

THE DUKE'S MEN

If it weren't for the Duke's Men, the Valdorian nobles and warriors under the command of Sir Ravning Coeur who have begun to act as unofficial watchdogs on the city guard, the magistrates would simply ignore the New Law. Whenever a member of the Duke's Men witnesses a magistrate taking bribes or other unethical activity, he confronts the magistrate and causes an embarrassing scene. If the magistrate waves off the Duke's Man, the Valdorian goes directly to Sir Ravning, who then lodges a complaint with the Prince — and from there, the complaint travels back down the chain of command,

typically ending with the guilty magistrate fined and, on occasion, removed from office.

The end result of all this is that magistrates are always looking over their shoulders when presiding over a case, and criminals — who could once count on being set free after a bribe — now must worry that one of the Duke's Men will show up and ruin everything. Typically, if a Duke's Man does show up, the magistrate pretends to conduct the proceedings in strict accordance to the law. Once he has the criminal back at the armory, he accepts a bribe to let the man go free... but the Duke's Men have learned of this practice and sometimes accompany the magistrate back to the armory.

There are, at present, nearly a hundred members of the Duke's Men in the city — and that number increases every month as more Valdorian come to reside with Sir Ravning. All of them are able-bodied warriors, fearless and willing to travel the entire city regardless of a neighborhood's reputation. A sizable minority of them are even nobles, all of whom live up to their land's reputation for strict morals, self-righteousness, and haughtiness. Typically the Duke's Men travel in groups of five to fifteen with a noble leading them.

Warriors among the Duke's Men wear blue tunics that hang to the knee and are belted at the waist with a broad leather belt. Over the tunic they wear a scale or chain shirt (or, far more rarely, a steel breastplate) and a leather skirt, and at their waist they wear basket-hilted broadswords. In addition to this, the nobility among the Duke's Men also wear a cloak of royal blue, a color only the Valdorian nobility may wear, and at the center of their belts is a golden medallion worked in the shape of a lion's head, which represents the arms of Romnal.

THE UNDERWORLD

There ain't no criminals in Elweir.

To have criminals means some folk are law-abiding, and no one in Elweir can abide the law.

Crime is widespread and rampant in Elweir, and nearly everyone is only one or two steps removed from some criminal endeavor or another. There is no monolithic thieves' guild in Elweir — to get so many thieves to follow the leadership of one man is an impossible dream. Even if it were possible, that one person wouldn't live long enough to see the profit, for there is no honor among thieves, particularly in Elweir. Instead criminal activities are split among numerous groups, temporary alliances, and lone individuals. The backbone of the underworld are the gangs centered in Lowtown, Snake's Den, and Gibberish.

GANGS

Gangs serve as both a labor pool for large-scale criminal activities and training ground for more ambitious and talented criminals. The average gang

member ranges from his mid-teens to his mid-thirties, and gangs number forty to fifty members. Gangs engage in protection rackets, mugging, and other activities that rely mostly on brute strength and thuggery. More complicated crimes are far beyond the understanding of most gang leaders.

Each gang has a territory staked out, usually six or eight blocks, and a member wears something that identifies him as belonging to a gang. The city guard typically overlooks gang activities, unless the gang over-reaches by attacking guardsmen or committing large-scale property destruction. Then the guard stamps the gang out of existence. Unlike criminal alliances, gangs are public knowledge and can exist for centuries, although they might change considerably as leadership changes hands.

A member can stop participating in gang activities at any time, but membership is for life. Usually this lifelong membership is a benefit, but sometimes it results in a gang leader calling in a favor. Members almost always grow up in the blocks claimed as a gang's territory. Members usually run in packs of five to ten, all of the gang members assembling rarely (usually only when there's a fight over territory with another gang). The best protection from the predations of gangs for those visiting Lowtown is to stay in large groups.

Some of the best-known gangs include:

The Dead Fish: The Dead Fish are a large, old gang that haunts the eastern embankment in Lowtown. Their main source of coin is protecting fishermen's tied-up rowboats from theft and vandalism. Members wear fish bones sewn to their sleeve, and the gang's leader is a large man called Puckered Beak. His name comes from the ugly puckered scar at the tip of his nose, which was lost during a knife fight.

The King's Boys: The King's Boys formed recently in Gibberish. All of them are young — the oldest is their leader, Fyrd Sickless, at twenty years old. They haunt the intersection of Spear Street and Shark's Fin Way, and their main source of coin is extorting payment from those who come to listen to the Prophet of the King in Sapphire Robes. A member of the King's Boys wears a swathe of dirty blue fabric stitched to the breast of his shirt.

The Bone Chokers: The Bone Chokers lurk along Glutton's Way in Lowtown. Glutton's Way is infamous for its seedy eating establishments, and the Bone Chokers mug any visitor who over-indulged in food and drink before attempting to stumble home, usually leaving a bone lodged in the victim's mouth as a sort of calling card. Members of the Bone Chokers wear a necklace of bones, usually from chicken or water fowl, around their necks.

The Fire Brigade: The Fire Brigade is a gang in Lowtown that controls the intersection of Dead Man's Slide and Flood Street. They have taken to setting buildings on fire, then robbing them as the families flee the flames. It's not an unusual practice among gangs, but one that, if performed too many times, is sure to draw the ire of the guard — and as of their last fire, the Fire Brigade has set one too many buildings alight. Members wear scorched sticks knotted in their unwashed, singed hair.

CRIMINAL GROUPS

After doing their time in the gangs, some thugs aspire to more profitable — and more risky — criminal endeavors. These run the gamut from extortion and burglary, to smuggling and spying, to banditry and assassination.

There's no honor among thieves, and that's doubly true of the thieves in Elweir, so unless one insists on considering the captains' guilds and Fifty Families criminal groups, most groups don't last long. The saying in Lowtown is: once people know a criminal group's name and the reason it exists, it's no longer around to be caught. It's definitely true that these are mostly temporary alliances, usually with a single, easily-stated goal. (For example, steal the Ruby of Giloush from the Ramblewine Palace in Gold's Reside; or discover who's kidnapping young street urchins and selling them into slavery, then extort some coin from the kidnapper with threats of informing the Duke's Men.)

The Blind Street Pledge: Rumors have just begun to spread through Lowtown's taverns about the Blind Street Pledge. It's said they're a group of thieves — and everyone has their own list of who precisely "has made the pledge." Speculation about what they're going to steal ranges from Sir Raving Coeur's signet ring, to something (always an artifact of great power and importance) in the Sinking Tower, to the gold statue of Kypris in the Temple of the Seven in Gold's Reside.

The River Snakes: The River Snakes is a smuggling ring that sprung up after the city guard executed the leadership of the Night Rowers. Working out of Gibberish and Lowtown, the River Snakes make deals with foreign captains to smuggle cargo off their ships. This way the captain can sell the goods without paying the assessor's tax.

The Silver-Crossed Palms: One of the oldest criminal groups in Elweir, the Silver-Crossed Palms practices extortion of the wealthy. From hired spies and bribed servants they learn some embarrassing fact about a wealthy person, then demand money or services from him to keep the secret. Rumor has it they know something embarrassing about everyone with two coins to rub together in Elweir, and they've been around so long they keep an archive of these secrets. If no one else knows the answer about a person or his past, the Silver-Crossed Palms do... but their membership is their most closely-held secret.

The Starveling Guild: If one takes tavern-talk seriously, all the homeless beggars in Elweir belong to the Starveling Guild, an organization as old as Elweir itself and ruled by the Beggar King. In the Starveling Guild, beggars learn many ways to make a man with a few coin to spare sympathetic to the beggar's plight: how best to stare sightlessly into space, so a person thinks the beggar is blind; how to hide his legs, so a person thinks he has none; how to spread dirt under the eyes and cheekbones, so a person thinks the beggar suffers from consumption — every method men have yet devised to squeeze coins from the pouch of a hard-hearted man. Like all kings, the Beggar King takes his due from his subjects and lives in squalid splendor.

INFAMOUS CRIMINALS

Renowned criminals are looked upon as the heroes of epic among the folk of Lowtown, and are often idolized by the children. Some of the most famous include:

Quiet Smoke: The killer known among the populace of Elweir only as the Quiet Smoke haunted the twisty streets of Gibberish for three months. There he killed at will, choosing his victims from the patrons of that neighborhood's smoke shops and strangling them with a scarf of red silk. For the last two months of his killings, after the Quiet Smoke murdered a young man of the Fifty, the city guard attempted to discover him and put a stop to the murders. The murders ended several weeks ago, but the guard has never stepped forward to say they captured him. In the minds of the populace, the Quiet Smoke still haunts the streets of Gibberish, searching for his next victim.

Fat Chiki, The Beggar King: Rumor has it that Fat Chiki, an indigent man living in the Kneel and known best for his notched cleaver and immense girth, leads the Starvelings Guild. Whether this is merely because the populace finds it humorous that such a large man, one who is obviously *not* starving, would lead the Starveling Guild, or for some other reason is unknown. Fat Chiki often refers to himself as the Beggar King (while speaking in the third person, to boot), but has never admitted to leading the Starveling Guild.

Sylarin Farseer: Sylarin Farseer is a pickpocket and burglar whose first deed is still a legend spoken of with admiration in the taverns of Lowtown. In that earliest story, Sylarin picked the blade of a magistrate from its sheath at the man's hip while he stood trial for petty theft. Since then Sylarin has received credit for every unsolved theft in Elweir, making it hard to ferret out which deeds he performed and which he didn't. Most Elweirnians think he's a member (if not the founder) of the Blind Street Pledge.

Al'Rauod: Al'Rauod is Tharestani thief who resides in the Foreign Quarter. Though no one knows if he has committed any worthwhile thievery in Elweir proper, he is reputed to have stolen the Jewel of Thar from the former ruler of Tharestan, Emir Souak — along with the emir's daughter who wore the Jewel at the time. What happened to the Jewel (not to mention the daughter) is unknown. No one has heard of the Jewel being sold, nor has anyone seen a woman in al'Rauod's manor in the Foreign Quarter. On occasion other stories of his deeds in Tharestan make the rounds in Elweir — and if even half the tales are true, al'Rauod is the most daring thief living in Elweir.

Svenair Alone: Most feel Svenair Alone, a former soldier of Amyklai who now resides in Lowtown, is the deadliest man in Elweir. Standing well over six feet tall and leanly muscled, with cold blue eyes and a menacing glare, he certainly looks deadly... and the furs he wears lend him an air of barbarous brutality. Most agree he has killed sixty men, including an entire company of guardsmen, since arriving

in Snake's Den a little over a year ago... and some say he's killed many more than that. Rumor has it Svenair works as an enforcer for the Silver-Crossed Palms (which is how he got away with killing so many guardsmen).

RELIGION

*You nevermind what the priests say —
I'm telling you, the gods turned their
backs on us — and before you ask why
would the priests lie, let me answer
your question: priests are just like any
other swindlers. They've got to make
you believe what they're selling is worth
something if anyone's going to buy,
and a priest wants coin just like anyone
else, maybe even more so. Never trust a
priest, lad... that's all you need to know.*

The gods are gone from the world. Most people say they turned their backs when Valdor died. Though the gods have departed, the priests haven't — a definite oversight on the part of the gods as far as Elweirnians are concerned. The priests tend to those who remain faithful. Over the last millennia, the numbers of the faithful have dwindled in places like Elweir, where the pursuit of coin is held above service to the divine, and a cynical populace views the priests as pursuing wealth just like anyone else.

The stories say that once priests were the vessels for divine power. They could heal the sick no matter what ailed a man, grant good fortune to the faithful, and make food and water out of thin air. And some stories tell that the priest could even raise the dead — return to life one struck down in the service of the god. But if that were once true, it hasn't been for nearly a thousand years — so long that all but the priests and their flocks believe those are nothing but fanciful tales.

Without tangible proof of the gods' existence, who's to say they're real? And no priest denies the gods once granted them great powers, so even if a person believes the gods do exist, they've obviously turned their back on mankind, so why worship them? What does a person get in return? Such are the arguments the faithless make.

Furthermore, new gods have sprung up to replace the old ones — and who's to say these New Gods are any less real than the Old Gods? The servants of both hold the same power — namely, none at all — and neither side has any more proof than the other of their divine masters' existence.

THE OLD GODS

Men and women have honored the Old Gods for as far back as any history records, and their worship, although sometimes under different names, is common throughout Il-Ryveras. There are seven gods and goddesses.

Pythos

The Sky-Father and Descender, Pythos is the creator of the world, of mankind, and of the other gods. He created the gods from his spit and organs, the first man and woman from each of his eyes, and the world from his hair and bodily fluids. Pythos rules the sky and storms, as well as the other gods. Few people worship the Sky-Father, although all honor him; typically only rulers and generals make pleas directly to him. Artists depict him as an old man with a shriven head and empty eye sockets. His chest lays open, the skin cut down the middle and ribs cracked open, to reveal the emptiness inside.

Erebos

The Coin-Monger and Far-Rover, Erebos is the god of merchants and travelers. Pythos shaped Erebos from his stomach. Stories tell of Erebos's wanderlust and greed, and of all the gods, he was most likely to be found in the world walking its roads. A more recent legend tells that the reason gold is so rare nowadays is Erebos took all he could find with him when the gods departed Il-Ryveras. Statues depict Erebos as a middle-aged man wearing a broad-brimmed hat, leaning on a gnarled staff, and holding in his other hand a pouch of gold.

Anyu

The Strife-Bringer and Manslayer, Anyu is the god of warriors and conflict. Pythos shaped Anyu from his liver. Anyu resides in the edge of a sharp blade, a spray of a man's blood, and the frenzy of battle when nothing remains but to kill one's opponent. Once he danced along the blades and spears in battle, raised up just before the downward killing stroke, touching warriors with madness; but now any madness a soldier feels is entirely his own doing, and no longer can men blame the god for the atrocities they commit during battle. Statues depict Anyu as four-armed man covered from head to toes with plates of metal; each of his four hands holds a sword.

Kypris

The Heart-Stirrer and Envy-Of-All, Kypris is the goddess of lovers and love. Pythos shaped Kypris from his heart. Kypris embodies more than just the happier moments of love, including despair-causing heartbreak, jealous-induced frenzy, and envy-inspired conspiring and plotting. People say that when mortals act their very worst, such as when Valdor's mistresses murdered the hero, Kypris lays with Anyu, the Heart-Stirrer entwined with the Strife-Bringer. Statues depict Kypris as a nude woman, thick curls of hair covering most of her downward-turned face, one hand extended and beckoning a person forward, the other hand hidden behind her back and clenched into a fist, hiding what she holds in her palm.

Poteidan

The Earth-Shaker and Terror-Of-The-Deep, Poteidan is the god of the unknown and the depths. Pythos shaped Poteidan from his bladder and kidneys. Poteidan is a cruel and heartless god, and he rules over the depths of both sea and earth. The monstrous beings who lie hidden from man are his to command, and at his anger, the earth trembles in fear. When he isn't inflicting suffering on those who brave the unknown — especially those who sail the sea where nothing stands between them and the horrors below the waves — his attention is either turned elsewhere or he is asleep. A sailor doesn't pray for the Wave-Roarers to make his journey a safe one; instead he prays for Poteidan to look elsewhere, pleading that others are more deserving of the god's attention. But most times when a sailor invokes Poteidan's name, it is only to curse the god. Statues depict Poteidan as a nude man with seaweed for hair, his mouth open in a roar and showing rows of sharp teeth like those of a shark, and in both his hands he holds lashes with sharp seashells woven into the braids.

Enodia

The Dark-Of-The-Moon and Temptress-At-The-Crossroads, Enodia is the goddess of knowledge and the night. Pythos shaped Enodia from his entrails. The other Old Gods embody both weal and woe for man, but Enodia seems wholly threatening; few, if any, are comfortable with her worship. Enodia hides behind the moon, and when the moon is gone, she drifts through the dark night, stealing men's secrets. She stands at the crossroads and tempts men with choices; and she fills men with dread about the future and makes them fearful of the outcome of their choice. Statues depict Enodia as a woman with short hair in a topknot to reveal her four faces, one on each side of her head. She holds both hands out, but closed in fists, as if daring a man to pick one of her hands and see what fate she holds for him.

Aides

The Final Lord and Dweller-After-Death, Aides is the god of the dead and the underworld. Pythos shaped Aides from his lungs. Aides was once the Beloved-Of-Man and Dweller-In-The-Sun, but when the first man and women died, proving they were only mortal, Aides threw himself on their pyre and died also. He did this so that he might accompany the spirits of the first man and women into the underworld, the hellish Nether Realms, and protect them from the demons that would otherwise torment them forever more. Since then, he has continued to perform this service to mankind... or at least, so the priests claim. Whether Aides has also departed with his divine brethren is a matter of much concern, even among the faithful, for if he has left his place in the Nether Realms then the souls of men and women are at the mercy of demons. Statues of Aides depict a man in elegant robes holding his hands over his face and tearful eyes. Behind his head is fixed a golden disk to remind the faithful what Aides gave up to protect his beloved mortals in the afterlife.

THE VALDORIAN BELIEF

Unlike the typical Elweirnian, a Valdorian believes fervently in the gods. The reason for their disappearance is a matter of some dispute though. The official belief is that the gods grew disgusted with mankind's wicked ways and will only return once mankind has shown itself capable of living a life that honors the gods. The unofficial belief is: the gods decided after witnessing Valdor's deeds that mankind was ready to live its own life without the interference and direction of gods — in other words, mankind had finally grown up enough to live like an adult without constant guidance from the gods.

The unofficial belief is called the Divine Parentage Heresy. A priest espousing it is expelled from the priesthood, but a layman believing it is not punished for his belief, because several Valdorian Emperors have held the same belief. Also saving it from more fervent persecution is the fact that the heresy doesn't question the authority of the priesthood — it concludes that despite the fact that gods will never return to the world, mankind must honor them just as a child, no matter how old, must honor his parents.

EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE

The average city-dweller in Elweir has little truck with the gods and their handiwork, since he lives a life far removed from nature, so he fully believes the gods have turned their back on the world. This isn't true of every inhabitant of Elweir though.

Sailors have all witnessed first-hand the wrath of Poteidan, and they believe the gods are still present in the world. Ever pragmatic and always philosophical, a sailor might compromise and agree that Poteidan probably just killed the rest of the gods and he's the only one who remains.

Mercenaries are also reluctant to believe that Anyu doesn't still live in the moments of battle — most of them have experienced the unbelievable and impossible in one battle or another, and have a hard time accepting the absence of the Strife-Bringer.

Places Of Worship

Every neighborhood has at least one temple or shrine dedicated to each of the seven gods. (Notable temples and shrines are described below in the section on the appropriate neighborhood.) One or two priests tend to a shrine and live nearby. Inside a shrine is a small graven image of the god, a small space for three or four people to kneel, and a collection box.

Temples are larger, with a sanctuary for worship and living places for the priests. On average, between ten and twenty priests live in a temple; they preside over services, one at sunrise and one just before sunset. A high priest commands the temple, and the rest of the priesthood is split between priests and acolytes. Priests and priestesses hold equal rank in the service of the Old Gods, and each priest serves all seven gods and goddesses equally, although most priests feel a certain sympathy with one god over the others.

THE NEW GODS

The New Gods are countless. It seems that every day a new one emerges to fill his lone prophet in the world with the righteous frenzy of belief — a frenzy so all-consuming the new prophet must find a street corner in Lowtown or Gibberish and begin to shout out the commandments of this new god, teaching every passer-by about this wondrous divine being. Some of the best-known of them are described below, but to make any full accounting of them all would be impossible.

Aldressa The Weeper

Aldressa is the goddess of motherhood and widows, according to her prophet Lizza Ashmorn, a woman who lost both her husband and son in 1000 VA when the Bandit Lords ambushed Prince Mehki's rag-tag army. The goddess gives comfort to those women who have no one else, whether because their husband and sons died or they abandoned the woman to her fate. Twenty years ago when she first started preaching about the Weeping Goddess, Lizza's followers originally pitied her — all knew her story and thought the death of her family had driven her mad — but since then, other women have become bereaved and found comfort in Lizza's teachings, which tend toward telling a woman she doesn't need a man to survive in the world. The followers of Aldressa wear a shroud stained with ash.

The Divine Alderman

The Divine Alderman is responsible for everything good in the world. No matter what it is, he is the prime cause and the single god a person should thank for whatever he appreciates in his life. This god began life as a political satire during Lowtown's last election four years ago, but amazingly enough, he found some worshippers and one person or another has carried on his street-corner proselytizing since then. The current "herald" of the Divine Alderman is Bevrin Simplewood.

The Gambling God

He has no name, but he lurks in the moments when the dice leave a man's hand and clatter across the table, or when the dealer pushes a card face-down to a player before he turns it over. His chief (and only) prophet is Sedgewyck Coffey, a formerly famous gambler who lost his left hand when he was caught cheating at cards. In the pain afterward (so he claims), the Gambling God revealed himself. Sedgewyck always attracts a large crowd — mainly because he offers many tips on how to win at gambling while he preaches the divine will of the Gambling God. Sometimes, he pulls out a pair of dice and bets the crowd it will turn up six. Everyone knows the dice are fixed, but bet against him anyway. In this way Sedgewyck collects coin while avoiding the prohibition against offerings to the New Gods.

The King In Sapphire Robes

He ruled when the world was nothing but ash, and now rules again. The Old Gods retreated before his dread majesty, and soon he will return the world to nothing but ash. He stands ten thousand feet tall, has ten thousand eyes that watch every man and woman, and brandishes ten thousand barbed tentacles to punish all those who defy his will. All these monstrous characteristics and more the Grave One, the name of the King's prophet, attributes to this New God, and the reason many gather to listen to the Grave One rant and rave is to hear what new monstrosity he will come up with next to describe his god, the crowd gasping with delight at the grotesque and lurid descriptions. The Grave One haunts a corner in Gibberish, and the crowds he draws have resulted in the gang called the King's Boys (page 29).

Sythen The Long-Suffering

Unlike many of the gods above, Sythen is something more than a swindle or an entertainment for the masses. He's gained a large following among the masses of Lowtown. His worshippers have even begun to erect a temple in the Kneel, where his worship is far more widespread than that of the Old Gods. Sythen is the god of the down-trodden, dispossessed, and indigent. He offers comfort to the suffering and hope for a better life after death. He has many followers who preach all throughout Lowtown, and his worship has begun to spread to Uphill West and East. The priesthood of the Old Gods considers worship of Sythen an epidemic and wants it stamped out. But the Prince and his advisors find his worship politically expedient, for the rewards one receives in the afterlife are directly proportional to the suffering one experiences in this life — which means Sythen's worshippers tend to accept suffering passively (rather than rising up in riots and the like). Sythen was originally a mortal, who only a hundred years ago was killed during a Sacred Purge of Lowtown. The stories tell that though the servants of the Old Gods dismembered Sythen, pulling him limb from limb, his mouth continued to speak soft words of forgiveness of his killers until finally they threw his head into the Serpentine. Sythen's original message

involved no gods at all — it was simply that a man should accept his place in the world and be content with what he already possessed — but his divine nature became apparent after his death and since then his followers have taken to worshipping their martyred god.

Places Of Worship

By proclamation of the Prince, worshippers of a New God cannot erect a temple or shrine to that god within the city limits.

In obedience to this law, a follower of a New God must limit his proselytizing to street corners, typically in Gibberish or Lowtown. These followers draw a crowd depending on either how compelling their god is, or how entertaining the follower. How the people judge whether a follower is entertaining is a fickle thing. Sometimes it's because the stories he tells present entrancing vistas of fantastic places and heroic deeds. Sometimes it's because the follower composes striking and original curses of Elweir and its inhabitants.

A follower's continued existence depends on the crowd he draws. If he fails to quickly draw a crowd, the city guard comes by and accuses him of conduct offensive to the Prince. They then expel him from the city. The guard first imprisons repeat offenders, and then sells them into slavery. However, with a large enough crowd, the follower can preach with impunity since the guard isn't willing to provoke so many residents.

By more recent proclamation of the Prince, offerings of coin to the New Gods are illegal. Now the followers receive gifts of food and ale, and some more cunning followers have devised other ways of receiving coin.

DAILY LIFE

The days in Elweir are just like they are anywhere, lad — folks wake up, eat, work, eat some more — nothing much special there. What did you expect anyway? Now the nights — those are a different thing entirely....

Despite Elweir's nefarious reputation, the people's hard-bitten cynicism and greed, and the ubiquity of crime and criminal dealings within the city, the majority of residents go about their daily lives much as people do elsewhere.

CLOTHING

A person's clothing tells someone familiar with the city much about that person, his profession, and where he resides. In many cases, a person is judged almost entirely by the clothing he wears — a fact many criminals take advantage of during their illicit dealings. See the individual neighborhood descriptions beginning on page 34 for more information.

FOOD

Any sort of food in the known world can be had somewhere in Elweir, with the most exotic cuisine served by the inns located in Gibberish. None of this food is free.

The staple of the Elweirnian diet is fish caught in either the Serpentine or the Worm: catfish, carp, bass, trout, and bluegill, plus mussels and crawfish. Numerous fishmongers sell the catch of the day in Hawker's Square and smaller markets throughout the city. Every housewife has her own unique recipe for a fish stew or soup — although many people grumble that all the recipes taste the same.

Fish isn't the only food available. In the villages around Elweir, herders raise livestock that provide the city with other forms of meat. Wheat, barley, and other grains come down the Worm from Valdoria, making them cheap and plentiful. Most buildings in Elweir have a small plot of land, usually in back, where families keep small vegetable gardens and chicken coops for egg-laying hens. The typical diet for a working family is fish and bread six times a week, and some other type of meat — lamb or poultry, usually — one night of the week.

Most of a family's water comes from barrels set out to catch rainwater. Only a madman or a poor soul living in the Kneel drinks water from the rivers without boiling it first. Those who can afford it drink wine mixed with water (casks of the stuff come down the Serpentine from southern Graecoria) or ale (kegs of which brewers ship down the Worm from Valdoria).

GETTING AROUND

Most people walk around Elweir, since the streets are too narrow and choked to allow easy travel on horseback, and most folk can't afford a horse anyway. In neighborhoods like Lowtown, a person attempting to travel mounted soon draws a crowd of yelling people, angry at the stranger who's too good to travel afoot. The crowd grows larger — and angrier — until they finally drag the person from the saddle and steal all his possessions (including his mount).

Some boat travel takes place between neighborhoods, normally via small rowboats and mainly by fishermen. Depending on where a person wants to go, boat travel may be quicker than walking; it's usually possible for someone to hire a fisherman to row him where he wants to go for a few bits.

THE SACRED PURGES

On occasion, priests of the Old Gods organize their worshippers into groups armed with cudgels and lead them into the neighborhoods where followers on the New Gods (the "False Gods," in their minds) are most numerous. These are called Sacred Purges.

Usually between fifty and hundred strong, these groups march through the streets until they come to a street corner where a "blasphemer" is misleading the gullible public. Then they beat him to a bloody pulp.

These purges typically take place in Gibberish and Lowtown, where gangs of thugs are numerous, and these gangs perceive the followers of the Old Gods as just another gang — one that's invading their territory and needs to be taught a lesson. This leads to the streets becoming choked with violence, the city guard desperately attempting to stop the fight, but only adding to the chaos.

The Prince has tried time and time again to convince the Divine Advisor to call a halt to the Sacred Purges, but to no avail. With the Duke's Men becoming more active in Elweir, Sacred Purges threaten to become more common.

NEIGHBORHOODS



*You got to think of Elweir like a woman,
and a woman is made up of parts, just
like Elweir is made up of neighborhoods.
Gibberish is like a woman's mouth,
Hawker's Square is her eyes gleaming at
the sight of fine clothes and sweetmeats,
and the Canals is her tangled hair. You
got Uphill East and West, and you need
only look below a woman's neck to know
what parts those are. You got Gold's
Reside, and that's like a woman's rapa-
cious heart. Finally, you got Lowtown
that sits at the crook of the Serpentine
and the Worm, the two rivers stretched
out to the south like a pair of long legs...
You're too young to know what part
that is, but you'll figure it out one of
these days....*

In many ways, Elweir is less a single enormous city than many small cities clustered together. Each neighborhood has its own distinctive inhabitants, places, and "feel."

THE CANALS

*You listen to this old man — the
Canals is haunted. Those ain't mists
that cling so thick and dense to its
buildings — those are ghosts, thou-
sand upon thousands of years of
ghosts. Some folk tell you the Canals
is sinking. That ain't true neither. The
whole place is damned and the ghosts
are pulling it down to the afterlife.*

The Canals, a spooky and mysterious place, stands on a triangle of land formed where the Worm flows into the Serpentine — the lowest point in Elweir. Here the mists that fill the river valley only clear for a few hours in the afternoon. Water long ago flooded the streets, so people make their way through the neighborhood on shallow-bottomed skiffs.

The Canals is a quiet neighborhood. The only sounds one usually hears are the lapping of the water against the walls of the canals, the soft slurp of a boatman's pole rising in and out of the water, and hollow, creaking moans that might be an echo from barges passing by on the rivers or might be the ghosts that haunt the neighborhood. Somehow the mists seem to swallow other sounds, making voices sound faint and hollow from more than a few feet away.

The People

Outside of the boatmen who work the canals, few people living in the Canals have professions or even seem to work — at least at any honest trade. The Canals is home to the embassies from Romnal and Abyzinia, wealthy criminals who had the sense to retire from burglary and the like before they were caught, old families cast out of the Fifty who cannot bear to move too far away from Gold's Reside, and folk of mysterious origin who are rarely seen, let alone known about. The Canals has long provided a home for sorcerers (or suspected sorcerers) who reside in Elweir — with the most famous being Largisse Foom (who once resided in the Sinking Tower), and the most recent Getab Yren, a necromancer rumored to hail from mysterious Ureth-Kalai.

CLOTHING

People dress well in the Canals, but the style of their clothing is often long out of date. Men wear sleeveless robes of cotton, belted at the waist, and women wear simple sleeveless gowns of silk or satin. The hems of the robes and gowns are higher here than elsewhere, usually just at the knee, because of the ever-present water. Also because of the water, both men and women are more likely to wear sandals than shoes or boots. The boatmen who work the canals go barefoot and wear a breechclout and a broad-brimmed straw hat.

RESIDENCES

The buildings in the Canals are old and made of stone, stained grey and black from years of rain-fall or green with mosses. At four and five stories, the buildings are some of the tallest in the city, and they are usually longer than they are wide. They stand side-by-side, sometimes noticeably leaning to the left or right. All of them are sinking, their first stories just barely emerging from the waters. The residents have sealed the first floors — despite this most still have several inches of water on the floor — and built new doors on the second floors. From this new door leads a set of steps down to the water. Bolted to one of the lower steps is a steel ring

where residents can tie up the skiffs they use to get around. Unlike many buildings in Elweir, the windows here hold glass and the roofs are flat, accessible from inside by a ladder.

Law And Government

The Canals is a quiet neighborhood — although thieves might plan criminal activities here, they usually carry out those plans elsewhere. The most frequent crime is burglary, against which the city guard is of little help. The neighborhood only has a single armory, located on the north edge of Hawker's Square because the most common duty for the city guard is to intervene in squabbles between quick-talking vendors and swindled customers.

THE CHIEF MAGISTRATE

Sinder Pennyburn is the Chief Magistrate of the Canals. His peers don't envy his position — since there's so little crime in the Canals, the magistrates get few bribes. But Magistrate Pennyburn prefers his quiet office to the more frantic ones some of his fellows hold. He's an old man with a potbelly and a grey beard who keeps his hair cut short. Of all the chief magistrates, he's the most honest, the least harsh, and the least interested in bettering his station in life.

THE ALDERMAN

Ulf Tanglevine, a short, rotund man with a large mouth and big eyes that make him look like he's always surprised, serves as alderman for the Canals. Four decades ago, the Tanglevine family was one of the Fifty, and they're dead-set on returning to Gold's Reside. Now serving his third term, Ulf never stops trying to win the favor of the Prince; he spends hours searching for excuses to request an audience with Summerset. The rest of his family engages in various tasks intended to increase the Tanglevine fortune — his immediate family owns several leases in the Canals, his two brothers both captain barges that sail the Serpentine, and Ulf himself is open to any scheme that puts coin in his pouch.

Features

The canals that wind between the buildings lend the neighborhood its name. Though some narrow footpaths and the like wind here and there through some parts of the neighborhood, the waterways provide the primary way of getting around. The water is muddy river water, and the depth of the canals ranges from about five to fifteen feet (1-2.5") deep. Where the canals run into the river, the Royal Masons have erected metal grates or stone "poles" to stop a skiff from drifting into the river. On the canals, boatmen propel their shallow skiffs with poles pushed against the cobbles below. To hire a boat costs one bit. you can find them either wandering the canals looking for work, or at the Prince's Road near Hawker's Square.

Notable Locations

1. FISHMONGERS' PERCH

Right at the northern point of the Canals is a clearing paved with flagstone that looks out on the Worm and Serpentine. In the early afternoon fishmongers gather here, and fishermen row their boats up to the embankment to sell their catch. The fishmongers take the catch to Hawker's Square for sale. At night Fishmonger's Perch serves as a lookout for criminals smuggling or robbing cargo from ships.

2. THE HOME OF GETAB YREN

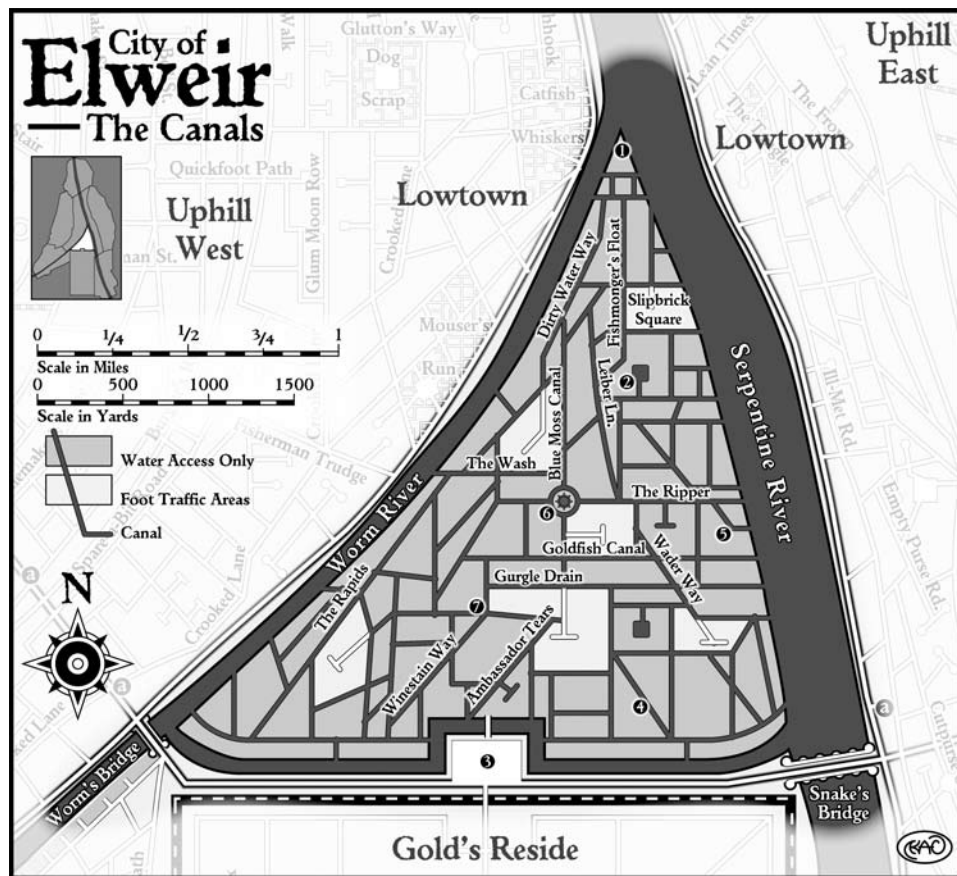
Many people believe Getab Yren, but recently arrived in Elweir, is a sorcerer, for they've seen strange lights in the windows of his home at night. When he arrived in the city, the Prince immediately granted him an audience, and he obtained a lease for a building not too far from the Sinking Tower. He wears a silver skullcap and bracelets of charms on his arms. Judging by his jaundiced skin and long black mustaches, he must be from Ureth-Kalai or some other exotic place. Members of the Duke's Men often watch his home from afar, as if waiting to catch him practicing sorcery. The only real question about Getab Yren is why he came to Elweir in the first place, since the practice of sorcery is now illegal.

3. HAWKER'S SQUARE

Hawker's Square is Elweir's main market place, and one of the few areas in the Canals that remains above water. A broad plaza paved with flagstones, its only permanent feature is a long pole at its center that flies the Prince's flag — eight golden coins arranged in a diamond on a field of white. At night the plaza is empty, but when the sun rises merchants come pulling their carts. They set up their stalls wherever there's room — those coming earliest getting the best places near the edges of the square; those coming later finding room where they can. There's no organization to Hawker's Square, and the place soon becomes a mazy labyrinth of colorful stalls, each merchant trying to shout loud enough to be heard over his neighbor.

A broad canal borders the north edge of Hawker's Square — this allows merchants to bring goods from Elweir's three portages — and a single bridge leads over the canal to the neighborhood's armory. Running parallel to the canal are the Prince's Roads; the one leading from the east coming directly from Snake's Bridge, and the one leading from the west coming directly from Worm's Bridge. The wall that surrounds Gold's Reside forms Hawker's Square's southern edge, and at the center of the wall is an archway, the single entrance into the neighborhood of the Fifty.

Anything and everything might be for sale here, depending on the merchants that day. Hawker's Square is one of the few places where people from all of Elweir can be found in one spot, each elbowing and pushing his way through the crowds, one hand gripping his pouch tightly to make sure a cutpurse doesn't steal his coin.



Hawker's Square is also the site where the Prince's proclamations are delivered (usually by Lord Speckmore the Chancellor). From here the market-goers spread word of his announcements throughout the city.

4. LITTLE ROMNAL

Little Romnal is a block of eight buildings, four on either side of Green Water Canal, given over to Sir Ravning Coeur and the Duke's Men. The Duke's Men have fortified the eight buildings, but no one knows precisely why. Some merely attribute it to their being Valdorians, always playing at war when they have nothing better to do. Others take it as a sign the Duke plans to occupy Elweir with his army. Members of the Duke's Men patrol the roofs at all hours. They've built wooden bridges over the canal, spanning across the windows of the upper stories, so they can travel quickly between the buildings.

5. OLD MAN WALLOWTORN'S

This abandoned home is well-known to children in Elweir. It was once the home of Old Man Wallowtorn — some stories call him a demon — who tempted children to enter his home with candies and sweatmeats. When they did, he trapped them in his oven and cooked them in a pie. People say the spirits of children still haunt the place, and if a person listens intently on the day of Oron's March, he can hear both the children's cries and the sound of gulping and gnashing teeth, as Wallowtorn's ghost forks another piece of pie through his black rotted teeth and blubbery lips into his large mouth. They also say the place becomes deathly

quiet, and the door creaks open and closed, when Old Man Wallowtorn's ghost is inside. When the door is tightly shut, you can hear the ghosts of children running through the rooms and laughing as they play.

No one knows for sure if Old Man Wallowtorn's house is truly haunted. But it has stood vacant for well over a decade. Its lease reverted to the Prince when the last family who lived there died — the two young sons murdered their parents — and no one's wanted to lease it since.

6. THE SINKING TOWER

Dead center of the Canals is the Sinking Tower, former home of the sorcerer Largisse Foom. Fifteen stories tall, it's the tallest building in Elweir. Stories say it was once twice as tall, but over the centuries it's sunk into the ground much faster than the rest of the Canals. Most storytellers say demons dragged Largisse Foom down to the Nether Realms, and now that he's conquered a portion of the hells, he's bringing his home down to him.

Whatever the case, the Sinking Tower has stood empty since Foom departed Elweir — as a freehold, it's

not the Prince's to give away, and few people would willingly live in Foom's former home anyway. Many stories tell of thieves who tried to break into the tower and steal whatever they found there. All them came to a bad end, usually at the hands of demons or restless spirits that guard the tower against trespassers. A circular canal called Foom's Way surrounds the place.

7. THE WATERY LAGOON

The Watery Lagoon is one of the Canals's few inns and taverns. Its first floor (the floor below the entrance) holds round tables with four seats. It has a strangely low ceiling because the floor is made of wood planks set over several feet of standing water that cover the original floor of the building. During quiet times in the inn, as a patron sits at a table, he can hear the water sloshing around below the planks.

The second floor holds living quarters for the proprietor, Owyn Tumblesink, his wife Myrna, and their two daughters. The family is laconic and seems unusually morose, especially considering they do a brisk business and charge unusually high rates for their food, drink, and rooms. They simply nod their heads at the small talk and other sort of chatter innkeepers usually enjoy, and share nothing of their thoughts or opinions.

The third through fifth floors have private rooms available to those who wish to spend the night. Well furnished with two large beds, the rooms are often used by visiting dignitaries.

GIBBERISH

*Zibber-zabber farqu barkish flagra...
you don't know what that means?
Well, of course you don't — that's
why they call it Gibberish.*

The streets of Gibberish are a tangle like some knot a drunken sailor tied around the Serpentine. Even more so than elsewhere in the city, the streets form a confusing maze of narrow paths and alleys. It's almost as if people just built their homes, wine shops, and smoke houses wherever they wished. Nearest the river are the wharves where ships from Abyzinia, Naraat, Khor, and even more exotic places tie up; then along both banks come warehouses for storing goods and the offices of the Port Authority. Beyond this hustle-and-bustle of sailors, captains, porters, clerks, and city assessors are the places that make the Gibberish so exotic.

The People

The people of Gibberish follow four professions: captains; sailors; those who provide services to sailors; and those who prey on sailors.

Gibberish sailors come from all over the known world. Many of them are just passing through, only staying long enough to recover from their last drunk and find a new berth. While ashore they reside in the flophouses — one- and two-story buildings that have nothing in them but row after row of lice-ridden pallets of dirty hay — eat cheap food in cheap inns and taverns, and drink themselves to oblivion in the neighborhood's many grog and wine shops.

Living in Gibberish's tenements are the porters who labor along the wharves and in the warehouses, and the potboys, serving wenches, bar-keepers, and whores who work in the shops. These live side-by-side with gangs like the Salty Lads and the Driftwood Drunks, who make an illicit living mugging drunken sailors.

Tucked between the flophouses and grog shops, almost as if their owners don't want potential customers to find them, are strange places that sell imports from far-off lands — everything from narcotics to crude statuettes to maps of places that may or may not exist. Staffing these shops are foreigners who washed up in Elweir like driftwood, and each of them has a strange tale about how he came to the city.

On the edges of Gibberish, abutting Uphill East and West, are the fine manor houses where the sea captains and their families make their homes.

CLOTHING

Clothing in the Gibberish is just as diverse as the people who inhabit the neighborhood; styles from all over the world can be seen here. Sailors of the lands on the Blue Waters typically wear salt-stained loincloths, a rag tied over their head to keep the sweat from their eyes, and usually little more;

they go barefoot. While this is the most common garb for sailors, other garments — from the flowing robes of Abyzinian captains to the barbarous furs of Khorian mariners — are far from rare.

Porters and other common Elweirnians wear clothing like that found in Lowtown. The street-walkers, even those born and raised in Elweir, wear all sorts of exotic clothing — Abyzinian dresses of feathers, revealingly-cut silks, strange garments of leather — whatever they feel will attract a man's attention. The foreign-born shopkeepers tend to wear the clothing of their homeland, provided it's suitable for so warm a climate. The sea captains and their families dress at the height of style, and often with exotic touches that set them apart from other wealthy men and women in the city — a vivid dye or leopard's pelt from the jungles of Abyzinia, a headdress made from the brilliant plumage of the birds of Zothedris, or the like. Whatever the touch, it often makes them the envy of even the Fifty.

RESIDENCES

The wharves are long stoneworks that run parallel to the embankments on the Serpentine, and here ships can set oars and tie up to on- or off-load cargo. Just beyond the wharves are long, low warehouses made of wood, and sprawling single-story stone buildings that provide counting rooms and offices for the Port Authority's clerks. Buildings beyond these, with rare exceptions, are ramshackle wooden structures one or two stories high. The notable exception is the hall of the sea captains' guild, a building of stone. Finally, at the edges of Gibberish, the streets open up into the broad avenues that lead to the sea captains' manor houses. Standing on grassy plots of land decorated with flower gardens, these manors are made of stone and decorated with carvings from exotic woods like ebony, sandalwood, cedar, or teak. Though they're smaller than the palaces in Gold's Reside, the manors often rival the homes of nobles in elegance of architecture and construction.

Law And Government

The city guard in Gibberish is one of the most violent and cruel in Elweir. In Lowtown, the city guard and the people are equals of a sort — at the very least, they're all Elweirnians. But in Gibberish the guard often deals with foreign sailors, known for neither their restraint and decorum, their capacity to pay a bribe, nor their ability to speak the language. Incidents involving sailors often come to blows, with the sailors receiving the worst of it. However, the edges of Gibberish, where the sea captains make their homes, are stringently patrolled — the captains make their appreciation known in coin.

THE CHIEF MAGISTRATE

Quandras Gamble is the Chief Magistrate of Gibberish. His position is a plum of an appointment. He benefits from the proceeds of selling foreign sailors either into slavery or back to their captains, and receives sizable gifts from the sea captains every year for all his hard work guarding their homes.

SHIPS IN THE GIBBERISH

You can find many types of ships moored in Gibberish. Ships that sail the seas of the Known World all have one mast, and most ships rely on oars as much as sail. Those without oars (such as the Naraatian curraghs) must stay near the coast and dare not cross open water. Sea captains native to Elweir tend to sail Valdorian triremes, but Abyzinian barques are not uncommon.

Valdorian Triremes
(*The Ultimate Vehicle*, page 61)

Abyzinian Barques
(use Trireme, *The Ultimate Vehicle*, page 61)

Khorian Longships
(*The Ultimate Vehicle*, page 62)

Naraatian Curragh
(*Hero System Vehicle Sourcebook*, page 112)

Urethian Black Ships
(use Trireme, *The Ultimate Vehicle*, page 61)

Magistrate Gamble is a middle-aged man with bushy sidewhiskers. He appreciates the finer things in life and wants to maneuver his way into the office of the Chief Magistrate of Gold's Reside. First he must discredit Capra Lustshine, while at the same time raising his own esteem in the eyes of the Prince.

THE ALDERMAN

Faraji Mansa is Gibberish's alderman. A native Abyzinian who recently relocated to Elweir for undisclosed reasons, he was elected only three months ago. He promised to return the slave market to Mansblood Square and make sure the guard treated foreigners, especially those who now reside permanently in Elweir, fairly. Everyone knows these are ridiculous promises for an alderman to make — he certainly doesn't wield that much influence with the Prince. But Faraji must be a very wealthy man (after all, he bought enough votes to win the election), so he must have other types of influence he can wield. No one knows where Faraji's wealth comes from, but he definitely has coin to spend. He holds several leases in the neighborhood, all wine shops catering to the tastes of Abyzinian sailors.

Notable Locations

1. AISSA T'NUMBRA'S SHOP

Aissa's Shop is a small two-story building near the bank of the Serpentine. The ground floor is one large room filled with oddities and eccentricities from around the world: battered teak chests; statues carved from bones too large to come from natural creatures; strange glass globes filled with colorful mists. Aissa haunts the wharves purchasing whatever strikes her fancy; once she tires of her latest purchase, she puts it on sale. She lives above the shop itself, her rooms crammed full of oddities she has yet to put up for sale. Roaming through both floors, and in and out of the front door to the shop, are a pack of black cats — it's impossible to know how many because they all look so similar, but easily twenty.

Originally from Abyzinia, Aissa claims to be the Witch-Queen of Abyzinia's sister. Sea captains from that land claim their queen has no siblings, but rumor has it the ambassador of Abyzinia takes an undue interest in Aissa and refuses to deny her relation to his queen. An older lady with a lined, weathered face and long grey braids, Aissa answers questions about the nature and origins of her wares with an elegant shrug, claiming each owner must find out an item's purpose for himself.

2. BLINDMAN'S BOOK SHOP

As its name implies, the proprietor of the Blindman's Book Shop is a blind man; his name is Yully. He purchases books not based on the subject matter, quality, or any other sensible basis, but on the thickness — he pays four coin per inch and charges three times that. Typically he makes his purchases from the Port Author-

ity or the Royal Exchequer after they confiscate a captain's ship and can find no other buyer for the books. He also buys books from thieves who steal them but cannot read.

Yully's narrow shop is crammed from floor to ceiling with shelves holding books. As one might guess given his malady, the tomes, logs, folios, and volumes are in no order whatsoever. Sometimes, lost among all the worthless books, are captain's logs holding valuable maps of far-off places and soundings of rarely visited waterways, or tomes in foreign languages that might hold secrets and other esoterica. Because of this, some sea captains make a habit of perusing the store's stock whenever they're in Elweir. The shop is also a good place for students at the academy in Uphill East to buy inexpensive books they can use in their studies.

Yully is a thin, bent man with eyes entirely white — not with cataracts, but entirely lacking irises and pupils. His nickname among the Jibber-Jabbers, the gang that malingers around (but not in) the bookstore, is Pearls-For-Eyes (or just Pearls). They claim he can give a person the evil eye, he's not really blind, and he's in truth a demon or a ghost, depending on who's telling the story. Whatever the truth behind these stories, the gang gives Blindman's Book Shop a wide berth.

3. THE COLORFUL SMOKE

Though not so numerous as wine and grog shops, there are many smoke shops in Gibberish. The most respected of these — in other words, the one catering to the tastes of the wealthy in Elweir, including some among the Fifty — is the Colorful Smoke. Curtains of silk decorated with colorful patterns section off each of its two levels, and inside each section are two L-shaped divans. At either end of each divan is a hookah where patrons can smoke various exotic drugs — the Kiss of Sleep, the Gift of Dream, and the Divine Vistas, and others — most of which come from the purple orchid that grows in the Abyzinian jungles. A patron purchases a smoke for five coin or more (the more exotic the drug, the greater its cost), then reclines on a divan to taste it. At the Colorful Smoke a person can remain on a divan through the night if he wishes.

4. THE GUILD HALL AND CLINK-CLINK SQUARE

Like the calm eye of a chaotic storm, the tangle of streets on the west side of Gibberish opens up onto a broad plaza. At the middle of this plaza is a large wooden building that serves as the sea captains' guild hall. The plaza is called Clink-Clink Square, and along its edges are fine inns, wine shops, and like establishments — all much nicer than the others in the surrounding area. This is where foreign sea captains stay, take their meals, and relax when they're ashore in Elweir. The inns and shops along the edge of the plaza serve as meeting places for captains and merchants so they can negotiate deals to purchase or trade goods.

Two stories exist as to why it's called Clink-Clink Square. The first claims the square is called Clink-Clink because that's sound of two glasses

toasting a completed deal. The other story claims it's the sound of coin passing from hand to hand.

The Abyzinian Night: The Abyzinian Night is an inn on the square that caters to visitors from Abyzinia — dignitaries, young nobles enjoying their idle youth, or wealthy foreigners with unknown purposes. It also serves *khafi*, a hot Abyzinian beverage some Elweirians have developed a taste for.

The Night is built in the Abyzinian style, with large open windows that let out onto balconies, tapestries hung across the ceiling and in the corners, and four-poster beds hung with netting to keep out the insects. When it's not raining, it also has outdoor seating where patrons can drink *khafi* or wine. The inn also hires out members of its staff to act as guides and translators for its guests.

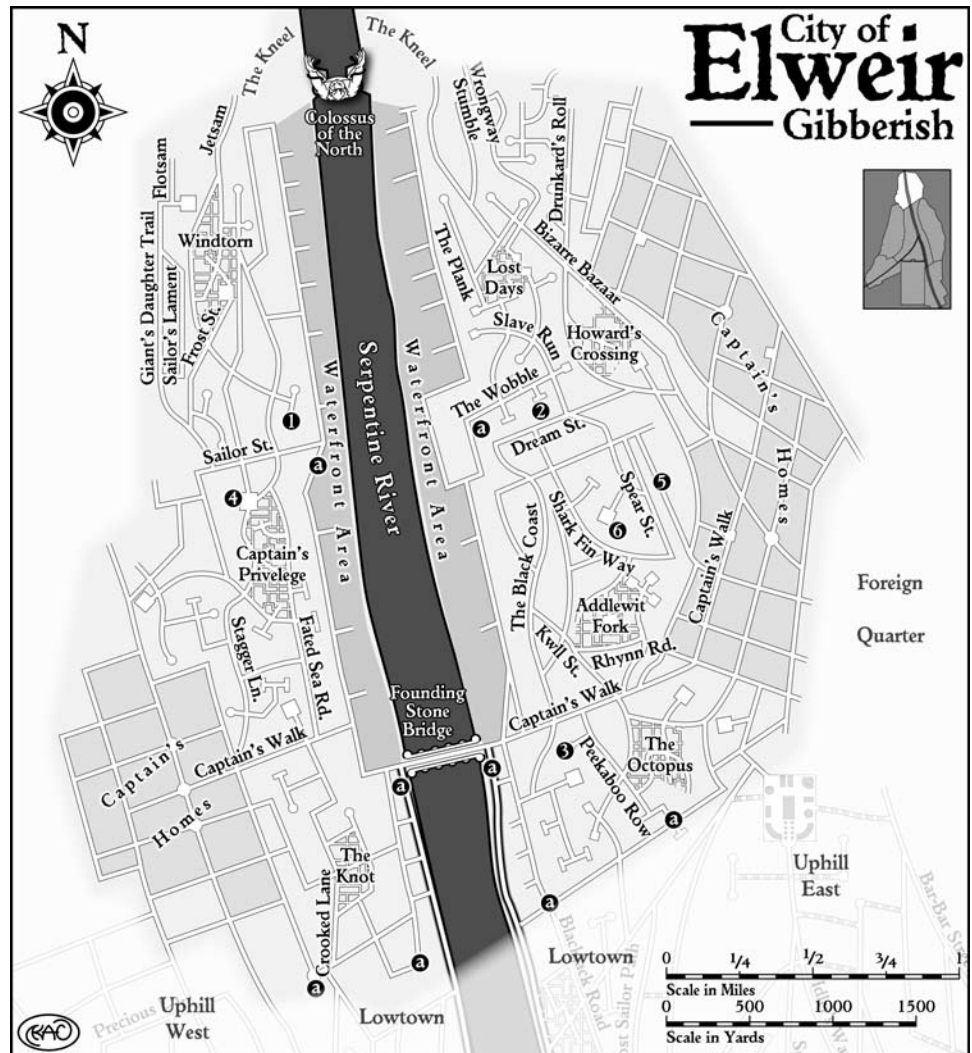
The innkeeper, Portleback Simmer, is a former sailor who somehow scraped together enough coin to purchase the lease to the inn several decades ago. Rumor has it he was once a pirate of the Maggot Isles who returned to Elweir after finding some treasure — one that grows larger and more mysterious with every passing year.

The Calm Sea: The Calm Sea is an inn on Clink-Clink Square favored by foreign sea captains. Quiet and elegant, it's one of the finest inns in Elweir. Its staff speaks many languages, and knows the customs of foreign lands, so that they can make customers feel more at home than they would at other Elweirnian inns. The innkeeper is Chata, formerly a slave owned by Faraji Mansa, Gibberish's current alderman and the leaseholder for the Calm Sea.

The Captain's Lament: The Captain's Lament is a wine shop on the square. Unlike the stinking wine shops filled with drunken, puking sailors common elsewhere in Gibberish, the Captain's Lament is tastefully decorated and exudes an air of sophistication — and it charges its patrons a high price for its decorum and atmosphere. The owner is Quimble Bottlebee, a former ship captain who lost his vessel a decade ago because of taxes he couldn't pay, and whose only remaining possession is the lease to the wine shop. The regular patrons at the Lament call him Captain Bottlebee — whether out of respect for his former profession or in mockery of his current station is hard to tell, but likely a little bit of both.

5. THE HOLY ONE'S WINE SHOP

The Holy One's Wine Shop is one of the more ingenious ways around the Prince's ban on giving offerings to followers of the New Gods. The Holy One is Mikus Apostle, the lone priest of Forlakka the Sea-Spider, a gigantic god who rides the waves



on his eight legs and brings calm waters wherever he goes. The leaseholder and barkeep for the wine shop is Dickon Bramblebush, a godless man who's very vocal about his beliefs (or, more precisely, lack thereof). The Holy One preaches through the night about the glories of the Sea-Spider, and Bramblebush charges an extra bit for his wine. In return the patron gets to listen to the stories of the Sea-Spider and receives the blessings of Forlakka — a promise that if the sailor's ship goes down, the Sea-Spider will speed across the waves to rescue the sailor before he drowns and deliver him to dry land. Sailors are a superstitious lot, and although many think the Holy One is a fraud, a blessing never hurts. In return for preaching in the wine shop, the Holy One receives a coin at the end of the night, and Bramblebush tells the guard it's just like paying a bard for his stories, so they have nothing to worry about.

6. MANSBLOOD SQUARE

Mansblood Square is a small, abandoned square on the east side of Gibberish. Four long, low buildings with leaky roofs and no windows stand at the borders of the square, and leading from each building is a wooden walkway ending a circular stone platform. Rising up from each stone are four poles with rusty iron rings at the top. Mansblood Square, named for the reddish tinge of the mud here, is the former slave market in Elweir. Slaves

MEMBERSHIP IN THE GUILDS

To obtain membership in one of the three captains' guilds in Elweir, a captain must prove he is a captain and he lives in Elweir. To prove he is a captain, he must own a ship or provide a signed document from a ship owner stating that he captains a ship for the ship owner. To prove residence, he must show a copy of his lease, or provide a signed document from the leaseholder he rents from. Finally he must pay ten coin a year to the guild.

Guild membership confers few actual benefits, but the guilds allow the captains to present a unified front when negotiating with the Prince. They also make sure the Port Authority stays relatively honest — in other words, that the clerks don't begin forcing the captains to bribe their way through the bureaucracy. The guilds keep libraries of maps and charts, and employs copyists who will copy a map for a captain for two or three coins. Finally, the guilds provide one of the more reliable sources of information about other lands in Il-Ryveras, since the captains in their comings-and-goings often share stories of their travels and are much less prone to exaggeration than sailors.

were crowded into pens inside the buildings. When it was time to sell one, the slaver led him out to the stone platforms and chained him to the poles. When the Prince made buying and selling slaves in Elweir illegal, the market moved to the Foreign Quarter, and Mansblood Square has stood abandoned since then. The leaseholder, Lord Drake Saltbraid, has been trying to figure out something to do with the land... but so far, nothing's struck him as particularly profitable.

GOLD'S RESIDE

*That's where the wealth is, lad —
there beyond the Gleaming Wall,
locked inside the Treasure Chest, is
all the gold in Elweir. Oh, to be sure,
some of those captains have some
coin, but if you want to see gold —
real gold — you need to get inside
Gold's Reside.*

Even though each neighborhood in Elweir is distinct and has its own character, Gold's Reside is like a different city entirely. Surrounded by a high wall to keep the riffraff out, its quiet streets are broad boulevards where nobles stroll through plazas filled with glorious statues and pools of clean water. Its palaces, made of clean white stone and decorated with gilt, stand on estates filled with flower gardens, cultivated hedges, and fruit trees that blossom in the spring and summer; songbirds hide in their leaves and fill the air with their happy chirps. Gold's Reside is like a heaven nestled in the hell that is Elweir, and all men and women dream of living there... but most never even catch a glimpse of it.

The People

Only members of the Fifty and their servants reside in the palaces within Gold's Reside. The nobility's sole profession is to make sure gold continues to flow into the Prince's treasury, and their servants' sole profession is to serve the needs of the nobility. The highest level of clerks work in the Prince's offices, but these men live in Uphill East. The neighborhood's guardsmen reside in the armory at the north wall, only leaving it when going to their posts, where they stand at rigid attention, eyes straight forward, and never meeting a noble's gaze.

Palace Servants

Most palaces have a similar staff of servants, including the positions listed below from highest-ranking to lowest. Generally, there are at least twice as many servants in a palace as there are residents. They live in the palace with their masters, and the nobility frowns on servants who spend too much time visiting their own families in other parts of Elweir — servants with such attachments always turn to thievery in the

end. Before the Prince's edict against slaves, many of these men and women were slaves. Since then, they have become freemen, though their lives — and their pay — have changed very little.

Chamberlain: A palace's chamberlain acts as valet to the Lord of the family. He's also in charge of all the staff. He usually grew up with the Lord, acting as his valet, so he typically has a close relationship with his master.

Lady's Maid: A Lady's Maid is chamberlain's female counterpart, acting as the Lady of the family's chambermaid. In families with a matriarch, rather than a patriarch, the Lady's Maid is in charge of the staff.

Head Cook: The head cook is in charge of the kitchen and the servants that work there (scullery maids, potboys, and the like). When not cooking he travels to market to make purchases for the kitchen.

Valet: Each adult male member of the family has his own valet, and the valet serves as his companion and personal servant.

Chambermaid: Each adult female member of the family has her own chambermaid, who performs similar functions to a valet.

Footman: Footmen are general servants and always male. They help the valets and chamberlain with their duties as necessary, set tables for dinner, serve dinners, announce guests, and perform manual labor around the palace (except in the kitchen).

Parlor Maid: Parlor maids are general servants and always female. They help the chambermaids and Lady's maid with their duties as necessary, set tables for dinner, serve dinners, and clean areas of the house (outside of bedchambers and the kitchen).

Potboy: Potboys work in the kitchen, generally cleaning, scrubbing pots, stirring soups, and other menial chores.

Scullery Maid: Scullery maids work in the kitchen at the same tasks as potboys.

CLOTHING

Young men of the nobility wear blousy silk shirts, leather breeches flared below the knees, and finely-made boots. Since the signing of the treaty with Romnal, it's become fashionable for young men to wear a rapier and dirk to lend themselves a martial air, one more in keeping with the Valdorians who seem to grow ever more influential in the city. Only a handful know how to use the weapons though. Older men, especially the Lords, wear long elegant robes typically embroidered with their family's insignia.

Young women of the nobility wear long gowns of dyed silk or satin, often slit up one or both sides to the upper thigh and belted tight at the waist with a girdle or corset decorated with gold, silver, and gemstones. Rings, anklets, bracelets, circlets set with gemstone, and pearl necklaces are common — a young woman can never wear enough jewelry. Older women wear even more jewelry than young ones, but their gowns are more demure.

The clothing and livery the guardsmen and servants wear must be impeccable — the Fifty stand for nothing less. The most common reason for expulsion from the city guard in Gold's Reside is a grease spot on a guardsman's livery.

RESIDENCES

The residences in Gold's Reside are palaces — sprawling, typically single-story buildings of stone that may have anywhere from forty to fifty rooms. Made from white or pink marble, they have flat roofs broken by occasional domes that allow sunlight into rooms below. The spacious rooms have ceilings up to twenty feet (3") high and are often decorated with furniture, paintings, sculptures, and other objects the owners have accumulated over the generations.

Law And Government

The law in Gold's Reside concerns itself solely with keeping out people who don't belong in the neighborhood, and the guardsmen do not accept bribes from someone seeking entry. Among the lowest "paid" in the city, the city guard collects a gift of coin from the Fifty yearly — a gift given chiefly to dissuade them from accepting bribes. Magistrates, however, make substantial coin working as agents for the Fifty, and this can trickle down to the guardsmen. These duties include collecting coin from those who manage the Fifty's leases, to investigating stories one of the nobility heard about something in another neighborhood, to serving as an armed escort for a nobleman or woman who ventures out into the city.

THE CHIEF MAGISTRATE

Capra Lustshine is the Chief Magistrate of Gold's Reside. The position comes with more status than actual coin, since he has nominal authority over the other chief magistrates in the city. Magistrate Lustshine spends his days advising the Prince, making sure his guardsmen are properly groomed, or in the city on some task for the Prince (and the Chief Magistrate only works as an agent for the Prince).

Magistrate Lustshine is a tall, well-muscled man, clean-shaven with a full head of thick blond curls. Dashing and heroic-looking, he's often the subject for a young noblewoman's crush. To his credit, he rarely takes advantage of this — although there's nothing chivalrous about his restraint. He knows that if a Lord found out about a dalliance between his daughter and a mere magistrate, he'd have Lustshine discharged immediately (if not killed). But some sweets are too tempting to resist....

THE ALDERMAN

Gold's Reside has no alderman. Since all nobles can gain the ear of the Prince through their family's Lord, the office serves no purpose in the neighborhood and has never been established. Every decade or so, one of the leading families of the Fifty tries to establish the office as a sign of the

family's status as first among equals. However, no one family has ever clearly been the wealthiest or most powerful of the Fifty, so each time the issue arises the rivals of he who raised it make sure nothing comes to pass.

Features

THE GLEAMING WALL

The Gleaming Wall (nicknamed the Treasure Chest by many of Elweir's residents) surrounds Gold's Reside. Twenty feet (3") high and made of gold-flecked marble, it's decorated on top with five foot (1") long gilded spears set close together and as sharp as any normal spear.

The Gleaming Wall only has one entrance — an archway fifteen feet (2.5") across and guarded by iron-banded doors. The doors stand open during the daylight hours, with a company of guards stationed outside; the guardsmen close and bar the doors at night. A sally door with a spyhole serves as an entrance for nobles and servants coming and going during the night. Regardless of the hour, the guardsmen allow no one to enter unless a noble accompanies him, or he possesses a written document signed by a noble that states his purpose in Gold's Reside. (The clerks who work in the royal offices all possess such a document, which they keep for the duration of their employment.) Guards patrol the inside of the wall at all hours, making the rounds in groups of four.

Notable Locations

1. THE ARMORY

The armory stands just inside the entrance to the neighborhood, guarding both sides of it. Unlike other armories, it has no wall and has barracks enough for the neighborhood's twenty companies of guardsmen. The guardsmen stationed in Gold's Reside *must* live in the armory. Though more plain and lacking the gilt, the armory is made of the same stone as the palaces.

2. THE PRINCE'S PALACE

The Prince's palace, sometimes called the Palace of the Pearl in the old songs, is twice as large as the other palaces in Gold's Reside and stands right at the center of the neighborhood. Just beyond the front entrance of the palace is the throne room. From the double doors a long path made of ruby-red tiles leads between pillars of marble. On the high arched ceiling of the throne room is a painted scene of the Serpentine and Worm as they must have appeared before the city Elweir sprawled across the river valley's hills. At the far end of the throne room is a high-backed throne made of some opalescent stone that glistens like mother-of-pearl, and inset in the back of the throne are eight large gold coins arranged in a diamond. Called the Pearl Throne, this is where the Prince formally receives visitors to the city.

Behind the palace are three simple, elegant buildings that house the high officials in the government's offices: one for the Royal Exchequer (where the Royal Archives are located); one for the Port Authority; and the Royal Masonry and the Caravan Authority share the third. All of these buildings look out onto a plaza. At the center of the plaza is a ten-story tower with many balconies and a parapet at the top, where the Royal Astrologer and his assistants work.

PALACES OF THE FIFTY

The palaces of the Fifty, constructed as they were at nearly the same time four centuries ago, are uniform in design and appearance with only the grounds differing from one to the next. The following families, mentioned elsewhere, are among the Fifty (with their family insignia in parenthesis): Speckmore (four blue discs in a line on a field of white); Reed (a field of blue set above a field of yellow); Longlass (a white disc at the center of a field of red); Grimble (a black sigil on a field of yellow); Windlock (a brown ship at full sail on a field of light blue); Saltbraid (a white braid on a field of blue); Hollow (a plain black field); Packmyrtle (a yellow tree on a field of green); and Ramblewine (a red bottle on a field of brown). Some others include:

Prestigious Families

The following three families, along with the Reeds, Saltbraids, and Ramblewines, are considered "first among equals" in the Fifty.

Alabaster: The Alabasters have no small amount of infamy among the commoners for the marrying habits of their matriarch, Lady Cyndera Alabaster. Lady Alabaster has had ten husbands in her fifty years of life — all of whom were originally commoners she reputedly picked out on Prince's Day when they came to her palace feast — and she wears a ring on each finger and thumb for each husband. She's currently without a spouse, and many people feel certain she'll pick a new one this coming Prince's Day (others argue against this, since she no longer has any more fingers for rings). Despite the early end her husbands come to, most are perfectly willing to live the last years of their life in the lap of luxury. The Alabasters' wealth comes from the leases the family holds in Snake's Den. Their family insignia is the white silhouette of a man on a blue field.

Gutterlow: The Gutterlows are considered coarse and graceless by the standards of the Fifty, but this is more a comment on the source of their wealth than a criticism of the manners and language of the family members. They hold the leases for numerous taverns and squalid buildings in Lowtown, and extract a sizable profit from these buildings — mainly by neglecting the upkeep and cramming as many families as they can into one structure. Despite their reputation among the Fifty, they hold considerable wealth. The head of the family is Lord Byls Gutterlow, a small man with a serious mien hated by many in Lowtown. Their family insignia is a silver cup on a field of brown.

Silverstreet: The Silverstreets are one of the families recently raised to the Fifty, and the source of their seemingly limitless wealth is a mystery many would love to solve. The other families know they haven't had time to accumulate very many leases, and they didn't make their coin in maritime trade like some other families. When asked, Lord Faldrew Silverstreet laughingly answers they made their wealth in imports, ending with a wink and a nudge. Many speculate that the Silverstreets have connections to the Silver-Crossed Palms (who are a sort of bogeyman for the Fifty, often blamed for a family's swift decline regardless of evidence), but the main basis for this is that both names include the word "silver." Lord Silverstreet is a roguish-looking gentleman with a regal head of silver hair and an easy smile. Strangely for a lord, he wears a rapier on his hip when outside his palace. The family insignia is a green field halved by a horizontal white line.

Lowly Families

The following three families are in risk of losing their status as one of the Fifty.

Blackrose: Properties the Blackroses held suffered a series of mysterious fires six months ago, and the gossip among the Fifty is that the family, never very wealthy, won't be able to afford to rebuild them. Furthermore, many suspect the family ran afoul of the Silver-Crossed Palms (for what reason no one knows, though many would pay well to find out such titillating information) — since the fires have stopped, the Blackroses must have paid whatever price the extortioners demanded. The family insignia is a black rose on a red field.

Crabgold: People have thought the Crabgolts would fall out of the Fifty for the last two decades, but somehow their matriarch, Lady Alyss Crabgold, always finds the coin to hold one more ball, slipping it in just as the year comes to an end. The Crabgolts' second ball is one of the most well-attended of the parties the Fifty throw, mainly because everyone comes to see if the family makes some humiliating error because it cut corners. But just the contrary, the ball always features some exotic oddity that pleases the Prince — rumors in the taverns say last year's was a living giant from Borellia. The Crabgolts' main source of wealth is its fleet of six sea-going ships, and it's these ships that provide the oddities. The family insignia is a gold crab on a brown field.

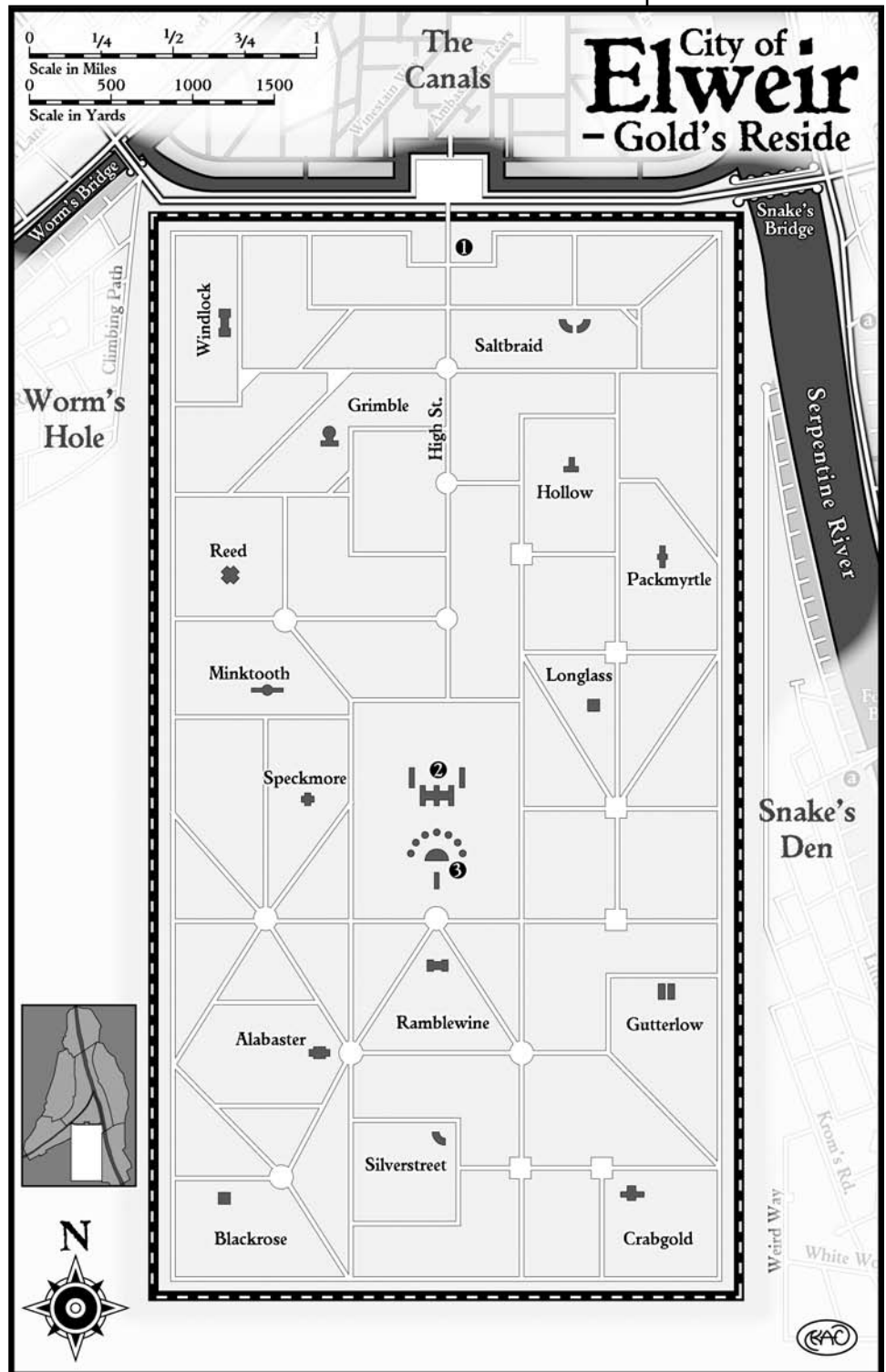
Minktooth: Everything was fine with the Minktooths until their patriarch died a year and half ago, leaving a new generation in command of the house. For whatever reason, this younger generation — two brothers (one with an Abyzinian wife named Isoke, the other still, suspiciously, a bachelor) and a single sister (also suspiciously unmarried) — are the most decadent and degenerate among the Fifty. They spend the vast majority of their time in Giberish, rarely returning to their palace, and there they throw their coin away on games of chance and in the smoke shops. The sister has gained a reputation as a harlot, and if there's a male equivalent to a harlot, both brothers have the same reputation.

The Minktooths are a very wealthy family and it would take the three siblings a lifetime to squander all the family's wealth — but given the treaty with Valdoria, the Prince believes the Minktooths will soon become an embarrassment to the nobility of Elweir. The current Lord is Davver Minktooth, the eldest of the siblings. The family insignia is a white mink on a black field.

3. THE TEMPLE OF THE SEVEN

The grandest temple to the Old Gods stands in Gold's Reside. A semi-circular building, it has large shrines to all seven gods leading off from the main hall of worship. In these shrines are statues that have achieved legendary status among the people — the stories of these statues only become more fantastic with each passing year, since so few outside of the Fifty have glimpsed the inside of the temple. It's said that the statue of Pythos is made of platinum and silver, the one of Erebos of gold with diamonds for his eyes, the one of Kypris of gold with rubies for her nipples and fingernails, the one of Anyu of iron but the hilts of his four swords hold one of every gemstone known to man, the one of Enodia of obsidian with platinum wire for her hair and black opals for her eyes, the one of Poteidan of silver with emeralds set in his hair and in the two lashes he holds, and the one of Aides of black gold with a halo of pure gold (no one is certain what black gold is, but everyone is confident it would fetch a high price from the usurers).

Behind the temple is a long, low building, 300 feet (46") long and made from dark granite. High-grown trees overshadow this building, and at each corner is a fifteen foot (2.5") tall statue of Aides. The middle of the building's roof is open to the sky. This is the Ossuary, which provides a final resting place for the bones of the departed nobility. In the rest of Elweir the bereaved enshroud their dead and deliver them to the rivers for burial (or else the city guard unceremoniously dumps unclaimed bodies in the river). The Fifty, however, build a pyre in the middle of the Ossuary, the smoke rising through the hole in the ceiling, and then they lay the scorched bones to rest in a small hollow in the Ossuary's walls. Sometimes they include a piece of jewelry or other small, beloved possession with the bones. Closing this resting place is a stone block engraved with the name of the departed.



LOWTOWN

Ah, beloved Lowtown. What can I say about my home, lad? Should I sing the happy songs all men sing of their home? Well I would, but no one's ever written a happy song about Lowtown — bawds and tales of woe, there's plenty of those, but a happy song? About a cesspit like Lowtown? Don't make me laugh.

In squalid Lowtown, muddy streets where men can barely walk two abreast run between dirty buildings packed together wall to wall like drunkards leaning against each other after a night of carousing. Sitting outside on the steps are local toughs and thugs just waiting for a stranger to pass by seeming lost; the streets are filled with angry shouts, babies crying, and bawdy songs. Women lean out from second and third story windows to dump chamberpots — and if they're kind and considerate, they screech a rude warning to those down below before they do. But few people are kind and considerate in Lowtown. The stink of those emptied chamberpots mingles with that of unwashed humanity and the stench rising from the rivers to form a miasma of stomach-churning smells — one that becomes unnoticeable after you live in Lowtown for a few months.

The People

Listening to someone from one of the nicer neighborhoods in Elweir — Uphill East or West, Worm's Hole, Gold's Reside — a person might get the impression the only professions residents of Lowtown have are thieving and murder. While that's mostly true, it neglects the fishermen who live by the Serpentine, row their boats out onto the river every morning, drag their nets through its waters, and then sell their catch at Fishmonger's Perch. Also missing are the barkeeps, potboys, and serving wenches who keep Lowtown's drunkards in ale and spirits through both the night and day. And one mustn't forget the building managers and their thugs who collect rent from the coin-poor occupants. Finally, those women who work along Whore Street say harlotry is a profession, because they certainly toil as hard as anyone for their coin.

CLOTHING

The clothing worn in Lowtown is as squalid as the buildings. Children often go naked until they're old enough to walk and talk; then they wear their fathers' cast-off shirts shot through with holes and stained dirty yellow. Young men wear loose, ill-fitting breeches held up around their waists with a rough piece of rope, and shirts made from sackcloth with sleeves of mismatched length, decorated with grease and wine stains, and sometimes patches, but more often

holes. Young women wear ankle-length skirts of homespun, the hems dirty with mud, and vests buttoned too tight across their bosoms that leave their navels, shoulders, and cleavage bare. Older men wear much the same as young men — probably, in fact, the exact same clothes they wore as young men — unless a man's girth grows too big, and then he gives up on breeches and instead wears a knee-length tunic belted below his belly. Older women wear similar skirts to young women, but often wear a loose shirt instead of vest, and cover their hair with a dirty bonnet. Most people wear sandals, if any shoes at all.

RESIDENCES

The oldest buildings — the few structures that have survived centuries of riots and fires — are made of stone and similar in size and shape to those in the Canals, except the windows long ago lost their glass. The rest of the buildings in Lowtown are made of wood. The beams are riddled with termites and shot through with rot, so they often stand off-kilter and have sagging roofs. To make matters worse, the buildings are on stilts so they stay above the mud and water, and these stilts slowly sink into the ground — but not at the same rate, so a building might lean to the left or right. Three or four steps lead up to a building's entrance (usually only the nicest buildings have doors), and people gather on these stoops, especially in the summer when Elweir is hottest. The buildings all have large windows lacking glass and most of them are without even shutters — few people in Lowtown have anything worth stealing, so there's no sense trying to keep people out, since thieves will just break the shutters trying to get in and see if there's anything worth stealing inside. Inside these buildings is a warren of small rooms; weak, creaking stairs lead up one or two flights. The insides of the worst buildings are entirely gutted; the families living there hang blankets and long strips of dirty sailcloth to create rooms.

Law And Government

People in Lowtown use the word “law” very loosely and always accompanied with a sarcastic snort or chortle. The city guards are as thuggish as any gang member, the magistrates as cunning and conniving as any criminal. The only differences between members of the city guard and the other residents of Lowtown are that guardsmen wear a livery and generally make more coin.

THE CHIEF MAGISTRATE

Malik Rotwell is the Chief Magistrate of Lowtown. A cold-hearted and vain man, Rotwell is a feared swordsman — despite his vanity and love for the finer things in life, he's not afraid to use his fists, blade, or any other sort of violence to get his way. One of the wealthiest magistrates, he has squeezed Lowtown for every coin and bit he can. He wears black leather breeches flared at the bottoms, black leather boots, a black vest over his well-muscle chest, and never goes anywhere without his rapier

and fighting dagger. He keeps his black hair long and wears a mustache waxed into points at the ends. His hatred for the Duke's Men knows no bounds, and every time he sees one he grows apoplectic with rage. It's only a question of time before he challenges one of them to a duel, and what happens then is a matter of frequent discussion among the residents of Lowtown. Some gambling houses on Coin's Depart have begun secretly taking bets. The Valdorian, whichever of the poor souls he might be, is only getting fifty-to-one odds to win the duel (and twenty-to-one odds to survive). (See page 186 for more about Rotwell.)

THE ALDERMAN

Illyn Candleorn, the alderman for Lowtown, holds the leases for a block of buildings near Crooked Lane and several taverns on Drunkard's Rest. The residents of Lowtown well and truly hate the man. During the last election, rather than bribing voters as is the standard practice, Candleorn bribed Magistrate Rotwell and the guard to incapacitate anyone who even mused aloud about voting for someone else, then he further paid the guardsmen to vote for him. Candleorn is a thin man with a pinched face and lank brown hair; he has a habit of jangling the pouch of coins that hangs from his belt. Most take this as some kind of bragging about how much coin he has.

Features

THE OVERHEAD ROAD

The buildings of Lowtown are set wall-to-wall with their roofs running one into the other, and many of the streets are narrow, usually only six feet (1") across. These roofs form the Overhead Road, and a person familiar with it (*i.e.*, who has the Skill *AK: Overhead Road*) can travel from one side of Lowtown to the other without setting foot on the street below. He knows which roofs sag and are about to break, which roofs lead to a gap too wide to cross over, which roofs stand higher than neighboring roofs, and vice versa. The only place he can't reach is the other side of the river — for that, he must resort to the Underfoot Path.

THE UNDERFOOT PATH

Most outsiders believe the Underfoot Path refers to the narrow space below the buildings, and when they hear the term used in a story, they believe it means a person is crawling below the buildings, moving hidden from one street to another.

This is not the case.

Lowtown is built on the bones of older cities — abandoned buildings long buried beneath dirt, mud, and rubble. And the sewers that drain Uphill East and West and help keep Lowtown from flooding worse than it already does run under the neighborhood on their way to the Serpentine. The old buildings and sewers create a maze of underground tunnels, and people can reach this maze via the oldest buildings in Lowtown, the ones made of stone that have a cellar. A person familiar with the Underfoot Path (*i.e.*, who

has the Skill *AK: Underfoot Path*) can reach all parts of the neighborhood on one side of the river, only rarely needing to journey above ground.

Reaching the other side of the river means emerging from underground. Generally a person comes up from one of the sewer drains at the embankment and travels to the Lowtown Bridge. Over the years people have made a path of planks set across the arches that support the bridge, running directly under the bridge above. An underground traveler crosses here, then enters back into a sewer drain on the other side.

Every resident of Lowtown has a story about a friend of a friend who stumbled onto some long-forgotten place after getting lost while traveling the Underfoot Path. Sometimes these friends meet their end; more rarely, they find a lost treasure. The majority of these stories concern finding places out of Elweir's earliest history: the Palace of Lord Vileranian, one of the city's earliest rulers whose home was swallowed up by the earth, along with the treasure inside, in the days after Valdor's murder; the Temple of the Serpentine, a site sacred to the divine spirit some say once inhabited the Serpentine River; the Fortress of the Builders, a strange place of greenish soapstone deep under Elweir that once served as a castle for the builders of Founding Stone Bridge and the Colossus of the North; and many others. And true to any good story, all of these places hold great treasure guarded by horrible creatures — either supernatural entities or the descendants of the original inhabitants warped after their centuries, if not millennia, of living in the chthonic depths.

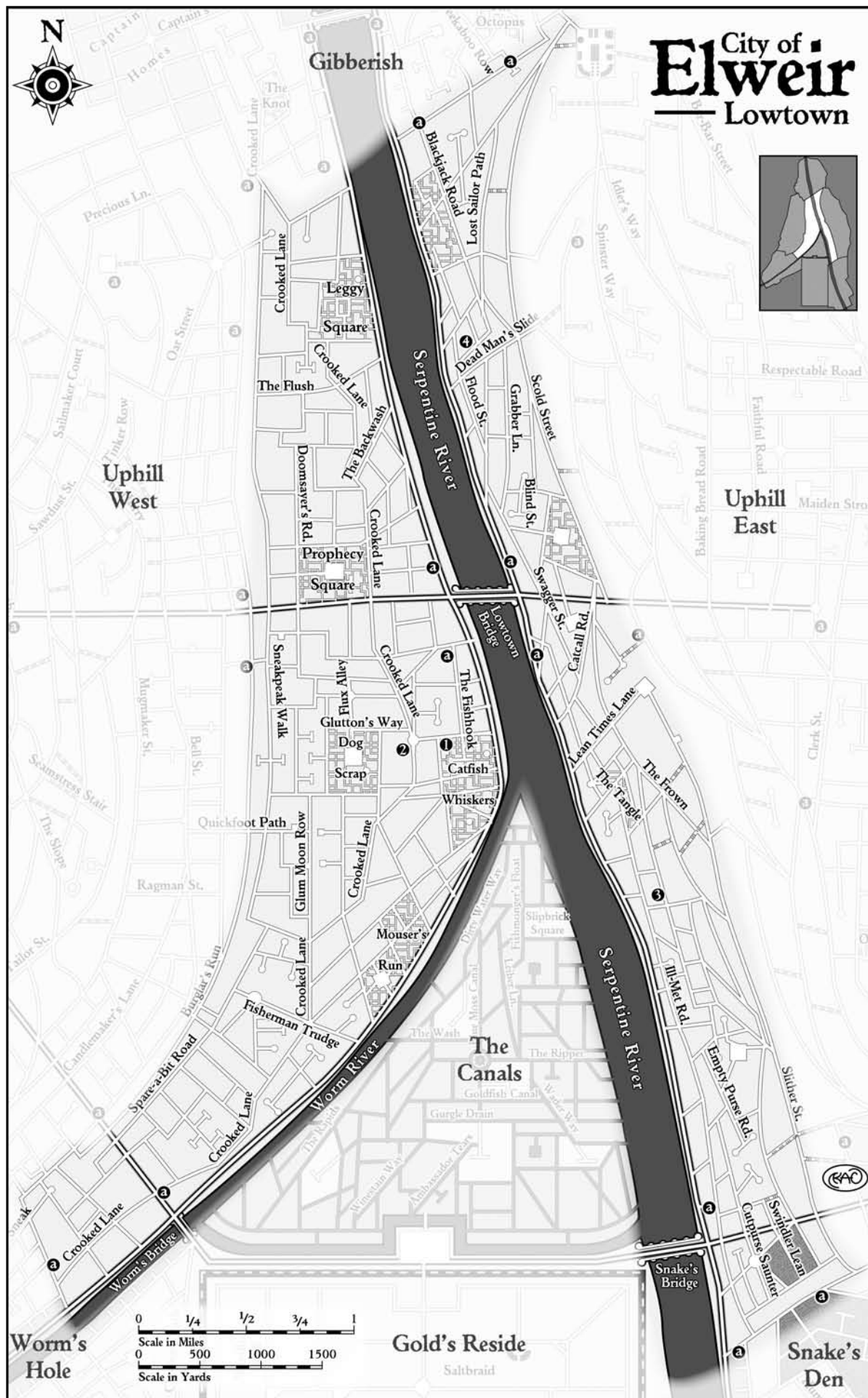
Notable Locations

1. COIN'S DEPART

On one side of this road are gambling houses where men can dice, bet on a spin of the wheel of fortune, or play cards. On the other side are usurers and pawnbrokers, ever happy to lend a stake to a desperate fool who's certain his bad luck must change for the better. Described below are a few of the places along the street.

The gang claiming Coin's Depart as its own is the Shuffling Boys, who wear a crudely painted playing card pinned to their breasts. They learned long ago not to mug those on their way to gamble, since this brings down the wrath of the gambling houses; instead they earn a few bits making sure debtors pay what they owe to the usurers.

The Celebrant: Above the door hangs a sign roughly painted with a dancing man holding two mugs of overflowing ale. Despite its name and the image on the sign, few people inside this tavern are celebrating. Most of them are morosely staring into their cups, having just spent their last few bits on an ale to ease the pain of losing in the gambling houses. That said, the barkeep does bear a striking resemblance to the dancing man on the sign. Dyg Thornlake is always wearing a jolly smile on his rosy-cheeked face and haranguing someone about the evils of gambling in a happy voice.



The Dice Hole: This single-story building of stone is one large room. In the room are ten tables with low walls along the edges where people can dice. Manning each table is a man wielding a curved stick. Called the stickman, he's responsible for making sure all bets are paid, and he uses his stick to scoop up the dice from one end and push them back to the other end where the shooter (the person rolling) stands. The stick also makes an effective club.

The Click-Clack: On the first floor of this two-story building are the wheels of fortune. The eight wheels are near the walls, and each is painted with six colors: large triangles of blue, red, green, and yellow, each of which covers a little less than a fourth of the wheel; and smaller slivers of black and white, each of which covers a sixteenth of the wheel. Nails poke out along the edge of the wheel, and when the wheelman spins the wheel, a slender piece of wood clacks against nail, slowing the wheel down. In front of the wheel is a board set on two empty barrels, and painted on the board are circles matching the colors on the wheel. Gamblers place their bets on the colored circles, and the winner is the one who guesses correctly which color the slender piece of wood stops on. A gambler can bet a single color, which pays four-to-one, black and white, which pays six-to-one, or black *or* white, which pays eight-to-one. On the second floor of the Click-Clack are round wooden slabs set on barrels to create tables for playing cards; to sit at the tables costs four coin for up to a day.

Ashram Fallow: Ashram Fallow is one of the usurers who keeps his office on Coin's Depart. His practices are typical to usurers in Lowtown. The person borrowing coin must either provide some form of collateral (preferably a lease) or sign an agreement stating that Fallow can sell the person into slavery if he defaults on the loan. The legality of the agreement is questionable at best, but the usurers pay Magistrate Rotwell enough to make sure he and his guard enforce these agreements. (This is not true in other neighborhoods, especially since slavery became illegal in Elweir, which is why usurers are only found in Lowtown.) The interest rate Fallow charges is twenty percent, and repayment terms are negotiable. Fallow makes loans to gamblers on the condition they repay upon winning back the coin; otherwise they have defaulted on the loan. He employs the Shuffling Boys to make sure his gambling debtors don't attempt to wander off after losing everything they have a second time. Like all usurers, Fallow also works as a money-changer and a fence for various thieves in Lowtown. Fallow is a grossly obese man; well-stripped bones of fish and chicken litter the floor of his office

2. THE CROSSROADS

The Crossroads, where Crooked Lane intersects with Coin's Depart and Glutton's Way, is one of the few open spaces in Lowtown. It's a field of mud with a small square of green, trampled grass at its center. On the grass are usually children playing and chickens pecking at the ground. At the

center of the small yard is a weather-beaten statue of Enodia. The statue is of limestone, with dark red streaks from years of rainfall running from the statue's eyes and breasts. On the ground around the base of the statue are small wildflowers with pale blue blossoms. The flowers are never trampled underfoot, since few are willing to come close to the shrine and even the chickens seem to avoid it. The priest Ranteren Everdusk (page 192) tends to the shrine; he lives in one of the buildings along Crooked Lane. A bald man with a wiry grey beard and haunted face, Everdusk can often be seen at his window staring out at the shrine.

The Crossroads is well-known throughout Elweir because this is where riots in Lowtown begin. They always start in the same way: an angry crowd gathers until the Crossroads is choked with shouting men and women. Finally a leader emerges from the crowd and leads the mob to destroy something. Because of this a troop of guardsmen always stand watch here, with orders to run to the armories if a crowd begins to gather. Under no circumstances are they to try to disperse the crowd on their own.

3. DRUNKARD'S REST

Drunkard's Rest gets its name from the drunks found sleeping in the street every morning. Up and down the street are taverns — more taverns than any neighborhood needs, let alone a single street. All of them are the same, only varying in size: a large open space on the first story filled with tables made of flat square boards set on empty kegs, and around them are kegs cut in half which serve as chairs. A bar made from a plank set atop stacked casks stands against the wall opposite the entrance. Upstairs from the tavern are sleeping quarters for the barkeep and sometimes the serving wenches. A barkeep lets a person sleep on the floor of the tavern for a bit or two; most, however, drink all their coin and find themselves thrown out on the street to sleep it off. The gang claiming much of Drunkard's Rest as their territory is the Cupbearers. Each member wears a small cup hung from a string tied around their neck. (The symbol also doubles as a mug to drink ale from.) They make coin acting as bouncers for the taverns and stealing whatever money a drunkard has after he leaves a tavern.

The Beaten Mug: A battered pewter mug hangs above the entrance to this tavern. Patrons call the barkeep Weaselwhiskers because of the three six-inch-long hairs that grow from a large mole on his cheek. Weaselwhiskers never stops complaining and has a bad reputation for mixing too much water (river water, at that) in his ale.

The Buxom Balladeer: A corset for a buxom woman hangs above the entrance to this tavern. The barkeep is a woman called Bawling Bard, because after a few cups she sings half-remembered songs in a terrible, off-key voice. Serving boys, rather than wenches, serve the drinks. No one's sure why she employs boys instead of wenches, and the Bard doesn't answer questions — speculation ranges from “she hates the competition” to “the boys are her sons.”

The Copper Coins: Three copper coins are nailed above the entrance to this place. The barkeep, Silent Syl, got his nickname because he never stops talking. A self-proclaimed expert on everything, Syl is always ready with advice. Those foolish enough to follow his advice have found him to be wrong almost every time.

Erebos's Temple: A shrine to Erebos stands across Drunkard's Rest from this tavern. The barkeep, Holy Jac, claims he's a priest of the Old Gods and has the duty of maintaining the temple to Erebos, while the priest who lives on Mackelray Court maintains the shrine. Holy Jac happily accepts offerings to Erebos.

The Fallow Field: A sheaf of rotted corn hangs above the entrance to this tavern. The barkeep is named Web Fallow; the leaseholder is Ashram Fallow (see above), who's Web's brother or cousin (depending on Web's mood). A large man, he has a reputation for throwing people out of his tavern if they disagree with him. He can often be heard wishing he was back on the farm in Lonetree. No one is sure whether he grew up on a farm, since his story changes from day to day.

The Oliphant: Two long tusks made of wood and painted white hang crossed above the entrance to this tavern. The barkeep and leaseholder, Zaid Tabansi, comes from Abyzinia. He tells stories of his homeland to the drunk patrons. He tends to make things up, and the more drunk his patrons become, the more fabulous his stories grow until eventually he reaches the point where Abyzinians live in cities atop the clouds and they sail sunbeams across the Blue Waters.

The Reveling Rat: A dead rat is nailed above the entrance to this tavern. Unlike many other taverns on Drunkard's Rest, the Reveling Rat is made of stone. The barkeep is a mute the patrons call Ratkeep, and most come to the Reveling Rat for peace and quiet (especially relative to the other taverns along Drunkard's Rest). Stories abound about the cause of Ratkeep's inability to speak, the most colorful being that when he was a child, a rat (the same one nailed above the door, some more drunken patrons claim) ate his tongue.

The Valdorian's: The crudely painted sign hung above the entrance shows a man wearing a crown lying on the ground, while a smiling man pours an ale on him (or maybe does something else... it's difficult to be sure). The barkeep is Ulrich Mot, who's something of a rarity: a morally-bankrupt, feckless Valdorian. He entertains his patrons with stories of what really happened throughout Valdoria's history — from Valdor's inability to satisfy his mistresses resulting in his death, to Oron's cowardice resulting in the truce. The Duke's Men have yet to discover the Valdorian's.

4. WHORE STREET

On plainly-named Whore Street prostitutes — or trollops, slatterns, tramps, strumpets, courtesans, or harlots — stand in doorways and lean from windows throughout the day and night. As men

walk by, the women call out to them and list their virtues and each virtue's price. The women have no pimps or madames. Instead a gang called the Whore's Bastards — many, but not all, of them the sons of the women who work the street — provides the women with protection from rough clients and those who refuse to pay, or simply beats anyone the women take a dislike to. A member of the Whore's Bastards wears a woman's undergarment hanging from his belt.

At the end of Whore Street is Lowtown's shrine to Kypriis. Across the street lives the priest, Holden Littletree, a quiet and humble old man whom the women and the Bastards are quite fond of; he's been there for decades. This shrine is the only one in Lowtown with any congregation to speak of — the women gather every Kypriis day in the morning to listen to Littletree speak a few words. It's also the only shrine to receive any offerings of coin on a regular basis, these usually coming from the whores' customers.

Snake's Den

*Watch yourself in the Snake's Den,
lad... you might think after surviving
Lowtown, you're ready for anything and
anyone, but things are more rambunc-
tious in the Snake's Den. Those barbar-
ians shambling about in their furs like
big bears settle discussions with their
fists, and if a fellow dies because of a
beating... well... they figure chances are
he got what he deserved.*

Along the southern part of the Serpentine, from the river chains under Foom's Bridge to the border of the city, lies the Snake's Den. A rough-and-tumble portage for the men who work the river all the way south to the border of Amyklai, the Snake's Den is best known for the barbarians who hulk through its streets — hard-drinking, hard-fighting men who have little time for explanations about why a poor soul has his knife near the barbarian's pouch. Still, unlike the cynical residents of Lowtown or the cosmopolitan ones of Gibberish, those same barbarians, already over-awed by the size of Elweir, are easy marks for a con, and any swindler with even half a plan for parting a man from his coin goes to the Snake's Den to try it out.

The People

Most of the residents of Snake's Den are captains, sailors, or those who support sailors, much like the residents of Gibberish. Others are marines — men who serve as guards aboard river barges. On a river, even one as broad as the Serpentine, it's a simple matter to row out to a barge and storm it, so river pirates are a constant problem. With

the rise of the Bandit Lords, marines have become even more of a necessity, although the presence of the Duke's soldiers along the Serpentine has gone a long way toward stopping piracy immediately south of Elweir. Also the stops a barge makes as it travels up- and downriver are in more lawless areas than the ports on the sea, many of which are cities with guards of their own.

While some marines are natives of Elweir, most come from the lands along the river: young men from Graecoria or Three Fingers, searching for adventure; Cynthian riders exiled from their people for their crimes or by dictate of the rigid customs of their tribes; men from Amyklai who either deserted the army or lost their families and villages to the raids of tribesmen from the Crumble; and even a few of those tribesmen, who've come north to see the wonders they've heard of from their storytellers.

CLOTHING

The Elweirnians in the Snake's Den dress much as they do elsewhere in the city: loose shirts and loose breeches. Some of the river captains have adopted the dress of the Three Fingers: a belted long-sleeve tunic, dyed either blue or red and hanging to mid-calf, worn over breeches. All of the veteran sailors carry a pack of rolled furs, slung over their shoulder in the city, for when they travel south into colder climes. Most barbarians wear their furs even in subtropical Elweir, much to the ridicule of the city-dwellers.

Unlike elsewhere, a variety of weapons are common on the streets — axes, short-bladed swords, and even spears like the slender lances Cynthians carry or the long-hafted spears of warriors from Amyklai. Some of the more respectable taverns and inns make their patrons disarm before coming inside.

RESIDENCES

The wharves, warehouses, and offices of the Port Authority are all made of wood, usually oak floated down the Serpentine. The taverns, ale houses, and inns of Snake's Den are usually one or two stories and made from half-stone and plaster with exposed beams. The windows are without glass, but have shutters to keep out the rains. Though simple, boisterous, and far from wealthy (or safe), Snake's Den has a rustic quality that makes it less bewildering than Giberish and less unsettling than Lowtown. The wealthier river captains who work the Serpentine make their homes in nearby Uphill East.

Law And Government

The city guard in Snake's Den includes some of the best fighting men in the city — but also has the most casualties. Though Lowtown is rough, its residents know to shut up and pay the bribe when the guard arrives on the scene. Many barbarians find the thought of a bribe despicable and abhorrent — as if it were a moral insult, unethical, or a blot on a man's honor (and that assumes they speak the language). Most barbarians, no matter how slowly or

loudly a magistrate speaks, can never understand why the magistrate has his hand out, or why it's all right to let a pickpocket go free once the stolen property is returned and the guard has received his bribe. Barbarians don't have a high degree of respect for authority to begin with, and when the guard shows up to stop a brawl, the barbarians tend to keep brawling and simply include guardsmen among the targets for their fists... or, if things have truly gotten out of hand, their weapons. Saddest of all, at least in the minds of many guardsmen, even the sailors originally from Elweir have picked up some bad habits while in the south and aren't much better than barbarians

THE CHIEF MAGISTRATE

Fife Murklight is the Chief Magistrate of Snake's Den. The Murklights are an old family in Elweir, and they claim to be the first to sail the Serpentine — a trade many Murklights still pursue. Though never a member of the Fifty, mainly because they have no interest in leaving Snake's Den and the river, the Murklights are almost as famous as any of the noble families in Elweir — and upriver the Serpentine, they're better-known than any other family in the city (with the exception of the Prince's, and the Murklights are generally more respected than the royal house anyway). But Magistrate Murklight is a black sheep in his family thanks to his fear of water. Teased relentlessly as a child, he hates the rest of his family with a passion, and a feud between the family and the city guard has gone on since Fife became Chief Magistrate. A thick, stocky man with dark hair, Magistrate Murklight has a nose bent from being broken once too often, and the knuckles of his meaty hands are swollen to the size of walnuts.

THE ALDERMAN

Gor Tallowblack is the neighborhood's alderman. An old, old man, Tallowblack spent years sailing the Serpentine, but a decade back he simply grew too old for the rigors of travel. Since then he's been the alderman. One of the few aldermen in Elweir respected by his neighborhood, Tallowblack makes an honest effort to see that Snake's Den is taken care of, and his main means of doing this is making sure those who obtain leases have the best interests of the neighborhood at heart.

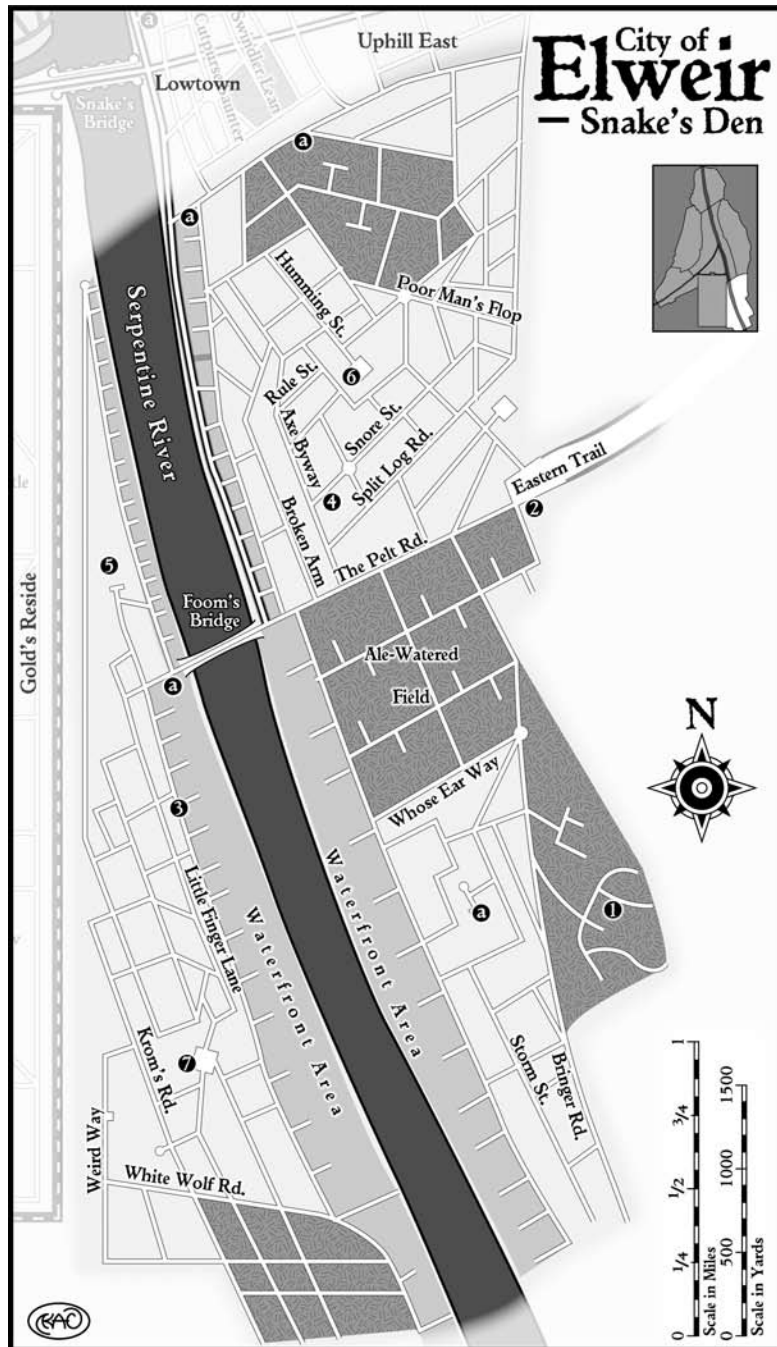
Notable Locations

1. BUILDER'S CAMP

Located at the edge of Snake's Den, Builder's Camp serves as a home for the laborers building Lionwatch Castle. Currently, Builder's Camp is a simple community of tents and hurriedly-built houses for foremen and engineers, but slowly Snake's Den is assimilating the community into the neighborhood. Already two taverns catering to the laborers have sprung up — the Uneven Stone and the Toilease — and many people have begun investigating purchasing leases in the area for when the Duke's soldiers man Lionwatch.

BARBARIANS

Elweirnians toss around the word "barbarian" quite a bit and always in a pejorative or belittling way. To one of Elweir, barbarians are naive, dull-witted, bloodthirsty, and gullible — not necessarily in that order. No one nation is the sole source of barbarians — in other words, Elweirnians don't discriminate on the basis of nation or race. They call anyone wearing furs a barbarian, regardless of where he hails from. This includes people from Khor, Amyklai, the Cynthian Plains, and the Crumble.



Like every other place in Elweir, a group of criminals has also taken up residence in the Camp. Called the Unwelcome Visitors, the group steals materials, mostly stone and wood but also sometimes tools, from the building site and then sells them to river captains trading upriver. Sir Ravning has recently received orders to ferret out the Unwelcome Visitors and make sure they stop stealing materials (the Duke is unhappy about the additional cost). Sir Ravning suspects it's a lost cause — even if he puts every member of the Unwelcome Visitors to the sword, another group will spring up to replace it — and is currently bringing pressure on the Prince to help absorb some of the cost of the castle.

2. THE EASTERN TRAIL

Before the rise of the Bandit Lords, caravans out of Elweir used to brave the Desert's Teeth mountains to trade with the nomads of the Blowing Wastes, and the Eastern Trail was where these caravans departed from and arrived at. While never as busy as Caravan's Rest in Uphill West, the Eastern Trail still saw the arrival of a large caravan every two weeks or so, and the Caravan Authority maintained a sizable staff here to make sure the merchants were properly taxed. Now the Caravan Authority only keeps three men on duty — two clerks and an assessor, all of whom are old men assigned to the place because they can no longer keep up with the hectic pace at Caravan's Rest.

The Trail is a large overgrown field on the eastern edge of Snake's Den. Open on one side, along the other two sides are long stables falling into disrepair and a smaller building that holds offices. A thick layer of dust covers the offices. The three men working the Eastern Trail often spend their time outside, staring off to the east (where the outlines of a road are still visible) and sharing stories of the past. Once merchants lived in nearby homes, but these are now vacant, and only one inn remains open in the area. Called the Nomad's Spear, the place is run by a young man named Vyr Willow and his wife Bessa. Both hope the Duke of Romnal soon claims Elweir as a part of his duchy and chases the Bandit Lords away, thereby allowing the caravans to come this way again.

3. THE FAR AWAY

Located in an old warehouse just on the river, the Far Away is a large, sprawling tavern and inn catering to both sailors and captains. The leaseholder for the Far Away is Simides Artorios, a Graecorian who was once a philosopher until he concluded that philosophy was a sham and the only true wisdom was to be found in drink. Expelled from his home city for his ceaseless heckling of his peers, he made his way down the Serpentine until finally ending up in Elweir.

Simides tends the bar in the Far Away, and as he serves cups of ale and wine he holds forth on the many tangled philosophical traditions spawned in Graecoria, always sprinkling in ribald anecdotes about the lives of the philosophers in question. Though most patrons don't know what he's talking about when he explains the difference between the Truth and truth, the ins-and-outs of rhetoric, or the proper way of organizing a republic (whatever that is), all are entertained by Simides's pantomiming and booming voice.

4. THE MARINE'S WENCH

The Marine's Wench is an inn that provides a place for marines to stay between berths. There are several similar inns in Snake's Den, but the Marine's Wench is the best known, and captains visit it first when looking for able-bodied marines to protect their barges. The place is famous for its meat dishes, the barbarous smell of dirty furs, human sweat, and sizzling fat, and the fights that frequently break out in the common room and spill into the street. When-

ever a member of the city guard hears of a fight at the Marine's Wench, he hangs his head and sighs.

The innkeeper, a middle-aged woman named Dotty Rosewater, is the widow of a marine, and she treats the marines who stay at the inn like her own children. She's also known for her ability to incapacitate a man with two blows — a sharp elbow to the solar plexus, followed by a quick jab to the crumpled man's nose. First-timers at the Marine's Wench are often taunted into betting whether they can remain standing after Dotty's two blows. Few win the bet, and even those who do win wish they'd never made the bet in the first place.

5. MURKHOME

Located on the western bank of the Serpentine near Foom's Bridge, Murkhome is a large, sprawling wooden building where the Murklights reside. The family's added to the place century after century, making its interior a maze of passages and rooms. All of the Murklights in the city except Fife Murklight (meaning a total of between thirty and forty people, depending on who's currently upriver, plus servants) live here with their families. Since they've traded with the southern peoples for centuries, the Murklights have many foreign friends, all of whom are welcome to stay in Murkhome when visiting Elweir.

The "patriarch" of the Murklights (the family calls him their elder) is Finn Murklight. A crotchety old man, he spent decades sailing the Serpentine, and there's likely no one in Elweir who knows more about the river than he.

6. PLAYERS' SQUARE

This small grassy square is known for the bards, minstrels, jugglers, and other players who congregate here. Anyone looking to hire a troupe comes to Player's Square. In the week leading up to Oron's March the square and surrounding streets are packed with both performers and their audiences, since it's a well-known fact the Prince and his entourage chose the marchers in the parade here. Some of the inns and taverns surrounding the square include:

The Broken String: Above the door of this tavern hangs a battered lute with broken strings. The barkeep is named Finly Murklight (one of the Murklights and the leaseholder). Finly dreamed of being a bard as a youth, but he's tone-deaf and can't sing worth a lick. Minstrels often frequent the Broken String and ask Finly to sing because he's so unbelievably bad one has to hear him to believe the stories. Finly well knows how bad he is, and sings upon request with rueful shrug and sheepish smile.

The Player In Need: This shop supplies lutes, strings, wooden balls, torches, face paint, motley, and other sundry supplies players need to perform. Its proprietor, Tinder Bellow, is an actor who chose to settle down after playing Oron in the parade on Oron's March twenty years ago. He spends much of his time at the entrance to the shop, looking out onto Player's Square, shouting out criticism or encouragement as the mood strikes him.

Master Toothgrim And His Goblins: Over the last few months, this wagon with its large colorful pennants has become a fixture of Player's Square. Master Toothgrim is a magician who performs sleight-of-hand and other illusions for those passing through the square. He frequently intimates to the audience his abilities as a sorcerer, although when asked to prove this he pleads he cannot because of the Prince's edict against sorcery. His "goblins" are short men and women, two to three feet tall, who paint their faces with purple and green paint and dress in barbarous leopard pelts — Master Toothgrim is often heard to refer to them as his familiars and claim they are People of the Night, a collection of tribes that haunt the mountains forming the northern border of Abyzinia.

In addition to the tricks he performs, Master Toothgrim also sells a selection of elixirs, the purposes of which range from easing bone-ache to ensuring a man never drowns. All of the elixirs are made with secret recipes and exotic ingredients from far-off lands. The city guard has already spent considerable time investigating him and has declared him nothing more than a fraud, but despite this, visitors to the square still spend their coin on Master Toothgrim's wares.

Master Toothgrim is a tall, saturnine man with unnaturally pale skin, peaked eyebrows, and a black goatee braided into two points. He wears all black and carries a silver-topped cane he refers to as his "wand of power."

The Mute: Above the door of this tavern hangs a sign showing a man with a lute smashed over his head. Most minstrels can't walk into a tavern without being asked to sing a song or two for the patrons; this is forbidden in the Mute and it's the one place a minstrel can go where he knows he can drink his ale or wine in peace. The barkeep is Rawly Goodhide, a large man with a brutal face who's known to suffer from a berserker rage if someone breaks out into song in his tavern.

The Somersaulting Torch: This inn caters to all players except jugglers who consider its name — as well as the history of its innkeeper, Clumsy Til, who walks with a pronounced limp — an ill-omen. The story goes that Til was once a juggler in an Oron's March parade who flipped his flaming torch too high and set a noble lady's hair afire. At that point a mob dragged him from the parade and beat him to a pulp. The beating resulted in his limp, and he decided to stop juggling and bought the lease to this inn.

7. THE RIVER CAPTAINS' GUILD HALL

The river captains' guild hall is a favorite spot for children. A long wooden building with wide eaves, it has mounted heads and pelts from beasts hunted along the Serpentine spread across its four outside walls. One can see everything from the heads of moose, caribou, and elk to the pelts of wolves and polar bears hanging on the walls.

UPHILL EAST

Nah, you don't want to go to Uphill East. Magistrates don't accept bribes and there's nothing to steal worth anything... except maybe some wife's fresh-baked pie. Come to think, a pie sounds mighty good right now....

Uphill East is a quiet neighborhood of clean, humble buildings separated by cobbled streets. Its residents are hard-working and industrious, and always greet those who belong in the neighborhood with a smile and a kind word or two — and those who obviously don't with a disapproving frown as their eyes search hurriedly for the nearest guardsmen. The streets are filled with the quiet click of feet on cobbles and children laughing, the air with the scents of fresh-baked bread and flowers from the small boxes hanging from the windows of many homes.

The People

The people in Uphill East are the clerks in the government offices and their families, with the wives often making extra coin by weaving and sewing clothes they sell to merchants who sell them in Hawker's Square. In the neighborhood's south end, captains who work the Serpentine make their homes.

CLOTHING

People in Uphill East wear humble but clean clothes: mostly plain linen and homespun cotton, sometimes dyed deep blue or green. The young women wear ankle-length skirts and blouses with long sleeves. They often decorate their clothing with hand-embroidered birds and flowers. The married women wear similar clothing, but cover their heads with a bonnet and often wear an apron over their skirt. The men wear well-made breeches held up with woven belts and shirts. Both men and women wear shoes, with some vain young men preferring boots such as nobles wear.

RESIDENCES

Most of the buildings in Uphill East are homes made of grey flagstone or wood. They're usually just one story tall and have a rustic feel, mainly because of the distance between them. Unlike the buildings in Lowtown and elsewhere, the homes in Uphill East aren't crammed together wall to wall. The windows lack glass, but all of them have shutters, often painted bright colors. The homes of river captains are usually two stories with glass in the windows and of much finer construction (although in no way rivaling the homes of sea captains).

Law And Government

The city guard is complacent and restive in Uphill East. Guardsmen spend much of their time giving strangers dirty looks and harassing them with questions about what they're doing in the neighborhood. The most frequent crime committed in Uphill East is conduct offensive to the Prince, and it often seems that a stranger simply setting foot in the neighborhood has in some way offended Summerset.

THE CHIEF MAGISTRATE

Furland Bother is the Chief Magistrate of Uphill East, and he prides himself on knowing the name of every family who lives in the neighborhood. A stiff-backed and proper man, Magistrate Bother stands well over six feet tall and has a habit of tilting back his head and staring down his long nose at any person from Lowtown or Gibberish brought before him. He sniffs with disbelief at the person's crimes as the witnesses recount the dastardly deed. Magistrate Bother punishes any minor transgression in his neighborhood with at least a good beating, and he usually gives the thief or pickpocket a choice between the beating and a maiming. He is the only chief magistrate who isn't open to a bribe (although the same cannot be said for every magistrate under him).

THE ALDERMAN

Cylus Bluebell is the alderman for Uphill East, a position his family has held for nearly a hundred years. Bluebell goes to a different home each day, and visiting for the morning, he listens to complaints of the lady of the house. Though he rarely does anything about the complaints except nod sympathetically, the families in Uphill East appreciate his attention and vote for him every five years without even the need for a bribe in return. Bluebell's main concerns are keeping improper businesses out of Uphill East and making sure the Prince continues to provide generous donations to the academy.

Features

Uphill East has two features of note: its stairs and its sewer grates.

Because Uphill East stands on a the hillsides looking over the Serpentine River, the streets tend to wind up the hills, rather than traveling straight up the slope. Between the streets one often finds shallow-stepped stairs running between the buildings, leading up from one street to another.

The streets in Uphill East are cobbled with bricks, and at major intersections, sewer grates of wrought iron bars are set into the street. These sewer grates lead to the sewers that run under Lowtown and open up along the Serpentine; they help prevent rainwater from running down the slope of Uphill East and flooding Lowtown.

Notable Locations

1. THE GRAECORIAN ACADEMY

The academy is Uphill East's most notable feature. Located at the northwest corner of the neighborhood, abutting Lowtown and Gibberish, it's the one place where the propriety and quiescence of Uphill East subsides. Founded in 586 VA as payment to Tolemos, the Graecorian architect who built the bridges on the Prince's Roads, the academy is the only school of its sort in Elweir, since private tutors teach the children of the Fifty and the wealthiest of the captains. The students are mainly the children of high-level government clerks and the only modestly well-off captains — no one else in the city cares overly much about education, and certainly isn't willing to pay good coin for it.

The academy is organized along Graecorian lines, with lectures in rhetoric and logic, history, astronomy and mathematics, and philosophy. Each of these four fields has one instructor, a Graecorian recruited from the city-states, and they all wear the white, draped robes of their lands with deep-blue trim to denote their status. The chief instructor is Pausias Aristophides, an elderly bald man with a paunch and fierce eyes who teaches rhetoric and logic. He turns everything into an argument.

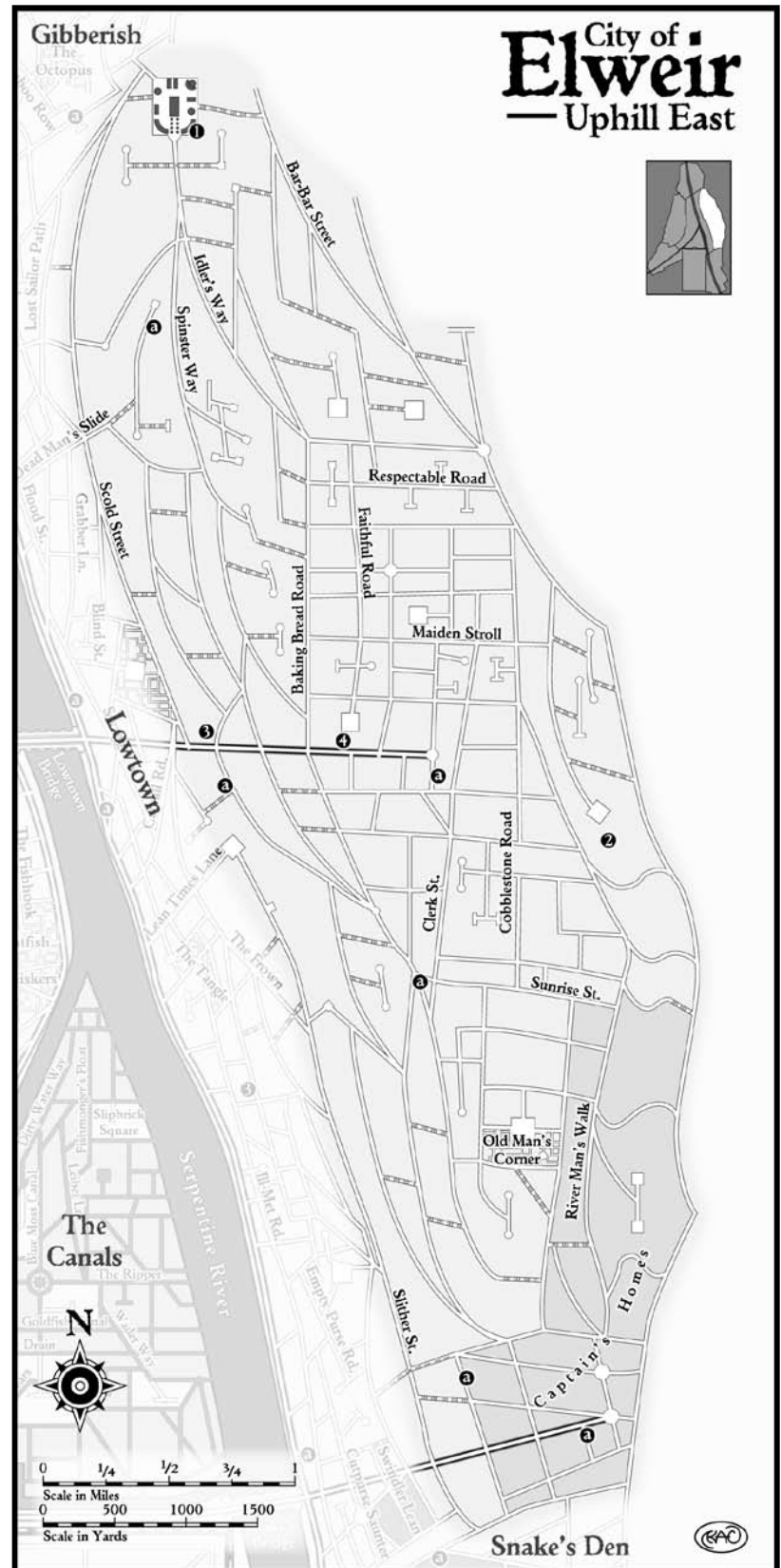
Designed by Tolemos himself, the academy consists of outdoor symposia and small amphitheaters surrounding a rectangular building of white marble that houses the library. The students either live in the inns around the academy or with their families. Being young, the students often venture into nearby Lowtown and Gibberish and get into trouble. Many of the students have adopted the Graecorian style of dress — draped robes like those their instructors wear, but lacking the blue trim — and this only makes them easy marks when they journey into Gibberish or Lowtown for a taste of adventure or the exotic.

2. THE QUIET NIGHT

The Quiet Night is a large inn near the eastern border of Uphill East, and it's often the first inn a person sees when entering the city from the east. Kept in excellent repair and immaculate, it's one of the nicer inns in the city — and proprietor Mikail Thimble and his wife Larette have every intention of keeping it that way. Anyone who looks even slightly questionable is turned away at the door, and the couple accepts no excuses for a disheveled appearance, clothes filthy from the road, or anything else that looks suspicious — “You never know who might be a spy for the Bandit Lords,” they tell anyone who listens. “Living on the edge of the city, you can never be too careful.” Because of this, it's also one of the most empty inns in the city.

3. THE SWEET TOOTH

Near the border between Lowtown and Uphill East, just off the Prince's Road, is a small shop called the Sweet Tooth that sells candies and sweetmeats. The shop is a single story building made of flagstone — its leaseholder, Mantily Bloom,



converted the front of what used to be a home into a place to display and sell her wares. Rock candy, mincemeat cookies, sugar loaf, and gingerbread are all for sale here, along with other goods depending on Bloom's mood that morning and the ingredients her daughter and son-in-law purchased the day before at Hawker's Square. The place is a favorite among the children of eastern Lowtown, who sneak

here past the neighborhood's guardsmen when they get hold of a few bits. An elderly widow, Mantily has a ready smile for anyone who enters her shop, although she rarely speaks.

4. THE TEMPLE OF THE SEVEN

Located just off the Prince's Road near the center of the neighborhood, the temple to the Old Gods in Uphill East is a humble structure — a simple rectangular building of stone with a wing at the back holding cells for the priests. Its only adornment are mosaics of glazed tiles on the outside walls showing images of the seven gods, but it has a large following among the clerks and their families.

The high priest at the temple is Reslin Bitterbend, who's responsible for many of the Sacred Purges (page 33). Through his words and the force of his personality, he incites the normally quiet and proper residents of Uphill East into a foaming rage at the criminals, ne'er-do-wells, and other unsavory elements in the city. He blames each and every one of them for the gods turning their back on the world. These purges have put him at odds with the Prince, but Bitterbend has vowed to continue and the Divine Advisor demurs whenever the Prince asks him to intervene. Bitterbend is a tall, handsome man with piercing blue eyes, a pointed goatee, and a full head of black hair.

UPHILL WEST

Uphill West is for folk with coin to spend, lad... so you won't be going there, unless you've been holding out on me — You haven't, have you! Better not be, you dirty little beggar — me giving you all this good advice and teaching you the ways and means of the Murk! You had better be showing me a proper appreciation!

Similar in many ways to Uphill East, Uphill West lies on the hills overlooking the opposite bank of the Serpentine. It's home to most of the city's industry, from the metalsmiths of Workman's End, to the weavers of the Spindle, to the woodworkers of Cooper's Row. The people make their way through the streets quickly, intent upon their business, and have little time — or use — for idlers and small talk. Unlike Uphill East folk, Westers are used to strangers and outsiders coming to visit the craftsmen and artisans.

Like Uphill East, Uphill West has stairs and sewer gratings (see page 52).

The People

The people of Uphill West are artisans and craftsmen — blacksmiths, goldsmiths, silversmiths, coopers, tailors, weavers, potters, and so on — and their families and apprentices. Most of them sell their own goods. Family members who don't actually make the goods (or help out, for example by obtaining supplies) deal with merchants and customers, making each family like a little shop.

CLOTHING

Residents of Uphill West wear clothing similar to those in Uphill East, but usually of better quality — the artisans trade among themselves for such things rather than make them at home. Because of the proximity of Worm's Hole and the presence of Caravan's Rest, the Valdorian style of dress is common, so men often wear tunics that reach the knees with a broad leather belts around their waist, and women ankle-length dresses with similar, but slightly slimmer girdles. The artisans and craftsmen themselves often wear leather aprons or similar garments; you can often determine someone's profession from the stains and debris on it: soot for a blacksmith; sawdust for a woodwright; dried mud for a potter; and so on.

RESIDENCES

The residences in Upper West resemble those in Uphill East, but they're closer together, and many have an attached shop or workplace — for example, a blacksmith's house has a smithy where he pounds out nails, horseshoes, and oarlocks. Most homes are two stories with a front room for customers and a kitchen on the ground floor, and sleeping areas on the second floor.

Law And Government

Thieves from Lowtown frequently come into Uphill West at night and steal goods from the craftsmen. The guard's main source of bribes is from these thieves. All in all, it's not the worst guardsman position in Elweir — the relatively low number of opportunities to receive a bribe is offset by the peace and quiet of the neighborhood.

THE CHIEF MAGISTRATE

Lysen Copperwait is the Chief Magistrate of Uphill West. Young for his position, Copperwait desperately wants to obtain a more lucrative posting — the bribes a magistrate takes in Uphill West are poor at best. The son of a coppersmith, he finds his common upbringing shameful and never stops trying to improve his manners and language in the hope of someday obtaining the position of Chief Magistrate of Gold's Reside. Anyone pointing out his lack of polish will find himself on the receiving end of Copperwait's anger.

Copperwait's been trying to get close to the Duke's Men — he sees which way the wind's blowing in Elweir and wants to be in a position to take advantage of it when the Duke claims Elweir as a part of Romnal. He spends a lot of time with Sir Gimli Mond (see *Caravan's*

Rest, below), doing his best to pretend to be an upright and gods-fearing man.

THE ALDERMAN

Alderman Salario Twistline was elected four years ago on his promise to make the Prince increase the city guard for Uphill West — thieves from Lowtown were coming into the area more and more often to steal whatever they could lay their hands on, especially from silversmiths. Westers wanted the city guard to stop accepting bribes and letting the thieves go free, and to start maiming them so they never came back. Twistline promised to pursue this issue with a vigor, never resting until he saw justice done in Uphill West. But when he won the election, he closed up his shop and began leading a life of leisure, enjoying the fruits of his yearly pay. Several smiths in the neighborhood have threatened him with bodily harm, but most are simply waiting for the next election to vote for someone else.

Notable Locations

1. CARAVAN'S REST

The Prince's Road runs through the middle of Uphill West. At its end is a broad, rectangular square. Long wooden buildings line three sides of the square; the fourth side is open with a long road of packed earth running as far as the eye can see. The east building on the square houses the Caravan Authority's clerks. The buildings to the north and south provide stables for horses, and just beyond these are inns that cater mostly to merchants and their men.

While most goods come into Elweir via the rivers, caravans of horse-drawn carts come to the city from the southernmost portions of Valdoria (particularly the Duchy of Romnal). The most important good coming overland is ore — silver and iron mined in the Oceanshore Mountains.

Like the Port Authority, the Prince's Caravan Authority keeps track of the comings and goings of merchants and traders, and taxes caravan goods sold. Because many of the merchants are law-abiding Valdorians, they're always forthright about how much coin they sell their goods for, and though they're assigned assessors just like ship captains, there's rarely any spying and sneaking about going on. The Caravan Authority also runs a large stable that's one of the few places in Elweir where people can purchase horses.

The road from Caravan's Rest leads directly into the Duchy of Romnal. Visible from Elweir is a wooden palisade that houses a contingent of the Duke's soldiers. These soldiers are under the command of Sir Gimli Mond, who's a frequent guest of Uphill West's chief magistrate.

2. COOPERS' ROW

Woodworkers ply their trade and sell their goods on Cooper's Row, a street about in the middle of Uphill West. The sounds of creaking wood, sawing, and hammering fill the air. The

goods made here are everyday items like wagon wheels, barrels, and shutters. Shipwrights also live here, though they typically do their work in one of the three portages.

Illin Cartwright: Cartwright is the lucky soul who receives commissions from the Caravan Authority, and this makes him the envy of his peers. He spends much of his time at Caravan's Rest, mending wagon wheels and carts.

Jarvyd Highsole: Highsole is the favorite woodworker of sea captains in Elweir. Though the city lacks a shipyard, many captains require minor repairs to their vessels before setting sail, and Highsole does the best work for the least coin. He does most of his actual work in Gibberish; when he's in his shop, he typically idles away the time making oars for triremes. A friendly man, Highsole enjoys trading stories while in his shop and loves to hear of far-off places, caring little if the stories are true or not.

3. THE SPINDLE

The Spindle is a long narrow street that runs from Worm's Hole into Uphill West, and along it are the shops of weavers and tailors. Flax and cotton come down the Worm from Valdoria, and thence to these shops, where workers weave the materials into fabric and then make clothing from the fabric.

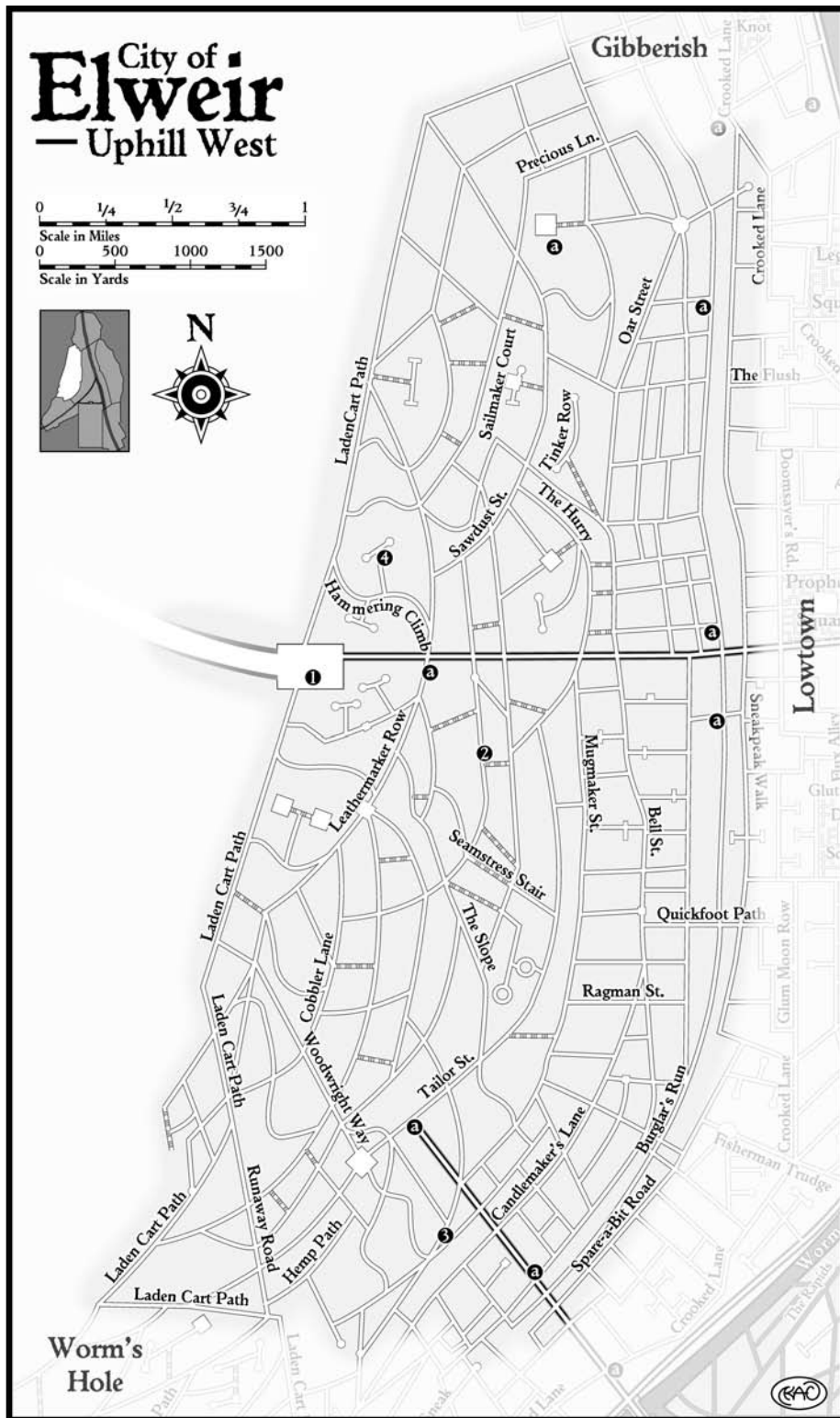
Alle Lovelace: Alle Lovelace is the preferred tailor of the Fifty. An old widow, she sends her six daughters to Gibberish quite often, hiring off-duty guardsmen to escort the girls, so they can sketch whatever exotic styles they see there. Many suspect Lovelace is the wealthiest of Uphill West's many craftsmen, simply because she does so much business with the Fifty. If a person is looking for clothing at the height of style for Elweir, his best bet is to visit Lovelace — she often takes a long time to complete her commissions, but the quality is second to none.

Avenford Slender: Avenford Slender spends most of his time making sails for seafaring ships and tarps for river barges. A poor tailor at best, his main commendable quality is that his goods are sturdy and inexpensive — although his materials are often strangely cut, as if the man doesn't understand a straight line is meant to be straight, and far from elegantly woven, with protruding knots and snarls in the fabric.

4. WORKMAN'S END

Located just north of Caravan's Rest is Workman's End, where smiths hammer at their forges. Here one can find copper-, silver-, and blacksmiths, as well as Elweir's two goldsmiths. Though the work of these smiths is unspectacular when compared to those of Abyzinia (for gold and silver) and Valdoria (for weapons and armor), all of them produce perfectly serviceable wares.

Berly Ring: Berly Ring's become the favorite blacksmith of the Duke's Men; they bring their weapons and armor to him for repairs. Though he prefers to hammer nails, horseshoes, and other objects not



Kurdy Deel: Kurdy Deel is a tinker who keeps a shop in Workman's End. He's often on the road, traveling the villages around Elweir and peddling his wares; he leaves the custom in the city to his two sons and wife. The oldest son, also named Kurdy (sometimes called the Younger), is seventeen years old. The second son, Parly, is fifteen. His wife Jessa is a sharp-tongued woman skilled at negotiating; many people believe her ceaseless badgering is the reason her husband is so often on the road.

Winfrey Moan: Winfrey Moan is one of the two goldsmiths in Workman's End. He sees little work — gold is rare and precious, and the Fifty prefer to purchase their gold jewelry from far-off lands since that's more exotic and prestigious. Moan's main source of work comes from the usurers in Lowtown, who purchase stolen gold from thieves, then give it to Moan to melt down and remake in a different shape, typically something dull like a bar stamped with the sigil of Tharestan or some other far-off land. Moan rightly considers himself a highly-skilled artisan, so this "low" work rankles him, but he's often heard to say a man has to eat.

WORM'S HOLE

Little Valdoria's what most call it... like a piece of the empire plunked down right in Elweir. Only reason to go there, lad, is to partake of the ale. And maybe sneak aboard some river captain's barge and steal yourself a whole keg....

Worm's Hole is the center of Elweir's trade with the Valdorian Empire. It occupies part of the banks of the Worm River, which runs through the northern portion of the empire's frontier. In customs and dress it has as much in common with Valdoria as Elweir... and since the treaty with Romnal, it's becoming more and more like Valdoria.

The People

Like Gibberish and Snake's Den, the professions of those living in Worm's Hole involve the river trade, but it lacks the exotic characters of Gibberish and the rough-and-tumble attitude of Snake's Den. Because Valdoria is a law-abiding land, the river captains have no need for marines to guard their barges as they travel the Worm, and the influence of Valdorian culture frightens off whores

intended for killing a man, he's loathe to turn away the coin. A widower who has little use for talk, Berly lets his thirteen year-old son Rekly deal with customers. Rekly fawns over the Valdorians when they come into a shop and never stops asking them if they'll make him a Duke's Man when he's an adult. The Valdorians are tactful and proper enough to tell him it's his father's decision to make and a son should always honor his father and his wishes.

and others who would prey on sailors. The wealthiest inhabitants are the river captains, but the divide between rich and poor is slight compared to other areas in Elweir: the river captains often follow the Valdorian belief, which holds honor and freedom higher than the pursuit of coin; and the profits of trade along the Worm are lower than along the Serpentine, since the risks are also low.

CLOTHING

Nearly everyone in Worm's Hole adopts the Valdorian style of dress. Men wear dark red or pale blue cotton tunics that reach the knees, fastened at the waist with a broad leather belt. River captains decorate their belts with a bronze medallion bearing a sigil representing the name of the barge they captain. Women wear ankle-length dresses with leather girdles similar to men's belts, but slightly slimmer. They often embroider the trim of their dresses with colorful thread stitched in the shape of green vines, blue birds, or yellow flowers. Only city guards (who wear the typical Elweirnian livery) and porters (who load and unload cargo from the barges and wear simple loincloths and sandals) dress like people elsewhere in the city.

RESIDENCES

Worm's Hole looks much like the standard frontier town of Valdoria: most of its streets are of hard-packed mud, though frequently-traveled streets are often "paved" with split logs laid side by side. Buildings are usually made of wood, two or three stories tall, with open windows and sloped roofs. Residents often shingle the walls to prevent water from leaking in. Even the homes of the river captains, the wealthiest of the residents in Worm's Hole, are humble affairs, lacking quarters for servants — the servants have homes of their own elsewhere in the neighborhood.

Law And Government

The main crime committed in Worm's Hole is thieves from Lowtown sneaking upriver in rowboats and stealing cargo from the barges tied up to the wharves. The city guard focuses its patrols on the wharves, since the rest of the neighborhood is relatively peaceful. Once this was a lucrative source of bribes, but more and more the river captains don't accept letting the thieves go free after paying some coin. Emboldened by the Duke's Men and frustrated with Magistrate Tollpike, the river captains have begun to dispense their own justice when they catch thieves aboard their barges. Typically this involves maiming the thieves and sinking their rowboats.

THE CHIEF MAGISTRATE

Rus Tollpike, the Chief Magistrate of Worm's Hole, has held office for over twenty years and has watched the neighborhood change during that time. He's growing dissatisfied with his position — as Valdoria's influence over the Prince increases, he feels considerable pressure to enforce the laws, especially the New Laws, strictly and justly in the

same way Valdoria would enforce them. Though not nearly as venal as some chief magistrates, Tollpike still relies on bribes for his income, but he can't do that if he actually has to enforce the laws as written. Every morning he considers resigning his post, and it's only a matter of time until he does so and the Prince replaces him with someone more acceptable to the Valdorians... likely a person of Sir Ravning's choosing.

THE ALDERMAN

Unther Aux is the neighborhood's alderman. A native of Valdoria who relocated to Elweir several years ago, he won the election with promises of transforming Worm's Hole into Little Valdoria in more than just name. Since then he's spent his time hounding Magistrate Tollpike to enforce the laws properly, and visiting Sir Ravning and the Duke's Men in the Canals to assure them they have the wholehearted support of the residents of Worm's Hole. Most people outside of Worm's Hole consider Aux an agent for the Valdorian Empire and a part of its plan to take over Elweir. Those who live in Worm's Hole hold him in high regard.

Notable Locations

1. THE MOONRISE INN

The Moonrise caters to Valdorian sailors and captains. It's one of the few places in Worm's Hole where one might hear a harsh word or two about the Duke of Romnal and his men — its patrons come from many Valdorian provinces, most of whom find the Duke's treaty with Elweir treasonous (since he made it without the Emperor's approval). While Elweirnians believe all Valdorians are alike, anyone who spends a few days in the Moonrise learns that isn't the case. The rivalries between the empire's provinces are fierce, especially along Valdoria's frontier.

The proprietors of the Moonrise are Wulfgard Fane and his wife, Hilda. They both come from the County of Norland, just upriver the Worm. They don't get involved in the political arguments that often break out in their common room, preferring not to offend any of their customers.

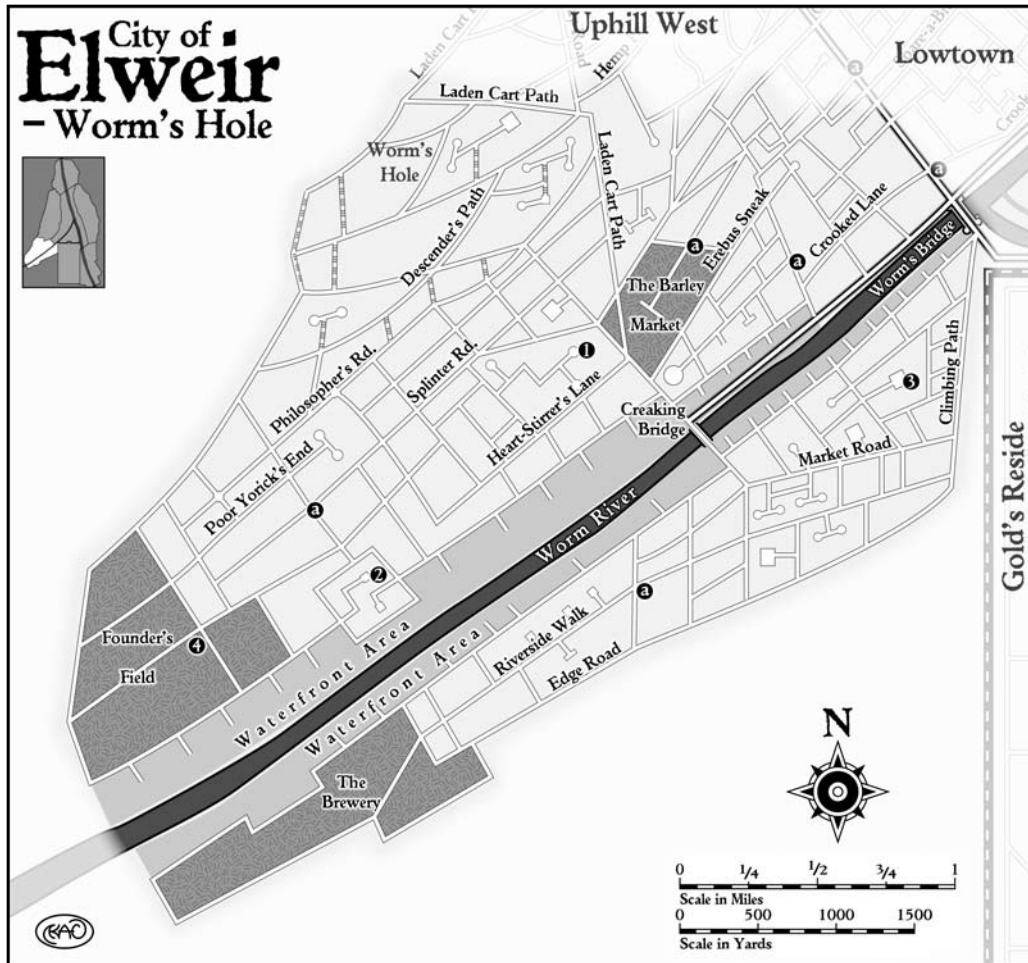
2. RIVER CAPTAINS' GUILD HALL

The river captains' guild hall in the Worm's Hole is a plain building of oak, long and low with a few offices near the front and large meeting room taking up most of the space in back. It also holds an office for an agent for the Imperial Treasury, where letters of marque are honored.

The Imperial Treasury acts as a sort of bank for Valdorian nobles and merchants, and provides the letters of marque in exchange for a deposit of gold. To receive a letter of marque, a person visits an agent (they're located in important cities and the seats of the nobility throughout the Empire) and gives him a quantity of gold. The recipient can redeem a letter of marque — which includes both his signature and small sketch of him — with another agent anywhere in the empire for the same

RIVER BARGES

The barges that travel the Serpentine and Worm Rivers are both the same: wooden, shallow-keeled, nearly rectangular, and typically thirty to sixty feet (5' to 9') long. Lacking sails, they depend on oars to make their way upriver and the river's current to come downriver. They don't have a below decks; sailors tie cargo down under tarps at the center of the barge. A cabin for the captain stands at the back of the barge, near the rudder; the rest of the crew sleeps on the deck.



chamber has benches set around the central area where the priest leads the worship service. The other seven walls contain small, semi-circular alcoves. Set in each alcove is a marble statue of one of the seven Old Gods, and in front of each statue is small stone altar. Here the faithful can place a small votive candle, which the indigent sell from small trays hung from around their necks for a couple of bits. Like the Valdorians, residents of Worm's Hole are gods-fearing people for the most part, and at all hours you can usually find at least one worshipper kneeling before an altar and lighting a candle.

The head priest at Worm's Hole temple is Sance Whitestone. A soft-spoken, peace-loving man, Whitestone is under pressure from Bitterbend, the head priest in Uphill East, to begin Sacred Purges of his own. Whitestone finds such violence reprehensible; he believes men and women must come to worship of the proper gods of their own free will and not for fear of punishment. During the last Godstime, he even spoke out to the gathered faithful against the Purges.

4. VALDOR'S COURAGE

Valdor's Courage, a long, low building built in the traditional Valdorian style, is an ale house near the bank of the Worm River. A single room with a ceiling of exposed beams fills the interior; the patrons sit at long tables and benches. It serves a wide selection of ales, all brewed in Valdoria, making it a favorite among Valdorian sailors and captains. Because of this Valdor's Courage is an excellent place to book passage on a barge traveling into the empire.

The proprietor, Olaf Gout, was born and raised in Elweir despite his Valdorian name. A large meaty man with wild, blond hair, he has little patience for "rough-housing" — the only activities he finds acceptable in his ale house are drinking and singing songs in honor of the Valdorian emperors (and not those tawdry and vulgar songs sung elsewhere in the city). Anyone who tries to start a fight soon finds himself surrounded by a band of Valdorians led by Olaf and thrown out on the street.

amount of gold as he deposited. This way a person doesn't need to travel with large quantities of gold — though the roads in Valdoria are safer than anywhere else in Il-Ryveras, no man tempts fate when it comes to gold if he has another choice.

Though forgers have tried many times to forge a letter of marque, none have succeeded. It's common knowledge (among criminals at least) that the agents hide some sort of code in the wording of the letter. Until someone breaks the code, attempts at forgery are fruitless.

Because of the agent's presence and the large quantity of gold he presumably keeps on the premises, Valdorian soldiers constantly guard the guild hall. The guild, as a matter of honor, makes sure the city guard receives an annual "contribution" to ensure faithful service.

3. THE TEMPLE OF THE SEVEN

The Temple of the Seven is one of the few stone buildings in Worm's Hole. Made from pink marble and octagonal in shape, it has an entrance in one wall that leads to a large chamber. The

THE OUTLANDS



I'm going to tell you about the Outlands, lad, because it's important to know they're out there. You don't ever want to end up there, but sometimes if things get too hot for you here in the city, it's best to pass a season or two in some little village where no one ever goes and your only company is the sheep....

The Outlands is what Elweirnians call the villages and other places in the area around Elweir that nominally fall under the Prince's rule. Two of these places, the Foreign Quarter and the Kneel, abut Elweir. Most of the rest are villages that sell their goods in Elweir's markets; over the years the Prince has come to rule them because they're so closely tied to the city.

THE FOREIGN QUARTER

The Foreign Quarter lies east of Gibberish. It's difficult to determine where the manors of sea captains stop and those of the Foreign Quarter's residents begin. Several prominent expatriates live in the Foreign Quarter, and the small neighborhood also serves as the location of Elweir's new slave market.

PROMINENT RESIDENTS

Many of the Foreign Quarter's best-known residents live there because, for one reason or another, the Prince won't acknowledge their presence in Elweir. But purchasing a manor in the Foreign Quarter requires the approval of the Prince and is handled through the Royal Exchequer, so the Prince knows the identity of the residents and has some use for them.

Captain Ushindi Olonga: Captain Olonga is one of the three men responsible for the new Slave Market. An Abyzinian sea captain who now resides in the Foreign Quarter, he has hired a captain to sail his ship and now spends most of his time in the city, making sure the Slave Market runs smoothly. Although not an Abyzinian noble, Captain Olonga possesses great wealth and comports himself with the dignity and sophistication typical of those of high Abyzinian birth. He can often be found in the offices of the Slave Market or just outside that building observing the bidding. Like any captain, he takes an active role in the business that goes on there. Of the three partners, he's the only one whose identity is publicly known (which may put him in danger, if Romnal comes to rule the city).

Sir Fleming Esprit: From the Barony of Sacre, near the source of the Worm, Sir Fleming Esprit lost a struggle of succession in his home province. The uncle of the deceased baron, he went to war with his rival, the baron's son-in-law. He fled to Elweir after he lost and the son-in-law ordered him executed for treason. Sir Fleming is a frequent visitor to Little Romnal, and rumor has it he's promised his fealty to Duke Lothar in exchange for enough men to seize the barony. Over fifty years old, Sir Fleming is a hard-bitten man, the grizzled veteran of several hard-fought battles.

Lord Edwin Gone: Edwin Gone is one of the River Lords of Three Fingers. He lost his land after his subjects rose up against him because of his ever-increasing taxes. Lord Gone depleted the treasury with frivolous pursuits, leaving behind him half-finished palaces, one or two half-chiseled statues of himself, and a fleet of gilded barges that weren't river-worthy. Having lived in Elweir for over a decade, Lord Gone has no interest in returning to Three Fingers — it's common knowledge he escaped from his former lands with whatever gold remained in the treasury — but the Prince has not acknowledged him because of a request for his return that followed closely on Lord Gone's heels when he arrived in the city. There have been no further requests, and most feel the new Lord has forgotten about the matter, but since Lord Gone has not requested the Prince's acknowledgment, Summerset feels he shouldn't run the risk of alienating an important trading partner. The real question about Lord Gone is: how much of the gold he arrived with does he still have?

1. THE SLAVE MARKET

Organized exactly like Mansblood Square in Gibberish (page 39), the Slave Market has only come into existence in the last year. Here, one can hear the pained and sorrowful groans of the men, and occasionally women, held in the long building bordering the square. Overseers lead the slaves out and chain them to the poles; then the slave owners accept bids. All exchanges of coin are handled in the northern building with the Slave Market's operators (one of whom is Captain Olonga, see above) extracting their fee of two coin, which includes the cost of housing the slaves for the duration of their stay in the market. The typical oarsman goes for ten coin; other, more specialized slaves start at ten coin and usually fetch a higher price depending on the nature of their skills. Once, when Mansblood Square was open, any slave who remained unsold for a week or two was killed. Now, in accor-



dance with the Prince's wishes, an unsold slave is released. But only the poorest of specimens remain unsold after two weeks — the market does brisk business because Abyzinian captains never fail to lose a slave or two when crossing the Blue Waters. Those escapees usually find their way to the shanties of the Kneel.

THE KNEEL

Living in the shadow of the Colossus of the North, dwelling around the bent knees of the gigantic statue, are the indigent and mad who've left Elweir, at least for a time. The Kneel is a stinking warren of roughly constructed lean-tos, tents, and shanties where people who can't make it in Elweir end up. The residents long ago addled their wits with too much drink, or lost their very last coin, or were crippled by a vicious beating and can no longer work. There are few places worth visiting in the Kneel, but two are well-known in Elweir: the Temple of the Long-Suffering and the Palace of the Beggar King.

1. THE TEMPLE OF THE LONG-SUFFERING

A temple dedicated to Sythen the Long-Suffering (see page 32) is currently being built with wood near the western bank of the Serpentine. The builders are the homeless living in the Kneel; they work for a piece of bread and cup of wine. When the workers finish the temple, it will be a simple, crudely-constructed building with a large room for worshippers (who can also sleep there if they have no place else to go), a second large room serving as a kitchen and meal hall, and a wing holding small cells for the priests.

2. THE PALACE OF THE BEGGAR KING

Located on the eastern bank of the Serpentine, the tent "palace" of the Beggar King (see page 30) is a sprawling maze of dirty sheets hung from crude poles to form rooms and halls. Small holes and tears in the sheets provide openings for sunlight. The Beggar King, his "children," and his harem live there. Whether the "children" are actually Fat Chiki's brats or just orphans he's "adopted" as his servants is unknown, but there must be close to fifty of them. The harem consists of homeless women the Beggar King has proclaimed as his wives; they range in age from their mid-teens to their late fifties. Other residents include squatters who climb under the walls by pulling up a sheet, then live there until someone stumbles over them and kicks them out.

VILLAGES

Several villages of no more than fifty people each surround Elweir — although there are quite a few less since the coming of the Bandit Lords. Most of these are led by village elders or a headman elected by the adults who live in the village. A few apply to the Prince to appoint a leader if the villagers can't agree on one for themselves. This leader, called a sheriff, typically comes from the ranks of the magistrates. The sheriff chooses a few guardsmen to accompany him and then moves to his new home. Generally appointment to sheriff is a punishment and means the magistrate lost a power-struggle with either the chief magistrate or one of his peers. Sometimes a magistrate requests the appointment because he's fed up with Elweir and longs for a quiet, rural life.

Ashrake: West of Elweir, not far from the border of Romnal, Ashrake is one of the larger farming communities in the Outlands. It's already come under the Duke's rule in all but name, and is home to a company of soldiers under the command of Sir Ultan Orvay. Ashrake was once a haven for criminals fleeing the city guard. The first thing the Duke's soldiers did when arriving in the village was round up every idle man — all of them refugees from the law — and put them to work on the farms. Many of Elweir's thieves point to Ashrake when talking about the future of Elweir and the fate of their profession.

Pako's Folly: Lying up the Serpentine from Elweir, Pako's Folly is the southernmost village that considers itself a part of Elweir. It's a single day's rowing away from Snake's Den and often serves as refuge for criminals fleeing the law or sailors who've had second thoughts about the berth they accepted. It's also the last place barges on the Serpentine can dock before reaching Elweir. Some captains offload goods and store them in Pako's Folly rather than risk losing them to thieves in the city.

Riverwatch: Riverwatch is an old village, nearly as old as Elweir itself. Located on the coast of the Blue Waters, near where the Serpentine debouches, the village has the duty of keeping a look-out for hostile ships approaching the mouth of the river. It's been over a millennia since any such ships threatened the city. Although fearful rumors concerning the pirates of the Maggot Isles raiding the city sometimes circulate among the taverns, the world's only true naval power — Khor — is too far away to raid the city *en masse*. But the villagers honor their ancient duty; one villager always stands on the highest hill, staring out to the Blue Waters and scanning the horizon for ships. If Riverwatch ever sights an armada, the sheriff is to ride hard for the city.

Welldeep: Welldeep is a small village of shepherds two days travel to the east of Elweir. It's survived the rise of the Bandit Lords for some reason, probably because it's too poor to attract the bandits' notice. The people of Welldeep are well-known in Elweir for their ugliness; they have narrow heads with greasy hair and protruding eyes. They dislike strangers and don't even have an inn.

OTHER LOCATIONS

The Duke's Forts: Stretching from the southern border of Elweir to the Nylsen Forest, fifty miles upriver the Serpentine, is a line of wooden forts, each surrounded by a palisade, along the river's eastern bank. Located about one day's travel apart, they house the Duke's soldiers, who guard the river against the Bandit Lords. The commanders allow no one inside the forts other than soldiers and those bearing a signed document from one of Romnal's nobles — early on, the Bandit Lords destroyed several forts by passing off members of their bands as innocent travelers. However, all are welcome to set up camp just outside the fort's walls, and in case of a Bandit Lord attack, the travelers receive a shouted warning from the soldiers (after that they're on their own). One of Duke Lothar's nobles commands each of the forts.

Though fighting with the Bandit Lords was fierce for the first year, it recently quieted down. Romnal's men have begun to patrol the areas east of the river, searching for their enemy. Some folk believe the soldiers have beaten the Bandit Lords into submission; others think the bandits are simply planning a devilish new attack.

Symkin's Lakes: Centuries ago, Prince Symkin claimed the lands to the southeast, which surround three small lakes, as the Royal Preserve. Here stands the Prince's Retreat, a sprawling lodge where the ruler of Elweir may go when he wishes to get away from the city. Since the rise of the Bandit Lords, Symkin's Lakes has stood abandoned. The current Prince has repeatedly requested the Duke of Romnal send soldiers to garrison the area, but so far the Duke has ignored these requests and has kept his forces concentrated around the banks of the Serpentine.

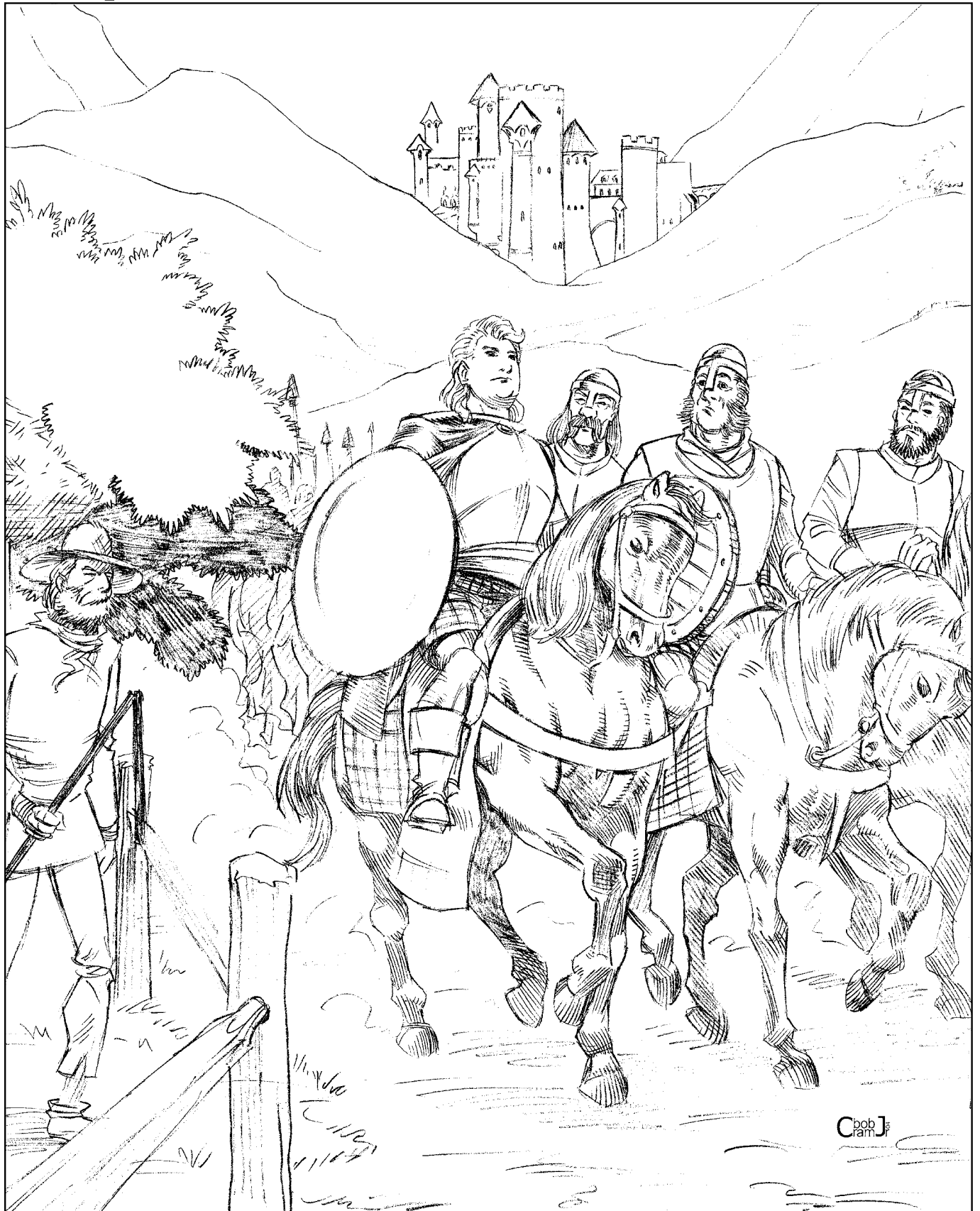
Tavern Keep: Three miles upriver the Serpentine stands a small island, and at the center of the island rises a low, man-made mound. Atop this mound is an ancient keep surrounded by a wooden palisade. No one knows who built the keep — but for centuries, it's housed an alehouse called the Tavern Keep.

The Tavern Keep has been an annoyance to the Princes of Elweir for as long as it has stood, for its owner claims to be the true Prince of Elweir. Five hundred and fifty years ago, the Signus family became the Princes of Elweir. Jarly, the proprietor of Tavern Keep, claims to be a Lurchpole, the family that ruled Elweir before Signus. He further claims the crown was stolen from his ancestor, and it's rightfully his. No one knows the truth about Jarly's claim — and no one much cares — but patrons at the Tavern Keep, who tend to be criminals on the run from the law, like listening to Jarly work himself up into a rage and deliver blistering curses about the Signus family and his stolen birthright. Because of his animosity toward the Prince and the royal family, Jarly guards his walls against all attempts by the city guard to get inside and arrest the criminals known to take refuge in the ale house.

**Ly'zren Pittos ("Lizard Pit"):**

Ly'zren Pittos, commonly called Lizard Pit, is a ruin right on the edge of Cavren's Demise, the swamp the Bandit Lords now claim as their own. Once it was a common destination for treasure seekers, but since the rise of the Bandit Lords, traveling there has become too dangerous. Most of those treasure seekers never returned, but everyone has heard of a friend of a friend who had returned with a cart filled with jewelry and gold, so people desperate for wealth continued to mount expeditions to the ruins until the Lords came along. Lizard Pit stands half out of the swamp, the tops of slender spires emerging from the ground, with more than three-quarters of their length still buried in the dirt. Once in the swamp, you can catch a glimpse of sprawling palaces of greenish soapstone and temples of moss-covered, mud-stained alabaster emerging from the scummy water. Some say Lizard Pit is not the only ruin in Cavren's Demise, only an outlying part of a much grander city located deep in the swamp.

chapter two:



THE KNOWN WORLD

VALDORIA



THE WORLD OF IL-RYVERAS

The Valdorian Age assumes the city of Elweir is central to the campaign, and what the PCs know depends on what Elweirians know. Thus, the nations of Valdoria and Abyzinia receive the most attention in this chapter... and the further a land is from Elweir, the less is known about it, with information in the *Rumors* section often predominating.

The chapter begins with Valdoria. It focuses on travel up the Worm by covering the counties, baronies, and duchies along the river in the most detail, then describes the rest of the Frontier before briefly covering other areas of Valdoria, the Middlemarch and the Heartlands. The next section deals with travel up the Serpentine. Then the journey takes you across the Blue Waters, to Abyzinia and the mysterious lands beyond.

Government: Hereditary monarchy
Ruler: Alric the Unmoved
Capital: Revanna
Language(s): Valdorian
Resources: Farming, craftwork, mining
Arms/Symbols: A broken chain

In a world of darkness and chaos, Valdoria is a beacon of light and order. It is an empire where man has thrown off the tyranny of despots and the oppression of sorcery to live justly and worship the Old Gods as is right and proper — where all men live as equals under the rule of law — where the Emperor can converse with his lowliest subject, and the lowliest subject can meet the eyes of his Emperor and speak truthfully, for both are freemen and the children of Pythos, and though they are far different in station, they are the same in nature, origin, and faith. Valdoria is mankind's finest achievement not because of the splendor of its cities, the wealth of its inhabitants, its ancient heritage, or the intellect and sophistication of its inhabitants, but because in Valdoria men live free of oppressors, whether they be the inhuman masters of the past, men who try to emulate those inhuman masters, or sorcerers who use their unnatural power to terrorize and harm. In Valdoria all men are free and none must live in fear.

Or at least, Valdoria *was* mankind's finest achievement. Though what's said above has held true for nearly a thousand years, even great Valdoria is succumbing to the plight of a world where the gods have departed. Though Valdoria's inhabitants remain law-abiding and god-fearing, war and chaos bite at the Empire's edges and degeneracy lurks in its heart.

HISTORY

For thousands upon thousands of years, the *Drindrish* held humanity in chains, using men and women as their slaves and treating them as little more than chattel. The inhuman race ruled all of Sarth, and they made for harsh masters. But from among men arose a hero to break the chains of slavery and lead his fellows to freedom.

That man's name was Valdor. He was born to a humble station, his parents farmers working to feed a tyrant who barely left them enough food for themselves and their child. As the boy neared his tenyear time, the tyrant took young Valdor from his family and gave made him a blacksmith's apprentice. Even at that young age, Valdor had greater strength than most men, and all could see he would grow to become a giant. In his master's smithy Valdor was forced to make weapons for the tyrants — the same weapons the *Drindrish* used to

keep men in chains — and the work rankled him.

By sixteen, the boy had not just great strength, but also intelligence, charisma, and good looks — a thick head of black hair that still marks the Emperors of Valdoria, and blue eyes that smoldered with rage at his captivity. By seventeen, he had organized a revolt and killed his first *Drindrish*. When he was eighteen, a yellow-bellied man betrayed his revolt. Captured by his enemies, Valdor went to work in the mines of the frigid south. Few men survived the gold mines of the Heavenspire Mountains, the sharp towering peaks that overlooked the Iceswept Ocean, and the *Drindrish* intended the rebellious slave to die there after a year or two. But he did not. Sending him to the mines was the last mistake the tyrants would make.

Valdor's first uprising failed because its members were farmers and craftsmen whose hearts were filled with hate for their masters, but who had little taste for violence or skill with weapons. But the slaves who worked the Heavenspire Mountains were being punished for their crimes against their masters. They were men and women who had already struck out at the *Drindrish* — who hated the tyrants as much as Valdor hated them and had already proven themselves capable of inflicting harm on them. Valdor came among these slaves, and there he found the seeds of an army.

Despite the foul sorcery of the *Drindrish*, their dragon-riders, and their armies, Valdor and his fellow slaves defeated them in battle after battle. The Old Gods favored their beloved son and stripped the *Drindrish* of their magic and caused their dragons to refuse to be roused from their dens. It fell to Valdor to kill the warriors in the Drindrian armies with sword and axe. He excelled at that task, and he needed no help from the gods to defeat the Drindrian armies in bloody-handed combat, for the divine had given him all the gifts he needed at his birth.

In the end, after twenty years of fighting, the *Drindrish* fled the world, sailing west in their gilded barges until they disappeared over the horizon. Then came the real task of forming an empire.

The previous chapter covers much of the history of Valdoria since that time. Valdor founded his empire — the lands now called the Heartland — and later emperors expanded its territories. In the wake of the retreat of the *Drindrish*, the freed slaves outside of Valdoria formed their own nations, but these city-states and petty domains were scattered and unorganized. The emperors going upon their Tours found little opposition to the Empire's expansion. Only in later centuries did these places band together and try to resist Valdoria, but by



then the Empire was too large to be stopped — it had become the greatest nation mankind had ever known. And, in truth, many places preferred to join the Empire, for the rule of the emperors was just and what man doesn't want to live free? But then the custom of the Tour came to an end and the Empire began to change... for the worse, many say.

VALDORIA TODAY

Today, Valdoria stands on a precipice. The events of the next few years will decide its fate.

Degeneracy and decadence hold the Emperor in their strangling grip. Valdorians consider Oron the Conciliator a saintly man but his Tour, which ended in a truce instead of conquest, was the beginning of the end for a custom that had kept Valdoria peaceful and united. The ultimate result of Oron's peaceful gesture is Alric the Unmoved, an Emperor so different from his ancestors that many think he's but a pretender to the imperial blood.

Grossly obese and obscenely lazy, Alric resides in Valdor's Seat, the castle that's the center of government for Valdoria. He hasn't stepped foot from that grand fortress since the earliest days of his reign. But his son, also named Alric, is something else — a broad-shouldered, thick-thewed man who loves war and warfare, the violence of the clash and the company of warriors. Alric the Younger seems, at least in appearance and words, to have stepped out of the sagas of Valdor, and every rumor speaks to the son's intention of returning the custom of the Tour when he rules as Emperor.

The provinces that make up the Empire, especially those on the Frontier, grow increasingly independent. The Duchy of Romnal is the worst offender because of its treaty with Elweir. But that said, the character of the Valdorians, both freeman and noble, hasn't changed. They still faithfully worship the Old Gods, still enforce the rule of law, and still value their freedom above all else. It is to this character that most pin their hopes for Valdoria's future.

SOCIETY

Society in Valdoria varies greatly from place to place, depending on the natural resources of the area as well as the climate. But one thing characterizes all of Valdorian society: every inhabitant of Valdoria is free. Though the nobles rule the land, they rule at the discretion of the freemen who inhabit their land.

Any noble who pushes his people too far will find himself thrown down — and his fellow nobles, even those who have sworn him their loyalty, are more likely to support the freemen than the noble himself. The cultural mores of Valdoria are clear and go without question: a freeman's property is his own; a noble must make his subjects understand why he needs taxes; a freeman has a grave duty to obey his ruler, but a higher duty to his family; and no Valdorian must disrespect his fellow's freedom.

From lowest to highest, the noble titles of Valdoria are: Knight, Baron, Count, Duke, and

Emperor. A knight owes fealty to either a baron, count, or duke (and in the unique situation of knights who belong to the Imperial Guard, the emperor); but barons, counts, and dukes only swear fealty to the emperor. The title indicates the size of the noble's province, not to whom he owes fealty. All rulers are men, and the titles are hereditary, passing from father to son. A freeman might be raised to a knight, usually for valor in battle, and before the end of the Tour, his descendants might rise through the hierarchy based on their own valor in battle. Since the Tour has ended, no new provinces have come into the Empire and no knights have risen to baron, count, or duke. Armies consist of the sons of the nobility (who make up the cavalry) and volunteers from the freemen (who make up the infantry and are usually spearmen). There has never been cause to raise a levy in Valdoria, for each freeman is more than willing to do his duty for his nation.

Valdorian freemen wear tunics that reach the knees and a wide belt around their waists. Those in colder climes like the Heartland wear breeches under the tunics and don cloaks of fur. Nobles have the right to wear a cloak of royal blue, and denote their province with a golden medallion that shows the symbol of their province stitched to the center of their belts (knights wearing the symbol of their lord). The more finely crafted the medallion, the higher the noble's status in his province. This is usually the only jewelry or finery Valdorian men or women wear, though a family might have an heirloom or the like that a family member wears to honor an ancestor. A province's seat of government is the ruler's castle, an impressive stonework that stands atop a mound or hill.

THE LAND

The Empire of Valdoria is vast, and its territory divides itself into three areas: the Heartlands, the lands of the original Empire; the Middlemarch, the lands conquered in the early centuries of the Empire; and the Frontier, the lands conquered after Middlemarch was taken. These areas are discussed below.

The Smoldering Sea

The Smoldering Sea forms the eastern border of the Heartland and Middlemarch, and the southern border of the Frontier. Stretching nearly 1,600 miles from north to south, it's an important part of commerce in Valdoria. Its name comes from the thick coils of steam that waft from the water's surface at all hours and in all seasons. In some places the sea roils like boiling water — and is, in fact, as hot as boiling water. Usually these places of bubbling water, which sailors call "scalds," last only a few days; if sailors' stories can be believed, the snores of Poteidan cause them.

The lore of Valdoria claims the *Drindrish* put some sorcery upon the sea to make it unnaturally warm so it would heat the coastal regions surrounding it. Most stories say the sorcery the *Drindrish* worked was to open gateways to the Nether Realms, and every sailor has heard of a friend of a friend who leapt into a scald because a volup-



tuous succubus appeared just below the waves and tempted him into her arms. The Graecorians, who live in city-states along the eastern shore, have a different story entirely, one that involves strange rents in the sea floor that allow molten earth to flow up from the heart of the world through the labyrinth of tunnels that lies beneath the surface of the land. These same scholars also claim eventually the water will all boil away and the cooling lava will fill up the bottom until there's nothing left of the sea but a vast crater. Most people regard them as fools — learned fools, maybe, but fools nonetheless.

Leading from the Smoldering Sea to the Iceswept Ocean is the Clashing Channel, where floes of ice crash against the high stony cliffs and eventually melt as they float into the warmer waters. Straddling this channel is the Colossus of the South (page 14).

Triremes from both Valdoria and Graecoria sail the Smoldering Sea and trade in the coastal ports. The steams make navigation on the Smoldering Sea difficult, and captains are loath to sail during the dark of the moon because that makes things even worse. Passing through the Clashing Channel is a feat only a madman would attempt — for all intents and purposes, the Smoldering Sea is landbound.

THE FRONTIER

The part of Valdoria farthest from Revanna and the Heartland, the Frontier has grown more independent over the last several centuries. The Duchy of Romnal threw the gauntlet down for the other five provinces, forcing them either to continue on their current slow path to independence or to declare their allegiance to the Empire and make sure Romnal doesn't break off on its own. But Romnal is the largest and wealthiest of the six provinces, and going to war with the Duke would require at least two of the other five to ally against it... which may run contrary to their own rivalries.

Upriver The Worm

Traveling upriver the Worm from Elweir, a barge passes through four of the six provinces on the Frontier: the County of Norland; the County of Sincerre; the Barony of Sacre; and the Duchy of Elan.

THE COUNTY OF NORLAND

Ruler:	Count Wolfing Nor
Capital:	Wolfwold Castle
Resources:	Farming, fishing
Arms/Symbols:	A wolf

Along with Sincerre, the County of Norland has the most to worry about from Romnal's recent actions, since it stands on the Duchy's southern border and is the smallest province in the Frontier. Its rivalry with Sincerre is deep-seated and acrimonious — ten years ago a favorite knight was killed when the Count's hunting party supposedly crossed into Sincerre, and this is only the latest such incident — so a third party would have to get involved before the two Counties allied against Romnal. Also standing in the way is Count Wolfing's ambivalence toward the situation. He feels Duke Lothar would have already invaded if he was going to — the Duke is a canny man and doesn't seem the type to give his opponents time to prepare for his armies' coming. Count Wolfing further wonders if an alliance wouldn't be a better idea than going to war for an Emperor he has never seen.

DRINDRIAN RUINS

The *Drindrish* ruled the whole of Valdoria, but it's no easy thing to find evidence of the glorious cities they inhabited, for the Valdorians have torn down to the very last stone every Drindrian building, monument, spire, or statue they can find. But rumors of Drindrian ruins occasionally make their way through the land. All of the ruins are said to hold great wealth; some are also said to harbor terrible dangers — from sorcerous traps and curses, to dragons that still slumber as they did when Valdor made war on their masters, to terrible demons Drindrian sorcerers bound and then forgot. The stories typically locate the ruins at the bottom of lakes, especially below the surface of the Smoldering Sea, and in the highest peaks of the Oceanshore Mountains. The Towers of the First and Last Sunset on the shores of the Iceswept Ocean are the only ruins known for a fact to still exist, although reaching them is not a task for the faint of heart.

THE COUNTY OF SINCERRE

Ruler:	Count Wolin Toulande
Capital:	Curledhorn Castle
Resources:	Iron ore, farming, fishing
Arms/Symbols:	A ram

Slightly larger than Norland, but far wealthier thanks to the iron ore mines in a spur of the Oceanshore Mountains that form the County's western border, Sincerre has less to fear from Romnal than Norland... but not that much less. But Count Wolin worries more about Duke Lothar's ambitions than his neighbor, and has cursed the day one of his hot-headed young nobles killed Count Wolfling's man. (A proud man, Wolin refuses to make the apologies Count Wolfling demands to even consider his proposals.) One reason for Count Wolin's increased concern about Romnal and its Duke's intentions is that Fortraln, the largest city in the County, was once an independent city-state. Some of Fortraln's inhabitants remember the days before Erich the Last Warmaker's coming — and those long-past days grow more grand and pleasant with each passing year. Rumors abound about a group of rebels called the Fortraln Five who seek to return the city to independence. Though the Count has no proof of this group's existence — let alone proof it's done anything other than "reminisce" about lost glory over cups of ale — he fears a war would give any rebels an opportunity to revolt against his rule.

THE BARONY OF SACRE

Ruler:	Baron Ulrik Esprit
Capital:	Three-Blade Castle
Resources:	Farming, fishing
Arms/Symbols:	A sword aflame

The Barony of Sacre, on the south bank of the Worm River, is Elweir's main source of ale, barley, and wheat. Though never poor, it has only recently begun to recover from the war over succession fought between the current Baron, Ulrik, and his uncle, Sir Fleming (see page 59). The Barony has slowly spread south past the borders of the Empire and into the sparsely inhabited hills that lie along the shore of the Smoldering Sea between it and Graecoria, and now it's nearly as large as a duchy. Informally, the Baron has accepted these few communities, nothing larger than a village of a hundred hard-working souls, into the Valdorian Empire — an act that lies outside his powers. This expansion was never an intentional gesture of independence from the Empire, but over the centuries it has become hard to ignore.

Baron Ulrik is a Valdorian through and through, and he has struggled with his conscience over this issue and the issue of Romnal's own expansion. On one hand, he sees what Romnal has done as similar to what his own Barony has done — in the absence of the Emperor it's to be expected that the provinces expand their borders when they can. Who are they to deny those poor people outside of Valdoria the benefits of freedom — isn't that what Valdor himself would do? But Elweir's reputation gives Baron Ulrik pause. Secretly, he has sent an emissary to Revanna to put the question to the Emperor, and he awaits an answer. If Romnal

forced Elweir to abide by Valdorian law, Baron Ulrik would probably look the other way unless explicitly ordered to do otherwise by the Emperor.

THE DUCHY OF ELAN

Ruler:	Duke Gimli Lanard
Capital:	High Aerie Castle
Resources:	Iron ore, metalwork, farming, fishing
Arms/Symbols:	A hawk

Wealthy and famous for its metalwork, specifically for the swords its weaponsmiths craft, the Duchy of Elan is the largest of the six provinces in the Frontier. It's also the oldest. It's become the gateway between the other provinces and the Middlemarch, which contributes in a large part to Elan's wealth.

Duke Gimli has no doubt, no crisis of conscience, concerning Romnal's recent actions: they are wrong, through and through. If Romnal's armies invade another province or sign some kind of treaty with one of them (a ridiculous idea in Gimli's mind, since they're all already part of the Empire), Duke Gimli will lead his army against Romnal, crossing whatever borders he must to strike at Duke Lothar. If Duke Lothar accepts Elweir into Romnal, and Duke Gimli's spies report that Elweir remains as lawless as it has ever been, he will go to war with Romnal.

Gimli has already started preparing his nobles to lead the attack and training his freemen in the arts of war. Strategically, Duke Gimli only has one worry: a single pass through the Oceanshore Mountains connects the Duchy of Romnal with the Barony of Baleur in the Middlemarch, and the Duke's spies report Romnal has sent frequent emissaries to Baleur. Duke Gimli worries if the two provinces ally against him, his Duchy will be caught in a pincer and forced to fight on two fronts, one of which will be on his very border. He awaits further word from his spies, but if he comes to suspect an alliance, he is determined to strike first and install a proper Valdorian as the Duke of Romnal.

Lake Veur

This large lake of still blue waters is the source of the Worm River, and has become one of the most important trading centers in Valdoria. Standing on its western shore is Veur Town, which despite its name has grown into a city over the last five hundred years. It's the final destination for river barges traveling to and from Elweir, as well as overland caravans from the Middlemarch and the small ports along the Smoldering Sea that serve as harbors for triremes sailing from the Heartland. Unlike the sleepy towns and hamlets that exist in most Valdorian provinces, Veur Town is a hustle and bustle of merchants and traders. Although it's not nearly as immoral as Elweir, men cannot remain totally righteous in the face of so much coin, and over the centuries the Dukes of Elan have struggled mightily to keep the town from descending into greedy lawlessness. (To a Valdorian, "greedy lawlessness" means a man must haggle with merchants, make sure they're honest, and keep a close watch on his pouch for fear of cutpurses — most Elweirians find Veur Town's

so-called lawlessness laughable.) One way the Dukes have accomplished this is to ensure the town's leader and high-ranking guardsmen come from elsewhere in Elan. Sir Rurik Lanard, the Duke's third eldest son, currently rules Veur Town.

Elsewhere On The Frontier

Only two other provinces remain in the Frontier, the County of Reswick and the Duchy of Romnal. Reswick stands on the shores of the Smoldering Sea. Romnal connects to Elweir not by the Worm River but via a thirty-mile overland route (described on page 55), and that road becomes increasingly well traveled as Romnal becomes more influential on the city.

THE COUNTY OF RESWICK

Ruler:	Count Valdemar Nomme
Capital:	Gullperch Castle
Resources:	Fishing, pearls
Arms/Symbols:	A gull

Standing on the shore of the Smoldering Sea and bordering Sacre and Elan, Reswick is the Frontier province furthest from Romnal and the least concerned with Duke Lothar's ambitions. A small, quiet place, its main source of wealth are pearls that divers fetch from the sea bed not too far from shore. It also serves as an important port on the sea because it's the furthest east a trireme sailing from the Heartland or Middlemarch can reach (although with Sacre's spread southwards along the Smoldering Sea, this probably won't be true in a few years). Its ruler, Count Valdemar, worries far more about Duke Gimli's ambitions than Duke Lothar's. The Counts of Reswick have long felt Elan tries to make passage from Reswick to Veur Town difficult — mainly through lack of upkeep on the roads — to encourage ships to drop anchor in Elan's ports rather than Reswick's. Count Valdemar is certain Duke Gimli would like to use Romnal's actions as an excuse to annex his County.

THE DUCHY OF ROMNAL

Ruler:	Duke Lothar Coeur
Capital:	Lionspride Castle
Resources:	Iron ore, precious metals, metalwork
Arms/Symbols:	A lion

Nestled in the crook of the Oceanshore Mountains, Romnal was the poor cousin of the other Frontier provinces for many years. The rocky hills made for poor farming, and the only livestock were goats and sheep. Despite Valdoria claiming the land, primitive tribes of wild men called the Mountain Lion Tribes still inhabited the highest peaks and made frequent raids on the Valdorians. The Duchy did not lie along the Worm River like the other provinces and couldn't profit from the river trade. All that changed when miners discovered deep veins of silver, and even gold, in the northern mountains a century ago. Since then, Romnal has grown more wealthy, and as it did, its influence on the region increased — and its relationship with Elweir grew closer.

Duke Lothar has shown himself the most ambitious of Romnal's Dukes by signing the treaty with Elweir. He continues to claim that he made the treaty out of the kindness of his heart — he could not turn away from the suffering of the Elweirians at the hands of the Bandit Lords. (And he's been known to add that the Bandit Lords, if they toppled Elweir, could become a threat to Valdoria.) He further claims his intent is to redeem sinful Elweir. As a father would protect a wayward child and patiently teach him the proper way to live, Duke Lothar will safeguard fallen Elweir and patiently teach the wicked city the ways of virtue.

Oceanshore Mountains

These old crumbling peaks that overlook the Gulf of Blue Waters are Romnal's source of wealth, but they also provide a home for the Mountain Lion Tribes, who for centuries have raided the lowlands. In the early days of Romnal, the Mountain Lion Tribes were much less bloodthirsty — they'd simply sneak into villages and make off with a goat or sheep or two. The worst of their crimes was to abduct a young woman from a Valdorian village, but this was rare, and it was even more rare for the tribesmen to kill anyone. However, they refused to acknowledge the sovereignty of Valdoria, the concept of property, and even the Old Gods (although they were happy to allow missionary priests to live with them).

Then miners discovered silver and gold in the mountains, and the Duke delivered the tribes, at least those he could find, a final ultimatum: accept the rule of Valdoria or face the consequences. The tribesmen refused as they had for centuries, and the Duke ordered his nobles to make war on them. Now the Mountain Lion Tribes inhabit only the highest peaks and deepest caves... and have in turn declared war on Romnal. Every once in a while, they strike in the dark of night, massacring whatever miners or villagers they find. Since he sent many of his soldiers to guard the Serpentine River from the Bandit Lords, Duke Lothar doesn't have the men to ferret out the last communities of the Mountain Lion Tribes. His advisors estimate that less than a thousand remain and Lothar has decided they can wait.

Standing only five feet tall on the average, a Mountain Lion tribesman is a primitive man with wild brown hair and tangled beard. He wields weapons of flint and wears a flat "breastplate" made from strung-together bones over his chest; this serves as a sort of poor armor (DEF 3, covers Hit Locations 10-12 on the front). When going into battle or on a raid, he paints his body with zig-zags of ochre pigments. The tribesmen worship a spirit they claim inhabits the mountain range; it takes the shape of a mountain lion when moving among men.

THE MIDDLEMARCH

This long stretch of gently rolling hills and rich farmland lies between the Frontier and the Heartland. The people of the Middlemarch lack both the sophistication and history of the those in the Heartland and the rugged qualities of those in the Frontier — they're a simple, industrious folk who have lived in peace for hundreds of years. Whatever squabbles occur between their rulers are rarely more than a war of words over this natural resource, that border, or some perceived slight. The main industries of the Middlemarch are herding and farming, and in many ways it is the breadbasket of the Empire.

Nine provinces make up the Middlemarch. To most Elweirnians these are little more than names on a map... or, more commonly, names of a type of ale that's unusually good (and unusually expensive). And to the inhabitants of Middlemarch, Elweir might as well be a city in the Nether Realms where demons frolic and play — on the rare occasions that a man from the Middlemarch meets an Elweirnian, he looks for scaly skin and a forked tongue only partly in jest.

The nine Middlemarch provinces are: the Counties of Adelard (famous for its wheat beer), Fierland (famous for its linen), Tiergon (famous for its barley ale), and Wensel (famous for the arrogance of its Count, who claims to be a descendent of Valdor); the Baronies of Baleur (infamous for its suspected relations with Romnal), Cinlerre (famous for its temple to Kypris, where if a person gazes deeply into the reflecting pool he will see his true love... or true enemy), and Monlarre (famous for its apple orchards and brandy); and the Duchies of Piedlyn (famous for the beauty of its women and supposedly the birthplace of Valdor's first mistress, Revanna) and Querlan (famous for its dark ale).

The rulers of these provinces are always eager for word concerning Romnal's most recent actions, but none of them have made a decision on the matter. For one thing, they don't realize the size of the Duke's presence in Elweir. For another, on the surface — Valdoria coming to the aid of Elweir because of the Bandit Lords, and teaching the city about virtue and worship of the Old Gods — the Duke seems to have made the right decision.

THE HEARTLAND

This is the land Valdor and his immediate successors conquered, where the great hero and his followers fought their inhuman masters. Monuments and memorials still stand at some of these places to commemorate Valdor's victories — often a statue of Valdor made from gold melted down from Drindrian finery and coinage — and the nearby residents, proud to live in proximity to such reminders of the past, make sure these monuments and memorials are well tended.

The Heartland is a land of long winters and dense pine forests. It's less populous than the Middlemarch; nearly every family living here can trace its lineage back to the time of Valdor's uprising against the *Drindrish*. The Heartland contains five duchies, each named after one of Valdor's lieutenants, although only three of the families can trace their lineage to those famous men — the other two lines ended during the time of the usurpers, the False Emperor and False Heir, early in Valdoria's history. The capital city of Revanna is independent of these duchies.

The Duchy Of Athael: The southernmost province in Valdoria, the Duchy of Athael is famous for its woodwork and leather goods, especially its finely-worked armor. It's one of the few provinces in Valdoria where fighting still happens on a regular basis, since every winter barbarians from the Crumble cross the ice and raid the towns and villages located near the Colossus of the South.

The Duchy Of Jotoun: Located on the coast of the Western Ocean, the Duchy of Jotoun is famous for the triremes made in the port of Frysia, which is the northernmost port of call for sea captain sailing out of Elweir. It's also the location of Valdor's final battle with the *Drindrish*, which took place on the coast at place now called the Bloody Shore because the pebbles there glimmer dark red.

The Duchy Of Ortella: Located across the Strait of Tears from Drindria, Ortella is still infamous, even after centuries, as being the place where the False Emperor, Friedrich, ruled before he usurped the rightful Emperor. Sometimes stories come from the far southern reaches of this duchy about strange creatures that wash up on the shore. Most people assume these creatures come from Drindria.

The Duchy Of Sigmark: The Duchy of Sigmark, on the coast of the Smoldering Sea, is famous for its many small port towns, and infamous for supporting Friedrich Ortella when he usurped the throne. It's said Sigmarks still hold themselves superior to other Valdorians, for their namesake was Valdor's strong right hand. Whatever the truth of this, Sigmarks are indeed arrogant.

The Duchy Of Vaeland: The only landbound duchy in the Heartland, Vaeland stands along the overland trade route for caravans traveling to Revanna from the Middlemarch and Frontier. It's famous for its Temple of the Seven, the largest temple outside of Revanna, which supposedly was the starting point for many of Erebos's travels in the world of

men. In the period of calamity that followed Valdor's murder, one of its priests claimed he received a visitation from Erebos in which the Far-Traveler promised to return to the world... and when he did, he would once again begin his travels from that temple. Since then the priests have maintained a small lodge, where a fire always burns in the hearth, solely for Erebos's use.

REVANNA

Valdor's first act as ruler was to found a city on the ruins of his birthplace, and he named the city after his first mistress. Now the largest city in the world, Revanna contains nearly five hundred thousand souls according to Imperial records. The wealth of Valdoria flows into it, and it's filled with buildings of clean white stone and broad cobbled avenues. Walking those streets is like traveling through the Empire's history, for monuments and memorials to each Emperor stand at important crossroads. Here in these plazas, each named after the Emperor they honor, statues and friezes commemorate an Emperor's life from his birth to death, cataloguing the important deeds he performed during his reign.

At the very center of the city, standing atop a high man-made hill, is a castle where the Emperor lives and rules. Called Valdor's Seat, it's built on the bones of the tyrant who sent the hero to labor in the gold mines of the Heavenspire Mountains. The city is most famous for its Winter Festival in honor of the Emperors. In each plaza, as the snow drifts down from the sky, players perform plays re-enacting the important events from the lives of the emperors. During the festival, it's said that the population of Revanna swells to almost twice its usual size, with Valdorians coming to the city from all across the Empire and pitching tents outside the city walls.

OTHER LOCATIONS

Two other locations of note lie near Valdoria. Both are exceptional and mysterious places — the locations of stories and legends often told in Elweir.

DRINDRIA

Though the *Drindrish* ruled all of Valdoria at one time and called their empire Drindria, their homeland and the capital of their empire was on a large island southwest of Valdoria's Heartland just across the Strait of Tears. To this day, men call this island Drindria... and stay far from it.

On this island are the Heavenspire Mountains where Valdor worked as a slave and organized his successful uprising. Also here are the Towers of the First and Last Sunset, reputedly the first city of the *Drindrish*, so called because from here the sorcerers of the inhuman race witnessed the first sunset at the beginning of time... and when the world comes to a final end, the last sorcerers will stand here to witness the final sunset.

The histories of Valdoria give no reason for why Valdor never conquered the land. In fact they gloss over his departure from Drindria entirely — in one passage he incites his fellow miners to rise

up against the *Drindrish*, and the history then tells of that glorious battle. It picks up again with Valdor and his ragtag army making landfall on what would later become the southern coast of the Heartland.

What the histories do say is that six hundred years ago Emperor Yorick the Mourned tried to conquer Drindria during his Tour. His armies stormed its northern coast and then attempted to traverse the unnaturally high peaks to reach the Towers, which he planned to pull down stone by stone until nothing remained to mark the passing of the *Drindrish*. Yorick lost his young life in that quest, along with more than half his army, and the remainder then fled the island. Most veterans of the attack refused to speak of their experiences. They would only shiver and walk away from whoever asked the question. Those who would talk answered that many of the men simply died from exposure — the peaks were impossibly cold, as if some spirit of ice were set to guard the Towers. Those who returned from Drindria filled with madness raved about terrible monsters — everything from six-legged wolverines the size of a man that traveled in packs, to legless dragons that tunneled through the ice and seemed to know when the men made camp and when the guard slept, to the ghosts of the *Drindrish* that blinded men's eyes with their magics and forced them to march off cliffs, one right after the other, as if they couldn't hear the screams of their fellows. Whatever the truth of these stories, all Valdorians know to avoid the island of Drindria.

THE WATCHERS

When the *Drindrish* retreated before Valdor's righteous fury, they set sail and fled to the west, supposedly journeying to the legendary lands of Oceanspast. Valdor suspected trickery and entrusted two of his best lieutenants with the task of guarding the nascent empire from the *Drindrish's* return. He dispatched them to two islands that lie off the western coast of the Heartland — the islands now called the Watchers.

The inhabitants of the Watchers are warriors through and through, despite the fact they haven't seen battle in nearly a thousand years. They spend that time training with their weapons and building fortresses. Today, after centuries of such work, storming the islands would seem to be an impossible task.

The rulers of the Watchers are the North and South Marshals, who answer only to the Emperor himself. Rumor has it that since the time of Oron the Conciliator, the Marshals, fearing for the fate of the Empire, created a network of spies on the mainland. Some believe they are concerned about Drindrian influence on the recent history of Valdoria — those inhuman tyrants were supposedly able to live for centuries, if not millennia, and having lost in war now seek to topple the Empire through cunning and subterfuge. Others believe the duty of the North and South Marshals — a duty never written down, only related from one marshal to his successor — is not just to guard Valdoria from the *Drindrish*, but from all threats. Having decided the Empire is in decline, the Marshals have taken it upon themselves to set things right.

UPRIVER THE SERPENTINE



RELIGION OUTSIDE OF VALDORIA

As with Elweir, few people living outside of Valdoria have much use for the gods. If a man of Three Fingers or Graecoria, or even more primitive places, worships any gods at all, they are the Old Gods of Valdoria. This is because one of the most holy missions a priest can undertake is to leave the safety of the Empire and travel the world, bringing faith in the gods to the blasphemous. It's not unusual to find a Valdorian priest in places like the Cold Peaks and Amyklai, and lands like Three Fingers and Graecoria are rife with them. Priests even journey into the Crumble on occasion, where the barbarians take them in if for no other reason than to hear fantastic stories of the outside world. Small shrines to the Old Gods, built by centuries of traveling priests, exist all across the land, and although many of them are in various states of neglect, sometimes a community actually does come to worship the gods of Valdoria.

The only place where there's no evidence of worship of the Old Gods is on the Cynthian Plains, and no one knows what gods the folk of the Blowing Wastes worship (although priests have journeyed there also). As for Ureth-Kalai, it's best not to think what foul and obscene beings those strange men worship.

The lands upriver the Serpentine from Elweir tell a different story than the Valdorians about the history of Sarth. The Valdorians claim the *Drindrish* ruled all of the continent and kept all men as their slaves, but most of the lands outside of Valdoria claim descent from an ancient human kingdom called Elothia. Their tales make no mention of slavery or inhuman masters.

The Elothians ruled all the lands along the Serpentine and its tributaries. Like the *Drindrish*, they were masters of sorcery, but according to the stories it wasn't demons who gave them their power. They say divine spirits inhabited the land — the Black-Scaled Serpent who resided in the Serpentine River, Cynthia who inhabited the Cynthian Plains, Old Widow Ice who lurked in the Cold Peaks, and many more. The Elothian sorcerers could call upon these spirits to cause the land to rise up against their enemies.

The histories are suspiciously silent about the fate of the Elothians. They record several wars fought between them and a kingdom to the west that can only be Drindria, but none of these wars led to the fall of Elothia (unless, of course, there was a final war no historian recorded). This lack of an ending for the ancient empire has led Graecorian scholars to claim Elothia was nothing more than a myth — perhaps, at best, a small kingdom at the fork of the Serpentine and the Crawl Rivers that over the millennia became legendary in stature and power.

The Cynthian Plains

Government:	Tribal
Ruler:	Various Tribal Chiefs
Capital:	None
Language(s):	Elothian
Resources:	Leather goods, pelts, cattle
Arms/Symbols:	None.

Bounded on the west by the Serpentine and in the other three directions by mountain ranges, the Cynthian Plains stretch nearly a thousand miles from north to south and half that from east to west. Thundering across the plains are horse nomads called the Cynthian Riders. No one knows how many Cynthian Riders live on the plains, for strangers are not welcome in their land. By command of their goddess, Cynthia the divine spirit who resides in the plain, a rider must kill any intruder. Cynthia lives in each blade of grass, each copse of trees and bushes, each stream and creek, and each exposed boulder and stony outcropping, so she knows if her people disobey.

HISTORY

The Cynthian Riders claim to be the direct descendants of Elothia, and further claim they're the rightful rulers of that lost empire. How long ago that was, their storytellers cannot say; they only shrug and say, "In the seasons before my grandfather's grandfather rode the plains." The Cynthians have no calendar — a man lives a number of winters, usually between fifty and sixty, and then dies. The Cynthians do not obsess over the march of time and care little about history.

However long ago it was, their goddess, Cynthia, ordered them to tear down the cities and towns of the plains and take to a nomadic life. The spreading of mankind's communities was like a pox on her flesh, and she wished to cure this ailment that disfigured her beauty. Without questioning her command, the riders did as she ordered and have lived as nomads ever since — or at least, so they tell outsiders.

As for what happened to the rest of Elothia (for the empire supposedly spread far beyond the Cynthian Plains), the old storytellers of the nomads have no answer. What matter to them what happens in the world outside of Cynthia's embrace?

The histories of the lands along the Serpentine record times when tribes of Cynthians gathered and rode out of the plains, razing and destroying everything in their path like some plague of locusts. On those past occasions, the riders claim they did as they were commanded by Cynthia. No such horde of Cynthians has left the plains in the last century; the last recorded ride was an attack on Three Fingers 106 years ago. There were some raids of vengeance against the Bandit Lords in Cavren's Demise within the first few decades of their rise, but the Bandit Lords quickly learned to leave the Cynthians alone.

The Cynthian Plains Today

One day on the plains is the same as the next, and the same as it was a year ago. Such has been the life of the riders for time out of mind. Divided into tribes of fifty to a hundred (including both men and women), they wander the plains, migrating north during the winter and returning south during the summer. With them travel their herds of horses and cattle — hairy, long-horned bovines with gawky limbs that outsiders call shaggy-cows. And they still kill any outsider who leaves the sight of the eastern bank of the Serpentine and attempts to travel across the plains, just as they have for countless centuries.



THE LAND

The Cynthian Plains is a flat grassland. The yellow grasses grow as high as a man's waist and waver in the eastern breeze. Weather changes are dramatic and sudden because of the mountains — the riders say the storm clouds lurk and gather on the other side of the World's End Mountains, hiding behind those mist-enshrouded peaks, and then spring forth to ambush Cynthia with their thunderbolts and pounding rains. Dotting the plains are small copses of trees and exposed boulders, and running across it are rocky streams and creeks, the sources of which are up in the mountains that border the plains. An abundance of wildlife inhabits the place — from small rodents, to deer and wild sheep, to prides of tawny-furred hunting cats.

The Cynthians think of the land as a living being (more knowledgeable scholars realize this is how the Elothians viewed the world, although the beliefs of the Cynthians are likely more primitive). The goddess they serve is Cynthia; their feelings about the rest are described below.

The Serpentine

The Cynthians hate snakes — hidden by the high grass, venomous serpents are terror for both horses and children — and in their minds the Serpentine is the god of snakes, or at least the source for all snakes. However, the riders claim some sort of truce exists between the Black-Scaled Snake and Cynthia. People sailing on the Serpentine may travel the plains as long as they never leave sight of the river.

All along the eastern bank of the river are primitive stone dwellings that serve as camps for tribes wishing to trade with the river captains. The tribe takes up residence in the dwellings, keeps a fire lit day and night, and waits for a barge to come up or down the river. There's no rhyme or reason to the times when they arrive — although during the winter, they're more likely to be found further upriver, and vice versa during the summer. Some traders arrange with a tribe's chief to meet at a certain time.

The Desert's Teeth

No rider has ever claimed to cross the Desert's Teeth and journey into the Blowing Wastes, but they all seem to know a desert lies on the other side. The Cynthians think of the Desert's Teeth as man who's been struggling with some mortal ailment for a long time — everyone knows he will die eventually, and they pity him, but they also admire his long struggle to stay alive. The riders view the Blowing Wastes as a plague that wishes to spread across the land and consume Cynthia. Only the mountain range holds the desert in check, and when they travel within sight of those bare peaks and can feel the warm, dry winds blow on their faces, the riders honor the Desert's Teeth with sacrifices.

The Cold Peaks

The Cynthians regard the Cold Peaks with a mixture of awe, disgust, and fear. They admire the snow-capped peaks' beauty, but there's also something in them that makes a rider shiver at the thought of climbing them. When the riders speak of the Cold Peaks, it's almost like they're

unnatural and inhuman — as if they have no place in this world. Sometimes a Cynthian describes the mountains as maggot-ridden, and if asked, further explains that they're like piece of rotted flesh — pull back the top layer and a person can see the squirming and burrowing maggots tunneling through the flesh. Sometimes storytellers speak of Old Widow Ice, the divine spirit who used to inhabit the Cold Peaks, but they always speak of her in the past tense and refuse to tell of her fate.

Because the Cold Peaks stretch to Three Fingers, it's well known among Elweirnians that hillmen inhabit those mountains. Though they're barbarians, they seem little different from other southlands barbarians except that their metalwork is unusually fine. But there are also strange stories of a race living higher in the mountains whose people aren't men. The hillmen, though normally taciturn and sullen around strangers, tell stories of this inhuman race when they've drunk enough ale. They call them the *Gronard* and speak of the battles fought between the two races millennia ago. Furthermore, they claim their ancestors drove the *Gronard* underground, and that hillmen stole the secrets of metalwork from them. If a person can believe the stories, the *Gronard* have steel skin, with finely-wrought wire for hair. They're short, only standing as high as man's chest, but are twice as thick as a man — and often twice as strong. If you listen to the most drunk and addle-witted of the Cold Peaks hillmen, you'll hear that battles still go on between the *Gronard* and hillmen.

The World's End Mountains

When a Cynthian dies, the goddess embraces his soul, taking him to her breast. After a time, she returns the soul to the living and the man is reborn... if his soul is faithful. Those who aren't faithful are banished to the World's End Mountains to fight the war against Long-Winged Death and his servants, the ravens that flock in those mountains. This war has gone on since the beginning of the world, for Long-Winged Death wishes to rain fire and ash down on Cynthia. At times he succeeds, and each Cynthian recalls with dread the high-reaching plumes of grey smoke that rose above the plains in the east and then spread across the blue sky as Death unfurled his wings.

In most of Il-Ryveras, the World's End Mountains are known as the Black Peaks. Though most sea captain shun the area, it's a well-known fact that the volcanic island of Ureth-Kalai lies not too distant from the Black Peaks.

SOCIETY

Cynthian society is tribal. A chief and priest together lead each tribe, with the chief administering to the everyday needs of his people, and the priest tending to the sacred duties. Cynthia herself chooses each priest by sending a sign like a sudden geyser of water or bending the grass against the wind when the child is born. Furthermore, legends claim priests can invoke the spirit of the plain and cause the land to rise up against intruders. But no outsider has witnessed a

priest performing such magic... or at least, no outsider has witnessed it and survived.

The tribe's members chose the chief, and each tribe has different criteria that depend on the tribe's current situation. During famine, a wise old man might be chosen chief; during war, a brave young man; and so on. There is no dishonor in stepping down as chief, and it's not unusual for this to happen if a tribe's circumstances change dramatically.

The tribe owns its herd of cattle communally, but the horses are a different matter. Each adult has three horses, and he may never have more horses than this — colts are given to children or adults who have less than three horses. These horses are like a tribesman's own family, and he treats them accordingly.

Nearly all crimes in Cynthia are punished with exile. Crimes include: spilling Cynthian blood on the plain; theft; or a man not owning any horses. Sometimes a priest simply states Cynthia has exiled the man, usually not because of any crime he committed but for the good of the tribe. The only crime punished with execution — strangulation performed by the victim while two others hold the criminal's arms — is deliberately killing a man's horse.

Relationships between tribes are friendly, but guarded: stealing a horse from a man of another tribe is not considered theft, but proof of a warrior's courage and daring. Strict customs regulate these thefts: a thief can only steal a horse from a man who has more than one (to steal a man's last horse is punished with exile), and once the thief has returned to his tribe, the horse is his and the victim has no recourse but to accept the loss.

On rare occasions, a tribe is possessed by a madness, begins defying the laws of the Cynthians, and must be slain. Cynthians refer to this madness as being *snake-wrapped*, and attribute it to the Serpentine River and the traders who travel it. The priests, acting as the mouths of Cynthia, declare when a tribe has become snake-wrapped.

The Cynthians, both men and women, wear breeches of rough leather with the fur turned inward and a trim left along the seams. Women wear loose tunics; men go shirtless during the summer, but wear similar tunics in cold weather. For weapons they carry slender lances and simple hand axes — these are passed from father to son, and the Cynthians also trade with the hillmen of the Cold Peaks for new weapons. They wear no armor, but carry a shield of woven sticks covered with a tanned hide. Both men and women braid their long hair, and men style their beards into sharp points with animal fat.

RUMORS AND STORIES

Elothian Cities: This rumor, usually accompanied by some ancient map or other, runs as follows: the Cynthians lie when they say they destroyed their ancient cities. They lie to discourage treasure-seekers from invading their land. Those cities still stand deep in the plains, far from the Serpentine, and within them are all the wonders of the Elothians. Other stories say these cities are the last remnants of Elothia, and aren't abandoned at all. The Eloth-

ian lords, ruled by their immortal Queen Cynthia, still reside in these cities, and the nobility of Elothia use the Cynthian riders to guard them from outsiders. Reasons for this isolation run the gamut from descent into decadence, to plans to survive the end of the world, to deep sorcerous study.

The Face Of Cynthia: At the very center of the plains, the land gradually rises to form a high mound. On that mound stands a circle of standing stones. The riders call this place the Face of Cynthia, and here the spirit of the plains can take human form and interact with her worshippers. The story goes that Cynthia sometimes calls a favored young man from one of the tribes, visiting him in his dreams and informing him he must leave his tribe and journey alone to the Face. There he meets the goddess, and she grants him whatever he wishes. Most tribesmen, when faced with the preternatural beauty of the goddess, choose to couple with Cynthia — but it's said she'll grant any wish at all if a man can keep his wits about him. If there's any issue from the coupling, Cynthia delivers the child — half-mortal, half-divine — to one of her priests to be raised as a Cynthian by leaving the child in the grass outside a priest's tent. Just as few outsiders believe in Cynthia's existence, fewer still believe the stories of the Face of Cynthia.

Three Fingers

Government:	Anarchy masquerading as oligarchy
Ruler:	High Lord (none for over two centuries)
Capital:	None
Language(s):	Valdorian, Elothian
Resources:	Lumber, wheat
Arms/Symbols:	Antlers on a green field

Just beyond the Nylsen Forest, the Crawl River flows into the Serpentine. The Serpentine River continues to the southeast, narrowing as it passes along the southern end of the Cynthian Plains before continuing on into the Cold Peaks. It becomes impassable to barges some two hundred miles beyond this fork because of sharp rocks that lie just beneath the river's surface. Few captains choose to journey upriver the Serpentine past the Nylsen Forest though; instead they turn their barges onto the Crawl and make their way southwest into Three Fingers.

Also called the Lands of the River Lords, Three Fingers is named after the three main rivers that run through the area: the Crawl, the Mad, and the Green. Though an important trading partner with Elweir, the River Lords have been in a constant state of warfare for the last two and a half centuries, ever since the last High Lord died without an heir. In addition to its natural resources and its location between Elweir, Graecoria, and Amyklai, which makes it an important trading center, Three Fingers has become a good place to hire battle-tested marines to guard a barge and a land where mercenaries can always find work.

HISTORY

In 774 VA, the last High Lord, Furland Glade, died a bloody death when three of his Lords ambushed him in his bedchamber as he bathed. Though the rebellious Lords had already agreed on how they would divvy up Three Fingers among themselves, they changed their minds soon after the assassination and went to war with each other. Joining the war was the young Roderick Laddle, who claimed to be the rightful heir, and two other Lords who took the opportunity to declare their independence from the High Lord. The nineteen other River Lords all soon found themselves allied to one of the six warring lords, and the land descended into chaos. None of the original lords who declared war survived more than a decade or two, but the war they started lived long after them. It's no longer fought over who will be the next High Lord, though. Now it's a matter of survival.

THREE FINGERS TODAY

The war between the Lords to decide who would rule Three Fingers never ended. It's become the status quo, and an incomprehensible tangle of truces, marriages, and alliances keeps the land from becoming a charred battlefield where only the corpses can find a home. Battles still break out between individual Lords, but because of the truces and alliances, these battles rarely end up embroiling more than one or two other Lords. They're typically fought between professional soldiers and mercenaries rather than levies raised from among the commoners. No place in Three Fingers is truly safe, let alone stable — to the Elweirnian river captains, it seems a new port replaces each old one every time they journey up one of the three rivers.

Most of the pitched battles in Three Fingers don't affect the common folk overmuch. More of a problem for them are the bands of lordless soldiers and out-of-work mercenaries who become bandits, or sometimes take over an area and declare themselves its new rulers. Usually some Lord or other takes care of these roving bands of marauders... eventually.

No one in Three Fingers esteems lordship anymore, so Lords often face usurpers and the threat of civil war. Everyone in Three Fingers knows that what qualifies someone for lordship isn't birth or personal qualities, it's how many armed men he can bring to the field of battle. As the saying goes, "if you don't like him, don't worry — there'll be a new Lord in a few years to collect new taxes." It's as if lordship were like the weather.

Despite the thinly-veiled anarchy that truly rules Three Fingers, life goes on. Elweirnian captains still come up the Crawl to trade with local merchants and those from Graecoria and Amyklai.

THE LAND

Three Fingers is fertile farmlands and pasture carved out of a forest of pine, oak, and maple. Interspersed with farms and pastures are orchards where people grow apples and cherries. Few cities exist, but villages and towns often stand no more than a day's travel apart, with farms in between.

The Crawl is the largest of the three rivers that runs through Three Fingers. At its source, Lake Worgon, is the city of Ottersham where a Elweirnian river captain seeking goods from Graecoria travels.

The second largest is the Green River, a cold, fast-flowing river formed by melt-off from the Cold Peaks. Before the Green River enters the hills there's a large trading post called Ice's End, where a captain goes to trade with the folk of Amyklai or the hillmen of the Cold Peaks.

The third and smallest of the rivers is Mad River. It runs through the center of Three Fingers, and the fighting between the River Lords has been the worst along it. The inhabitants barely have time to rebuild their razed homes before another battle takes place, and over the decades Elweirnian river captains have come to shun it. There are few more appetizing targets for out-of-work mercenaries turned bandit than a slow-moving barge, and since the river is no more than a hundred feet (15") across, bandits can even swim the distance if desperate enough.

SOCIETY

The one advantage of such a war-torn land in a state of constant upheaval: if a man doesn't like his station in life, he can leave and start again elsewhere. Strangers are common in the towns and villages in Three Fingers, and any man traveling alone or in a small group — meaning a man not traveling with a large band of armed men filled with ill-intent and sneering with lust and greed — is greeted with a friendly (if cautious) wave and a smile. The people of Three Fingers have learned not to question a man's past too closely. Many have tragic tales to tell of lost farms and lost families, so it's become courtesy not to ask questions and dredge up those awful memories.

Even better for more adventurous souls, a person need not be born into the nobility to become a lord. He must simply become skilled with a weapon and find other men willing to follow him. With these fighting men around him, he has as much a chance of becoming a River Lord as someone with noble blood. This describes the humble origins of many of the current River Lords (see below), who are little more than opportunists who found themselves leading large bands of warriors.

The people of Three Fingers are rough-and-tumble (all of them have learned to protect themselves to some extent) but jovial — almost as if the death that surrounds them drives them to find great pleasure in the slightest joke. Even before the war started between the River Lords, the people were fiercely independent; over the last two centuries, they have only grown more so. They love a good song almost as much as they love a cup of good ale; Three Fingers is famous for its bards, who are almost as good with their blades as they are with their lutes and harps.

The Lords

There are currently seventeen River Lords ruling in Three Fingers. The strongest of these is Lord Roke, who rules the western shore of Lake Worgon (including the city of Ottersham). He can trace his lineage back to the last High Lord and idles away his days concocting plans to make himself the new High Lord. A pragmatic and cunning man, Roke realizes that these are only fantasies; he'd have a better chance of returning the gods to the world. In truth, he counts himself lucky to have a stable port where river captains can tie up their barges and trade their goods.

The other sixteen River Lords are at best petty rulers whose authority extends only as far as their sword arms reach. The most notable of them include:

Dhormac Redhand: An Amyklai soldier who came to Three Fingers seeking work as a mercenary and ended up a Lord. He decided the Lord he worked for was a weakling and a fool, and took both his land and his life with his swift-swinging axe. Although crude and ignorant, he has great charisma and inspires fierce loyalty in many of his men.

Ensher: A noble born, Lord Ensher holds his family's ancestral lands through guile and treachery as much as military strength. His army is small, but he wins battles through careful preparation beforehand... including the assassination of enemy leaders and other such trickery. People say that even if you make alliance with Ensher, remain alert for his spies and poisoners.

Havlock: An old man who's survived over two dozen pitched battles, Lord Havlock is a clever warrior and skilled tactician. He's been grooming his eldest son, Gelbar, to take his place, but by all reports Gelbar hasn't even half of his father's skill or bravery.

Graecoria

Government:	Confederation of independent city-states
Ruler:	The Voice Of Graecoria, Aristofanes Akilieos
Capital:	None
Language(s):	Valdorian
Resources:	Wine, olive oil, craftworks
Arms/Symbols:	A golden laurel

The gods are gone, and while most people just shrug apathetically, or with despair, only in Graecoria have the people eagerly replaced the gods with reason, logic, and scholarship. Graecorians claim the gods, and to a lesser extent sorcery, kept mankind from attaining its potential, since man relied on divine inspiration and intervention rather than his own intellectual prowess and inventions. It's fallen to the Graecorians to show the rest of mankind what they can accomplish with the tools of reason and logic.

HISTORY

The Graecorians claim their confederation of city-states is a simple evolution of reason, resulting from applied logic. Their cities were first villages, then became towns as the population increased, and finally grew into cities. With each step, the sophistication of the people increased, until now they stand at the height of civilization.

Eight hundred years ago, in 352 VA, the great scholar Saphokles argued that the city-states should present a united front to foreign powers, and that by doing so, they would all benefit. The rulers of the city-states debated the issue, and sensibly enough — because they used the tools of logic and reason, a Graecorian is quick to point out — they agreed Saphokles's idea was a wise one and formed Graecoria. A ruler elected by majority of the city-state's leaders would occupy the position titled the Voice of Graecoria for a term of ten years. Saphokles was the first Voice.

GRAECORIA TODAY

Graecoria today is a peaceful place where shepherds tend to their flocks in the rocky hills, vintners raise their grapes and make their wine, and scholars teach their students in the cities' forums, quadrangles, and symposia. The beauty of its sculpture is unsurpassed on Sarth; only monuments raised through sorcery in the ancient past surpass the elegance of the statues created here. Graecoria's architects and engineers create marvels that seem like magic to outsiders, but the Graecorians are quick to claim they are achievements any man could accomplish given the proper training and talent.

THE LAND

Graecoria spreads along the rocky hills and low mountains standing on the eastern coast of the Smoldering Sea. The unnaturally warm currents of that sea keep Graecoria temperate all year around. While the Graecorians raise sheep, the land makes for poor farming; their only significant crops are grapes and olives. They depend on Three Fingers for most of their other food — an uneasy situation.

SOCIETY

Graecoria consists of seven city-states: Arethusa, Daphrae, Iphygen, Hella, Maryssas, Mysenni, and Nossos. Including the inhabitants of the surrounding area, a city-state's population usually numbers somewhere between twenty and sixty thousand people, although only a tenth of them live in the city proper. A tyrant rules each city-state, and he's advised by an assembly of patricians (citizens of the city-state elected by their peers to represent them). Only men who own land and are native-born Graecorians are citizens. Below citizens are women, foreign residents (including Graecorians from other city-states), and men who don't own land. On the bottom rung of the hierarchy are slaves, usually bought in Three Fingers from Elweirnian captains or soldiers of Amyklai (who on occasion sell captured barbarians).

The people of Graecoria wear woolen robes and tunics, and don fur cloaks during the coldest months of the year. Their hair is thick and curly, ranging from deep black to dirty blond, and they're usually shorter than men elsewhere. Proud and arrogant, they take haughty views toward other people, to whom they feel superior in nearly every way.

The Voice Of Graecoria

Elected by the majority of the Tyrants, the Voice of Graecoria represents the seven city-states' interests to foreign powers, primarily Valdoria and various River Lords. The position holds little actual power, but if a foreign realm threatened Graecoria, the Voice would become the Tyrant of Tyrants. There is more than one story about a Voice attempting to convince a River Lord to orchestrate an invasion so he could seize power, but nothing has come of these conspiracies (except the plotting Voice's assassination).

RUMORS AND STORIES

Not all is peaceful among the scholars of Graecoria. While arguments, even heated ones, are common, the recent founding of the Cult of the Ancients is something no right-thinking Graecorian countenances. Of course, as much as a Graecorian would deny it to an outsider, not all his countrymen are right-thinking.

Founded six years ago by the architect and engineer Arkimedes, the Cult takes as its central premise that the Graecorians are not the first race of men to explore the wonders of reason and logic. Claiming to have found a set of scrolls that details an ancient culture called the Alinoi, Arkimedes proclaimed that the next step for Graecorian science is to meld its knowledge with the arts of sorcery. By so doing, the Graecorians can craft marvels not seen in the world since times most ancient.

The bitter debate over the Cult began four years ago when Arkimedes gave a public display of the sorcery he had recently mastered. He caused the waters of the Smoldering Sea to rise up, taking the form of a giant man. The Cult of the Ancients found a sponsor in the Tyrant of Mysenni, and just beyond the city's walls laborers are constructing a huge bronze statue, three times the size of a man. Arkimedes claims that when he finishes the statue, he'll bind a spirit of fire into the furnace at its heart so the statue will move under its own power thanks to its arcane system of internal gears and levers. So far the conflict concerning the Cult of the Ancients has been confined to scholars, but if Arkimedes succeeds and the Tyrant of Mysenni adds a colossal statue to his army, the other Tyrants are likely to become concerned.

Amyklai

Government:	Hoplocracy
Ruler:	The Lord Marshal, Karlevi
Capital:	None
Language(s):	Elothian
Resources:	Pelts, ivory, metalwork
Arms/Symbols:	None

Amyklai stands between the northern lands and the barbarians of the Crumble, a scattering of ice-choked islands lying in the Iceswept Ocean. While outsiders refer to the villages and small towns in this area as a nation called Amyklai, in truth Amyklai is the name of a truce and the army that resulted from that truce.

HISTORY

Since time immemorial, the barbarians of the Crumble had ravaged the towns of Amyklai. Every winter the barbarians came across the ice to steal food and women while killing men and children wherever they found them. During the calamities that followed Valdor’s death, the winter didn’t end with the spring — instead it went on and on, and the populace feared it would never end. Adding to their fear was the fact that the barbarians continued to raid as long as winter went on, unlike in the past when they would return to the Crumble as the weather warmed. The towns and villages banded together to protect themselves from the barbarians who came further and further north with each passing month, and this led to the establishment of Amyklai.

The truce named over a hundred wide-flung towns and villages who agreed to donate every fourth child born in their community, whether man or woman, to an army called the Amyklai (“band of defenders”). This army would become a society within the larger society. It would be self-sustaining because it could raise and hunt food during the warm months. When the winter came it would stand against the barbarians, shielding the communities named in the truce.

The children given to the Amyklai were trained in the arts of war from their earliest days — even the games they played would emphasize martial skills. They had no family but the Amyklai. Any child who didn’t find a place in the army by his eighth year, whether because of lack of discipline or physical skills, was expelled and allowed to return to his home village. After several generations passed, the Amyklai became a fixture of the region, and every year stood brave and unyielding before the barbarian raiders.

AMYKLAI TODAY

No society could have such a powerful army in its midst without that army coming to rule the land — and over the last nine hundred years, that’s exactly what happened. The Lords Marshal, the highest commander in the Amyklai, realized it requires more than strong arms and sharp weapons to defend the land from barbarians. A Lord Marshal must make sure the land isn’t consumed by infighting and that the inhabitants have enough food to eat — never a sure thing in the harsh clime of the land south of the Cold Peaks — and other necessi-

ties. But the rule of the Amyklai is lenient; the Lord Marshal rarely delivers outright commands to the villages named in the truce. The towns and villages can organize their own governments and take care of their local concerns however they see fit so long as it doesn’t jeopardize themselves or their neighbors. The primary concern of the Amyklai is keeping the barbarians of the Crumble from ravaging the towns, and to a lesser extent, keeping the towns under their care from fighting each other.

THE LAND

The land of the Amyklai is harsh, for it occupies the frigid lands between the foothills of the Cold Peaks and the flat icy wastes of the furthest south. Winters are long, with snowfall for five or six months of the year, and drifts blown by cold winds can reach as high as a man’s head. The growing season is short; the inhabitants grow winter wheat, potatoes, and other hardy crops. Most food comes from hunting; the Amyklai preserve the meat with salt gathered from the eastern coast. Most families live in sod homes, and the villages and towns have a communal steam lodge made of wood.

The members of the army inhabit a long line of wooden forts standing behind high palisades that runs from east to west, between the southernmost village and the Crumble. These forts form the first line of defense against the barbarians, and they force the barbarians to break up into smaller groups to sneak by the warriors who always stand guard. Scouting parties travel constantly between the forts, looking for the tracks of barbarians (even in the summer). Whenever they see tracks, they hunt the barbarians until either they locate them, or they pass out of Amyklai into lands further north.

The Crumble

If the lands of the Amyklai are harsh, the Crumble is even more severe — it’s almost impossible to believe that men inhabit the area. But live there they do. No matter how many barbarians the army of Amyklai kills in one winter, their numbers seem replenished the next.

During the summer, narrow straits of ice-crusted water separate the small islands of the Crumble, and the barbarians pitch their camps on whatever island they ended up on when the ice broke. They hunt seal, caribou, and other animals for the duration of the warm season. When the freeze begins again, the ice grows thick enough for the barbarians and their sledges to cross, and the Crumble becomes a single icy land. Then the barbarians follow the caribou to the north — where they come upon the villages of Amyklai and decide killing men and stealing their food is easier than hunting.

The barbarians are capable of primitive blacksmithing. They wield large axes and primitive swords with curved tips designed only for hacking. They wear thick hides and pelts which serve both to keep them warm and as protection from weapons. The sledges of the barbarians are made of bone and wood, and a single white-furred bear pulls each sledge. No one knows how the barbarians tame these bears, who are fiercely protective of their owners.

SOCIETY

A hetman governs most villages. Some larger villages and most towns have a council of elders instead. All men are equal, because there's little to elevate one man above another — no one in the Amyklai is wealthy. Resources are communal, because only by working together can a community survive the long winter.

The army is a rigidly-structured organization composed of the best-trained warriors in Sarth. Of all the known lands in Il-Ryveras, only Valdoria could challenge Amyklai with hopes of winning a war, but that's because the Valdorian army outnumber the Amyklai twenty-to-one, and warriors of Amyklai fight as skirmishers, not as a single army. One on one, the average Amyklai warrior can easily defeat the average Valdorian soldier.

Both men and women fight in the army, and by the age of twelve, a child knows what weapon he'll use for the rest of his life — sword, spear, or bow. Once his instructor chooses the weapon, a child receives a small tattoo in dark blue ink on his forehead denoting it. Then he spends the next four years training every day with the weapon until he becomes its master. At the age of sixteen, the child is given a choice: he may leave the army to wander the world, or remain at home and assume his duties immediately. There's no shame in leaving, and if he so chooses, he takes the surname "Alone" and leaves Amyklai. He may return home at any time, and most wanderers do — those who never come home have often found their death in their travels. If the child chooses to stay, the commander of the child's fort assigns him to a company, and the child takes the first name of his immediate superior as his last name.

There are five ranks in the army: Lord Marshal, who commands the entire army; Marshal, who commands a fort which holds between eight and ten companies of fifteen men and takes the name of the Lord Marshal as his surname; Captain, who leads a company and takes the name of his Marshal as his surname; and Warrior, the lowest rank. Members of the army wear leather or scale armor (or, more rarely, chain shirts) under long fur jackets with deep hoods. The swords they wield are long-bladed with a hilt meant for two hands; the six foot long spears are made of ash with broad, leaf-shaped blades; and the bows are made of horn and can fire an arrow hard enough to punch through a sheet of steel.

RUMORS AND STORIES

The following story is a great favorite in the taverns and inns of Elweir, for obvious reasons, and it concerns a land that lies even further south beyond the Crumble.

According to the stories (and no barbarian of the Crumble has ever denied it, so it must be true!), there exists an island somewhere in the Iceswept Ocean beyond the Crumble. Only women inhabit the island, and they possess a preternatural beauty. They have long cascades of thick platinum blonde hair, upward-sweep-

ing cheekbones, and yellow or lavender eyes. By some magic they are immune to the cold and wear revealing gowns made from a mesh of sparkling diamonds. Supposedly, the young men of the Crumble journey to this island and spend a year with the women. This is considered a rite of manhood among the barbarians, and in this way the women on the island can have children. Some barbarians never return from the island, and it is said that the women were especially pleased with that young man's performance and decided to keep him in their paradisaical land rather than send him back out into harsh frigid wastes.

ELSEWHERE ON SARTH

Two other lands are located on Sarth. They have limited contact with Elweir.

THE BLOWING WASTES

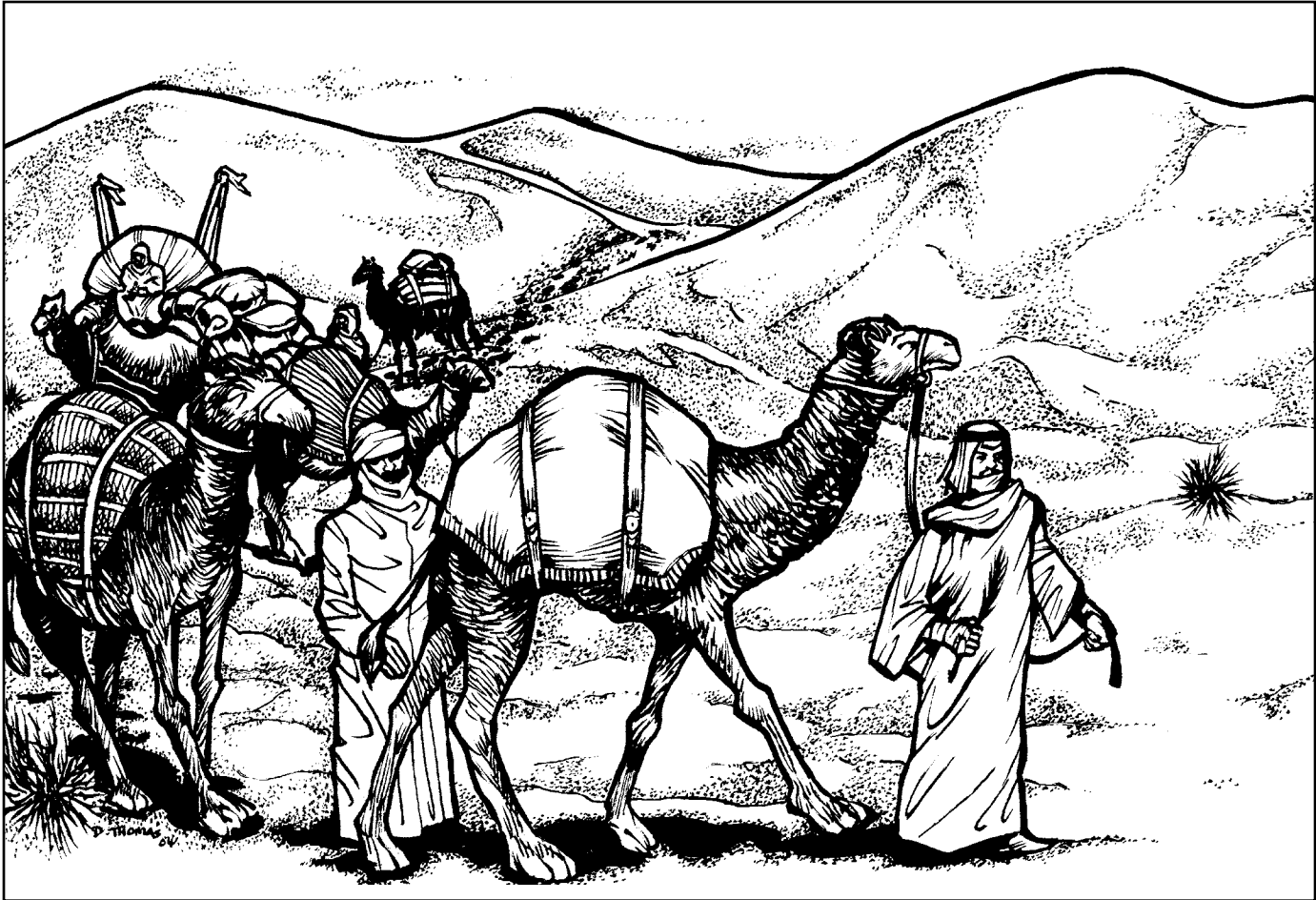
Past the Desert's Teeth to the east of Elweir is the land of the Blowing Wastes. The rocky desert is filled with swirling sands, jagged gulches, eroded mesas, and strangely-shaped outcroppings of stone. The land is harsh, as harsh in its own way as the frigid south, and water is exceedingly rare.

Only one city exists in the wastes — a small place named Olanifer standing right against the mountains. The Howling Pass leads through the mountains from just north of Cavren's Demise to the city. Before the coming of the Bandit Lords, Olanifer was the destination for caravans traveling east from Elweir. Merchants who used to travel there describe it as a place of low, square buildings made from straw bricks covered with orangish-brown clay, where the winds never stopped howling and the sand piled up against the walls in large drifts.

The people of Olanifer are quiet and polite, almost solemn. They live under the rulership of a Sheik. They say Olanifer is the only city allowed to stand in the Blowing Wastes because of an ancient truce they signed with the nomads who wander the Wastes. Called the Tribes of the Wind, these nomads permit no other community to be established, no matter how deep the well or desirable the location, though they won't say why.

The main goods coming out of the Blowing Wastes were gemstones — sapphires, emeralds, and rubies. Where the nomads find these jewels is unknown. Despite the Bandit Lords, the occasional caravan still tries to make it to Olanifer because of the stones.

By all reports, the nomads are lunatics — and not only because they don't know the proper value of the gemstones they trade. They refuse to ride beasts of burden in the desert, and any man who can't walk they leave to die. They have many customs surrounding water: to decline an offer of water or to spill water, even accidentally, are both offenses punishable by death. Despite the heat, they drape themselves in loose robes that cover them from head to toe, with only a small slit to see out of.



URETH-KALAI

Every once in a rare while, a black-hulled ship sails into Elweir upriver the Serpentine from the Blue Waters. When it enters Gibberish, a fearful hush descends on the crowded wharves as every man, woman, and child turns to stare at the ship and gaze on its blood-red sail. These are the ships of mysterious Ureth-Kalai, an island nation just east of Sarth.

A man draped in dark crimson robes with a deep hood pulled up to hide his sallow-skinned face captains each of these ships. The sailors and overseers are tongueless eunuchs, and they have nothing but a blow of fist or whip for any stranger who tries to speak with them. At the ship's oars are slaves covered with welts from the lash — and round oozing sores, shaped as if made by the sucking bite of some over-sized leech, the result of some unknown form of punishment no sane man wishes to learn more about. The slaves wear glazed expressions and have slack mouths as if the overseers have beaten all personality and intellect from them.

The ships of Ureth-Kalai rarely have goods to trade. Their captains purchase slaves, narcotics, and exotic goods, paying with strangely-tarnished silver coins. The robed men have no love for hag-

gling, instead paying nearly any price a merchant asks. Despite this evidence of wealth, even the most daring criminals are unwilling to sneak aboard Urethi ships to see if there's anything worth stealing. Every thief has a story of a horrible curse descending on anyone who steals from an Urethi, and every Urethi captain is said to be a sorcerer of terrible power. It is further said that not even the pirates of the Maggot Isles are foolish enough to attack an Urethi ship.

As for the island of Ureth-Kalai itself, no foreigner has visited it and returned to tell the tale. The sea captains say: "If the Urethi want to trade, they'll come to you. If you go to them, you've only one cargo the Urethi find worth buying and that's the lives of you and your crew. And the Urethi don't pay much coin for lives." There's one port visible from the sea on the northern end of the island. The sea captains call this port Raven-shaunt, for flocks of *something* with black wings can be seen taking flight from high-reaching towers of glossy black stone, and every captain hopes they are only ravens. The island is volcanic; plumes of ash and spews of lava can sometimes be seen reaching high into the air, as if the land itself rebelled against the presence of the Urethi.

ACROSS BLUE WATERS



While the waters of the Western Ocean are tumultuous and storm-tossed, the Gulf of Blue Waters is tranquil and makes for easy sailing. Its calm waters, so blue as to be almost turquoise and so clear they shine with reflected sunlight during the day and moonlight at night, lie between the two main continents of Il-Ryveras: Sarth in the south, Pelosa in the north. On this northern continent lies Abyzinia and a host of lesser kingdoms, nations, and tribes.

Abyzinia

Government:	Magocracy/Bureaucracy
Ruler:	The Witch-Queen, Zenobia T'numbra
Capital:	Sri Addis
Language(s):	Abyzinian, High Abyzinian
Resources:	Craftwork, farming
Arms/Symbols:	Hawk in flight

A brief glance at the ancient history of Il-Ryveras reveals that vast empires, the might of which depended in a large part on sorcery, once ruled the world. These sorcerous empires — Drindria and Elothia being the most well known — are long gone from Sarth, but such is not the case on Pelosa, where Abyzinia still stands.

Abyzinia is the last of these great empires. All the rest have faded into history, toppled in the sweep of millennia, but in Abyzinia's capital of Sri Addis the Witch-Queen still rules, relying on her sorcery to maintain her power. Abyzinia is a nation out of the past, the oldest kingdom in the known world; it has a reputation for sophistication and cruelty, wisdom and ruthlessness, knowledge and decadence.

HISTORY

The Abyzinians claim their kingdom was founded at the beginning of time by a man named Lnaren who was a stranger to the land — not a man of Sarth, but one who came from a different world entirely. The histories are clear on this point: he was a mortal man (though a powerful sorcerer), not some supernatural being... but he came from outside this world.

Lnaren did not stay in his new kingdom long. He taught his heir the arts of sorcery and then departed for lands unknown, never again to visit the kingdom he founded. By the Abyzinian Reckoning, that was 8,127 years ago.

Compared to what the stories say about Drindria and Elothia, the Abyzinians have been a peaceful people throughout the kingdom's long existence, more interested in trade than the

glories and plunder of war. Perhaps this lack of martial spirit allowed them to survive while the other two empires fell into oblivion. The histories do tell of minor battles fought at sea with the *Drindrish* — heroic tales with Abyzinian sorcerer-nobles from the legendary Cult of the Black Sigil standing in the prows of ships, using their magics to guard them from the ravages of dragon-riders — but for the most part the history of Abyzinia is one of peace, marked by bloody civil wars of succession and small uprisings from among the large slave population.

83 VA: The World's Death Rattle

The Abyzinians care little about the death of Valdor, which took place in 82 VA (7186 AR). While an Abyzinian might find the stories of Valdor's feats and prowess entertaining, he still has a hard time believing Valdor led an army of lowly slaves against the glorious and mighty *Drindrish* and won. The Abyzinians respect the sophistication and learning of few cultures, and none in the modern age, but of Drindria they have a respect that borders on awe.

Nor do the Abyzinians care about the Old Gods of Valdoria, whom most claim turn their backs on the world in these years. The Abyzinians, if they can be said to have any gods at all, honor the four Infernal Princes — not out of any love and devotion, but in hopes of avoiding the evils those demons cause.

But like the rest of the world, the Abyzinians mark the years after Valdor's death as a time of upheaval and change for the worst. Great calamities and catastrophes shook the kingdom. A plague of demonic locusts came buzzing out of the Ylsythen Jungles in the east. In clouds towering hundreds of feet high, the unnatural locusts moved across the lands and consumed not just the plants and trees, but also the flesh from animals and men, leaving in their wake only bones stripped bare of meat. The People of the Night came storming out of their mountains to raid the northern border of Abyzinia. Earthquakes opened great rents in the endless savannah to the west of Abyzinia. And waves over a mile high sped across the Blue Waters and crashed on the coast, pulling down the buildings and docks of the kingdom's port cities.

Abyzinians refer to this time as the world's death rattle. Just as a man, sliced open so his blood runs out onto the ground, goes into convulsions and thrashes his limbs before he dies, so too the world struggled against its death and was loath to give up its soul, thus causing the calamities that struck all the realms of the world. But just like a

man dying in the dirt, the world could not escape its fate despite its struggles, and as its soul — which the Abyzinians think of as magic and wonder — departed Il-Ryveras, it gave the world one last shake and then laid still, finally dead.

For the next nine centuries the Abyzinians carried on much as they had throughout all of time, but even they could not ignore the changes to the world entirely. Their society had depended on the power of sorcery to protect it from outsiders and, more importantly, keep the slaves their culture depended on in chains. As the sorcery slowly drained out of the world, they found themselves weakening. It was as if a thief had come in the night and stolen the swords from all the warriors in the army, and the Abyzinians worried about their safety in the absence of great magics.

But the Abyzinians have adjusted to the new world. Their nobles turned away from sorcery to learn the arts of sword and spear, and created a new caste of slaves to serve as warriors in their army. These warrior-slaves have many privileges to keep them content with their status; they often work as overseers, guarding other slaves. Despite these changes, more and more slaves escape every year and find their way to freedom in the depths of the Ylsythen Jungles. Some of these desperate men journey to Naraat and the Maggot Isles to take up pirating, but others lurk on the edge of the kingdom, helping their fellow slaves escape and raiding Abyzinian settlements as they may.

In the northern mountains, the People of the Night grow more bold and raid farther south each year. Though magic wanes elsewhere, their necromancy seems much unchanged and just as much a threat as ever.

Across Blue Waters, the Empire of Valdoria has arisen, climbing a stair made from the bodies of the legendary *Drindrish* to attain lofty heights. All Abyzinians know of Valdoria's strange, impossible-to-comprehend customs and its seemingly insane faith in gods who have obviously departed the world. They also know the Valdorians have no love for Abyzinia, for in that ancient kingdom the conquerors of the *Drindrish* see shades of the inhuman tyrants from their past. Abyzinians have watched Valdoria spread easily across the continent of Sarth, and they wonder nervously if that upstart empire will someday turn its eyes across Blue Waters.

Only the savannah to the west seems to hold no threat for Abyzinia. The many tribes of men dwelling there seem content to hunt the gazelle as they have for millennia and make never-ending war on the other tribes there. Their warriors still take prisoners and still sell these prisoners to Abyzinian slavers.

1005 VA: The Crowning Of The Witch-Queen

Bloody civil war had always marked the succession in Abyzinia, and 1005 VA (8108 AR) saw only the latest in a long history of savage battles to determine which magus would be the next Sorcerer-King or Witch-Queen of the kingdom.

Long ago, all claimants to the throne came from the Cult of the Black Sigil, to which sorcer-

ers of noble birth belonged. The days of the Cult passed long ago, for there were too few sorcerers to fill its ranks after the death of the world, and it faded into history. But Abyzinian tradition still dictates that only a sorcerer can rule the land, and the most recent civil war marked the first time an outsider attempted to take the throne of Abyzinia.

Ilign Maleinia claimed to come from the land of Orlik-Sil, a kingdom no one had ever heard of. Whatever his origins, Maleinia's sorcery was without a doubt powerful, and he brought with him a mercenary army gathered from across the world with men even from far-off Amyklai standing in its ranks. For three years he fought against the other claimants to the throne: Zenobia T'numbra and her uncle, Zaid T'numbra, both of whom were Abyzinian nobles, and Razi Simbaktu, a man of common birth but powerful sorcery.

In the end, Zenobia won the war for the throne, first slaying Simbaktu in a sorcerous duel, and then killing her uncle on the field of battle. She used treachery to defeat Maleinia, paying his mercenaries a fortune in gold to betray him at a crucial time. Maleinia disappeared after this defeat; a bounty still stands for his capture or head.

ABYZINIA TODAY

Much as they have always been, the Abyzinians concern themselves more with trade than warfare, the gods, and other less practical concerns. They're considered the most sophisticated and elegant of people, and the goods their craftsmen make fetch high prices nearly everywhere — even Valdorian nobles of the Heartlands value Abyzinian goods. Their merchants purchase the raw materials for these crafts in foreign ports, bringing them back to Abyzinia, and then traveling abroad again to sell goods ranging from soft, well-woven fabrics to the finest jewelry.

The Witch-Queen Zenobia T'numbra still rules Abyzinia, but though her physical appearance is ageless and still beautiful — Abyzinians are wont to claim she is the most beautiful woman in the world — she begins to succumb to madness. This is a matter-of-fact affair for the Abyzinians, as madness is the usual end of their sorcerous rulers. They say no mortal can balance the obligations of ruling a kingdom with his obligations to otherworldly powers and remain sane for long. Zenobia's public appearances become increasingly less frequent, and when she does make an appearance, it usually ends with her raving and demanding blood and souls to feed the demons she trafficks with for the good of the kingdom. It's only a matter of time now before she dies — perhaps taking her own life, perhaps having her soul dragged down into the Nether Realms by tittering demons.

Normally an Abyzinian would have little concern about this matter, for this is how the kingdom has gone for thousands of years and it always survives the upheaval. But the fact that a foreigner played for the throne in the last succession worries them. The Abyzinians are cosmopolitan, but the idea of an outsider wearing the crown makes them uneasy.

THE LAND

Abyzinia stretches across the southern shore of Pelosa from the grasslands of the Endless Savannah to the Ylsythen Jungles in the east. Its most ancient documents claim an area almost twice as large as most mapmakers show the kingdom. Most of “greater Abyzinia” is the Ylsythen Jungles (a deep and impenetrable area of high-grown trees and choking underbrush filled with dangerous animals which no man or kingdom could truly claim to rule), and the Nightlurk Mountains, where the People of the Night live (see below).

The cities of Abyzinia are elegant beyond human ability to craft — many of them come from before the world’s death rattle when the Abyzinians had recourse to magic. The palaces are open and airy, because Abyzinia is even hotter than Elweir, and wide eaves shield broad windows from the frequent rainfalls. Impossibly high towers mark most of the cities; wide balconies run all up and down their length, and these serve as the homes for the wealthiest of the nobility. Most of the buildings are made of ebony wood, hardened (so they say) via magic and decorated with carved flowers and vines. The rooms are sparsely furnished with floors covered in elegant rugs and walls hung with tapestries.

The people of Abyzinia are a handsome race. Tall and slender, they have dark eyes, dark hair usually worn short, and skin tones ranging from deep brown to purplish-black.

The Endless Savannah

The Endless Savannah is simply called the savannah by most. It stretches for hundred of miles between the Nightlurk Mountains in the east and the al’Tarabi Mountains in the west until it ends in the forests of the Desolate Coast. Inhabiting the savannah are an uncountable number of small tribes. Each of these tribes has its own name, but their society and culture are often similar with minor, but important to them, variations from one to the next. They all speak the same language, which the Abyzinians call Tribespeak, but as with their customs, each tribe has a dialect it considers the proper way to speak the language. If a merchant intends to trade with a tribe and keep his head attached to his shoulder, he had better know that tribe’s dialect perfectly.

The tribes are hunter-gatherers and usually number between a hundred and two hundred warriors. A tribal warrior wields a slender eight foot long spear and a short sword with a leaf-shaped blade sheathed on a leather strap that hangs from his shoulder. Both of these weapons are made of bronze, with chiefs carrying weapons of steel obtained from Abyzinian merchants. They carry large shields, either oblong or almond shaped, made from hide stretched over wood. Both men and women wear long skirts that hang to their ankles. A skirt’s design, usually intricate patterns of geometric shapes and zig-zags, indicates what tribe the wearer belongs to. Tribesmen live in simple tents of oxhide, and once a tribe has depleted the resources of an area, it picks up and moves... which usually leads to a feud with a tribe already occupying this new area.

The tribes constantly fight among themselves, as they have for thousands of years. Every once in a while a rumor arises of a great warrior who will unite the tribes into one nation, but nothing has ever come of these rumors.

The Nightlurk Mountains

In the northern part of Abyzinia are the Nightlurk Mountains, low peaks of blackish-grey stone where the People of the Night live.

The People of the Night are the ancient enemies of Abyzinia, but despite their antiquity, little is known about them or their culture. They are said to be short, standing only four feet tall, and to have hairless piebald skin, mottled raw pink and sickly brown, that hangs loosely from their bones. Their ears and noses are large and begin to droop as the person ages. Their mouths are said to be wide and filled with jagged rotted teeth that they sharpen for some obscene reason.

From there, the stories about the People of the Night become more fantastical. They live in deep caverns and can see perfectly in the pitch-black depths. They are cannibals who cook up feast of their captured prisoners. They aren’t men at all, but some inhuman race that has survived the millennia... or demons... or the souls of evil Abyzinians striking out of the Nether Realms to avenge themselves on the living.

Two things the Abyzinians do know beyond a shadow of a doubt: the shamans of the People of the Night are powerful necromancers; and the People of the Night will never cease to make war on their neighbors to the south. They rove in bands of twenty to fifty, but over the long history of Abyzinia, there have been times when armies of thousands have descended from the Nightlurk Mountains to terrorize the Abyzinians. The last of these times was during the world’s death rattle, over nine hundred years ago, but despite the centuries that have passed since then, every Abyzinian shudders with dread at the thought of another attack.

Dreadful tales long told in Abyzinia say that high up in the peaks of the Nightlurk Mountains is a vale that’s deathly quiet, and in the middle of that vale is a lake. Named Lake Tah’nees, its waters are pitch black, viscous, and bubble like tar. This lake is the source of the necromancers’ power.

The Ylsythen Jungles

A tropical jungle dominates the southeastern portion of Pelosa. In the west, the Abyzinians have tamed a swath of this jungle and now rule it as a part of their kingdom (although officially they claim the whole jungle as their own). Only two other kingdoms exist in the jungles — Zimaravia and Zothedris, both on the eastern coast of Pelosa. All the area in between is wilderness; only escaped slaves live there.

The jungle makes civilization impossible. The water and humidity rot wooden structures and rust steel, and bringing stone into the jungle is impossible. The density of the trees and underbrush, and the insane rate at which they grow back, prevents men from making large clearings where they can gather in large numbers. The jungle is filled with



dangerous beasts, venomous serpents, insects and other vermin of every variety, and even terrible monsters out of legends. The whole place is unhealthy; plagues and mysterious ailments suddenly and inexplicably strike down those who dare to journey there.

That said, no man who knows and understands the jungle need ever starve. Food is plentiful and easily had, which is why escaped slaves can survive there. Though they may not have much civilization to call their own, they have developed a culture over the centuries, one based on freedom. They live in small bands but consider themselves one people. They call themselves the *Tschonga*, Abyzinian for the Free Men. A chief leads each band, and the members of a band elect their chief, each member with one vote. They can also vote to remove a chief from his position. All men and women have a voice in council and can offer whatever opinion they have, whether bad or good, of the chief's decisions without worrying about retribution. These bands mainly concern themselves with helping other slaves escape and surviving their inhospitable land, but each one dreams of someday toppling Abyzinia and bringing freedom to all the slaves in the kingdom.

The Coastal Cities

There are three main trading ports along the coast of Abyzinia, each at the mouth of a river. The most important is Y'Sathor, on the Uloni River, which is nearest to Elweir. It claims to be the largest city in the world. The buildings nearest the harbor and river stand on poles sunk into the muddy ground. To an Elweirnian, Y'Sathor seems like Giberish spread out over mile after mile of land.

The other two cities are Ethia at the mouth of the Shalona River, and Chenti at the mouth of the Duroño River. Located between the Y'Sathor and Chenti, Ethia is a port sea captains often skip during their journeys — while it's important to trade within Abyzinia, there's little to be bought here that can't be had for a better price in Y'Sathor or Chenti. Chenti is famous for the abundance of slaves available in its markets and the cheap grains from the large plantation farms further inland.

SOCIETY

Abyzinia's entire economy rests on the backs of slaves. Legends say that once sorcery provided for the livelihood of the realm, but as sorcery faded from the world, Abyzinia had no choice but to rely more and more on slaves, until now even the rank and file of its army consists of slaves.

Slaves row the barques across the Blue Waters, work the mines in the foothills of the Nightlurk Mountains, clear back the underbrush that encroaches on settlements in the Ylsyth-ern Jungles, work the large farms that sprawl across the southern part of the savannah, labor as porters on the docks in the coastal cities, provide manual labor for artisans and craftsmen, serve as household servants in the homes of even the poorest commoner, and perform many other duties. No law protects them — they are only chattel, their living conditions dependent entirely on the predilections of their owner.

The rest of society is divided between nobles and commoners. The main difference between the two is commoners must work to make a living, and nobles can spend their day at whatever pursuit

strikes their fancy. The commoners make up the ranks of the sea captains, farm owners, inn- and tavernkeepers, artisans, and the like. One must be born into the nobility — no one ever rises to the rank — and each noble can trace his family back for millennia. Only three professions are deemed suitable for a noble: sorcery, war, or diplomacy and government. Since sorcery is such a rare talent nowadays, most nobles who choose to do something with their life take up war or politics. From these come the officers in the army and the chancellors and ambassadors in the government. A vast bureaucracy of these nobles runs Abyzinia, which is why the madness of the sorcerer-kings has little impact on the realm as a whole.

The noble titles in Abyzinia are:

- *Ato* is a generic term for any member of the nobility. Most diplomats and government officials have this title; it's considered the equivalent of "Sir." The feminine of *Ato* is *Woizero* (equivalent to Dame).
- *Bitwoded* is given to chief office holders in the Abyzinian bureaucracy, those who act as advisors to the ruler. Its closest equivalent in Elweir is the Royal Exchequer, the Portmaster, and so on.
- *Kenyazmach* is a military rank given to commanders of a hundred warrior-slaves.
- *Gerazmach* is a military rank given to commanders of a thousand warrior-slaves and ten *Kenyazmachs*.
- *Dejazmach* is given to the warlord of Abyzinia, who command all the armies; its equivalent is Lord Marshal.

To denote sorcerers the suffix of *-litora* is added to the title, so for example: *ato-litora* or *dejazmach-litora*. These stand slightly higher in station because of their sorcerous talents. For someone speaking Valdorian, all titles above *Ato* are given the honorific title "Lord." The title for the sorcerer-king is *Ras-litora* (and for witch-queen, *Rasa-litora*).

Abyzinians of both genders wear long skirts usually dyed deep red or blue, but other colors are not unheard of. The skirt is worn draped over one shoulder and reaches the ankles. The nobility wear much finer clothing; revealing gowns made from cloth-of-gold and silvery fabrics are common. Both men and women often wear jewelry and other adornments made from gold and silver — but unlike their counterparts in Elweir, who tend to wear so much finery it becomes gaudy, Abyzinians are never anything less than elegant.

There are two languages spoken in Abyzinian. Nobles and commoners alike speak simple Abyzinian. High Abyzinian is the formal language of the court, used only when addressing the Witch-Queen and recording official documents. High Abyzinian is the original language of the land, but only the nobles still learn it.

Naraat And The Maggot Isles

Government:	Hereditary monarchy
Ruler:	King Harisham Phoon
Capital:	Port Haven
Language(s):	Gibberish Pidgin
Resources:	None
Arms/Symbols:	A white ship on a black field

There's a riddle told among Elweirnian sailors: what's the difference between a Naraatian and a pirate of the Maggot Isles? The Naraatian pays taxes.

Separating Pelosa from Sarth is a wide strait called the Middle Passage that connects the Western and Eastern Oceans. Scattered across the Middle Passage are the Maggot Isles, small rocky areas of land that serve as a haven for pirates. The islands are desolate places, but a few of the larger ones have palm trees and springs of fresh water, and on them pirates lie in wait for ships sailing the Blue Waters.

The king of Naraat claims all of the Middle Passage and its isles as his domain — but few, if any, take his claims seriously.

HISTORY

Founded only fifty years ago, Naraat is the most recent realm to arise in Il-Ryveras. King Harisham is its second ruler — his father, King Gorlinny, founded the nation on the largest of the Maggot Isles. Gorlinny was an infamous pirate captain who controlled a fleet of ten ships, but most felt at the time he must have lost his wits when he founded a nation and crowned himself king.

Pirates have dwelt in the Maggot Isles for time out of mind. Civilization is distant from the isles, but not so far that pirates can't sail their ships along the coast and find places to raid or ships to prey on. The isles become more mazy and treacherous the deeper a ship sails into their midst, making them excellent places to hide from angry kingdoms that have decided to exterminate the pirates once and for all.

The pirates have no love for authority, and the idea of a kingdom is not one they find appealing. But Gorlinny was a fierce man — not one to let small matters like devotion and loyalty stand in the way of his ambition. Through force of personality — as well as his own strong arm and large bribes to anyone he thought could best enforce his will — he forged a nation from the pirates. His son, Harisham, inherited the throne in 1016 VA and has continued his father's work.

NARAAT TODAY

Slowly but surely, Naraat is bringing the pirates to heel under their king. Every month more captains come to Port Haven, the ramshackle city that serves as Naraat's capital and harbor, to pledge fealty to the king and add their ships to Naraat's growing fleet. Joining Naraat offers no real benefits to the captains, but the Naraatian fleet has taken to burning any independent pirate it finds in the Maggot Isles. Most captains feel paying taxes is better than dying.

Some more daring — and less law-abiding — captains out of Elweir have even taken to stopping in Port Haven to trade for goods pirated from other ships. Though most outsiders look on Naraat as just another group of pirates, and find the idea of a pirate king laughable, Naraat is a power on the rise. Some think it's only fitting that as the world slides into chaos, a kingdom of lawless and bloodthirsty pirates should rise up to take its place among the nations of mankind — for what people are better suited to the world of today than pirates?

THE LAND

Naraat occupies the largest island in the Maggot Isles, some fifty miles from the coast of Pelosa, and it claims all the surrounding isles as a part of its territory also. Naraat is also the location of the only city in the isles, Port Haven.

The Isles are rocky and barren, and the pirates must depend on booty from ships laden with grain for sustenance. A few of them have small towns where pirates can drop anchor and spend their ill-gotten gains. Most such towns are ruled by a single man, brutally harsh, who has a group of lackeys to do his bidding and enforce his orders. Called chief, captain, or by some other informal title, he typically owns all the grog shops and houses of ill-repute in town — which is to say anything of value on that particular island. Beyond such establishments, there isn't much else in most towns other than maybe a sailmaker and a place to purchase and sell basic supplies like rope and rough clothing. Some of the most infamous of the towns are: Red Jak's, a town run by a former pirate; the Scrape, the oldest town in the Maggot Isles and run by Chief Mockery; and Flimflam, a town run by a "boss" named Old Man Oshandi and notorious for its yearly card game, where a man can stake his life if he runs out of coin.

SOCIETY

Society in Naraat is a rough affair — the strong decide what the law is, and the weak abide by it or suffer the consequences. Most Naraatans think of themselves as falling into one of four groups: the land-dwellers, which includes women, shopkeepers, and the infirm; sailors who man a ship; captains who command a ship; and the king and his royal captains.

The royal captains form a sort of nobility for the land. They're the original members of Gorrinny's fleet, as well as a few later captains who brought fleets (rather than single ships) with them when they joined the kingdom. The only real prerogative the royal captains possess is they have the ear of the king — mainly because both Harisham and his guardsmen know their faces and will permit them to enter the Seaside Palace (actually nothing more than a long hall made of driftwood, stolen lumber, and planks taken from shipwrecks).

All captains in Naraat must pay a percentage of their booty in taxes to the king. The king negotiates the percentage when a captain pledges fealty; it usually ranges from two to five percent, depending

on how large a "gift" the captain brings to the bargaining table. King Harisham knows his captains rob him blind and lie about how much booty they take from foreign vessels, but for the time being there's little he can do about it.

Naraatans come from all over the world, but many of them got their start as slaves in Abyzinia. While some slaves — those who care about their fellow slaves still in chains — try to help others escape, not all of them have the desire to eke a living out of the inhospitable jungles. These slaves travel through the Ylsythen Jungle to the coast of the Middle Passage, and from there join a ship. Others are simply criminals who end up in the Maggot Isles after being chased from every other land; a few are captains from other nations who fled justice in their ships and now make a living as pirates.

Khor

Government:	Hereditary monarchy
Ruler:	The High King, Oleg Grimkel
Capital:	The Hall of the High King
Language(s):	Khorian
Resources:	Pelts, lumber, iron ore
Arms/Symbols:	A crown and spear

Mapmakers can't decide whether Khor is a large island of the coast of Pelosa or a continent unto itself. Most simply think of the place as a snow-bound land far to the north known for its rowdy sailors, who are quick to draw their swords when insulted, and longships — the only men and craft in Il-Ryveras that dare to sail the oceans.

HISTORY

Khorians claim this is the Second World. In the First World, there was a man (or maybe a god) named Khor. He and his sons populated the world, but into this paradise an evil crept out of the Nether Realms. It brought foulness and despoil into the world. The descendants of Khor went to war with this evil, but the only way to save the world was to destroy it and start again.

The current inhabitants of Khor crawled out of the wreckage and ruin of the First World to found a new nation. For countless millennia they believed their ancestors had driven away the evil and recreated paradise, but eventually they set sail in their longships to see what this new world had to offer... and discovered evil had also survived. All across the world they found empires of sorcerers and inhuman races. They realized their ancestors had failed to purge evil from the world. It was petty evil and not nearly so terrible as that which destroyed the First World, but still it was evil. The Khorians were struck with despair.

But Khorians are not a race that gives in to hopelessness. They kept their own land free of these evil races, and when the mood struck them they raided the empires, burning and pillaging wherever they desired.

Eventually the Khorians spread from their island home to nearby lands and founded new kingdoms: one on a smaller island just off the coast of Khor called the Freehold, others in the forests along the northern coast of Pelosa. Over these kingdoms ruled the High King, and in their own rough and unsophisticated way the lands of the Khorians were as great as any other empire in the world. For many centuries all was peaceful, and if a Khorian wished to make war, he gathered a host of warriors and set sail in longships to raid other lands.

But the Khorians were wrong about the Second World. They thought the evil that dwelt in Il-Ryveras a petty thing, far removed from the terror that destroyed the First World. But it was only far more subtle, and it came to Khor in the form of the sorceress, Vylessa the Red, whom the High King took as his bride in the year 289 VA.

289 VA: Vylessa The Red

The High King's son, Bjarni, had abducted Vylessa from a ship sailing the Blue Waters, and she refused to tell her land of origin. During the trip back to Khor, Vylessa seduced Bjarni and convinced the young man to take her as his wife. However, when Bjarni returned to his father's hall, the High King was entranced by the woman's beauty and decided he would take her for himself. To do so, he had Grunilda, his current wife and Bjarni's mother, murdered. Thus began a war that would last nearly a hundred years and give the northern shore of Pelosa a new name: the Desolate Coast.

Outside of Khor, five other kingdoms existed. One, the Freehold, held the island to the west of Khor. The other four were on the coast of Pelosa: Lerwick, Jelling, Breisen, and Riurik. All owed fealty to the High King, for their founders had originally come from Khor. But in this matter of the High King's new bride only the Freehold stood with its liege lord.

Grunilda had originally come from Riurik, and it took up arms against the High King as a matter of honor. The other three stood with Riurik for reasons of their own, but mainly because Bjarni told them his father had gone mad — which his murderous actions seemed to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt.

The first battles were fought between the High King and his son, but soon both were slain and Vylessa took command of the armies of Khor. With a foreign sorceress leading one side, the war grew increasingly bloody, earning Vylessa her sobriquet. Eventually it became clear Vylessa was long-lived, maybe even immortal, for though decades had passed, she didn't appear to have aged a day. The war continued decade after decade, with the coastal kingdoms refusing to surrender despite their horrendous losses. Sometime during the century of war the Freehold abandoned the conflict, but even this did not stop the war. It ended only when all the people of the coastal kingdoms were slaughtered to the last man, their towns and cities pulled down to rubble.

For several decades afterward, Vylessa ruled Khor. Without an enemy, she turned her sadistic attentions on her own people, but in the end this led to her downfall. The histories are unclear, but it seems emissaries from Freehold assassinated her as she slept. The Freeholders feared they would face the same fate as the coastal kingdoms if Vylessa lived, and if it was going to be war, the Freeholders would rather face armies led by mortal men than some undying woman.

But Khor didn't go to war with Freehold. Instead, the Khorians felt as if they'd awoken from some terrible dream. They had killed every last man of the coastal kingdoms, and their own population was decimated. Nearly all agreed Vylessa had worked some terrible magic that had filled them with a red-handed madness during the hundred years of war. Now that she was dead they were free of her sorcery.

KHOR TODAY

Vylessa the Red died in 368 VA, and since then later High Kings have attempted to re-establish the coastal kingdoms. But they have had little success, for few Khorians want to live on a shore where even today the grey waters recede from the beach to reveal ancient skeletons and rusted weapons. The population of the Desolate Coast grows slowly, but has yet to come anywhere close to its numbers before Vylessa's coming.

The Khorians are far less bloodthirsty today than during Vylessa's rule, and more inclined to trade than raid or plunder — although never too averse to raiding for most foreign captains' tastes. The Khorians still sail wherever their hearts take them, and are the only men willing to brave the Oceans of Il-Ryveras. Their longships can be seen in every port in the known world.

THE LAND

The land the High King of Khor rules stretches from the dark forests of oak and ash on the northern coast of Pelosa to the mountains that dominate the north end of the island of Khor. Nearly all the communities — which Khorians call steadings — are located along the coasts, for the Khorians are a seafaring people who are uncomfortable when out of sight of the water. On Khor proper and the Freehold, the steadings are made of stone and gathered around long halls where the chiefs and kings rule. The coastal kingdoms have like communities, but with buildings made of timber.

SOCIETY

Society in Khor is based around the hall of the chief or king, which in most steadings also doubles as the local mead hall. There's little in the way of societal ranking or a nobility, so even chiefs and kings must remain leery of pushing the people too far. Absolute, unquestioning subservience is a quality unknown among Khorians. Slaves are uncommon in Khor; they're usually only found in the halls of kings and the High King working as servants. The people spend the summers raising their crops and building ships, and the men set sail in their longships during the winter to go trading (and sometimes raiding).



The Khorians have no gods. Instead they honor the spirits of their ancestors, with the spirit of Khor and his first sons the most revered of the dead. When a community gathers to honor its dead, the chief or king leads them in prayers and sacrifices of cattle and sheep.

The High King rules Khor itself, and one king each rules Lerwick, Jelling, Breisen, and Riurik. No king rules the Freehold; instead a council of chiefs leads these independent-minded people, who still count themselves the subjects of the High King.

Khorians are a tall people with broad shoulders and hips. They have blond or red hair, and light blue eyes. The men keep their hair and beards long, and often braid both; the women likewise favor long hair, which they braid. Men wear tunics and breeches made of leather and pelts; women prefer long, single-piece dresses made of wool or linen and belted at the waist. Every man among them is a skilled warrior, fierce to fight with sword or axe; they typically wear *cuir boilli* or scale armor and conical helmets in battle.

RUMORS AND STORIES

The Khorians, having ranged far in the world, are famous for the stories they tell... and also for making things up.

Borellia: Far to the north beyond Khor is a land the Khorians call Borellia. They say giants more than thirty feet (5") tall live there. The giants

delight in the company of men, but this is just a ruse to lull visitors into complacency. The giants spend a few weeks fattening up their "guests," then kill them, cook them, and eat them. Khorian sailors also say the giants of Borellia are extremely wealthy — gold is so common that they use it to make household goods like mugs and knives. Best of all, some of the Borellian womenfolk are only a bit taller than a Khorian hero, and beautiful beyond measure. Sometimes a wise, brave Khorian can win a Borellian bride.

The Spine: The Khorians claim there's a series of six small islands off the eastern coast of Khor. Most times of the year these islands are underwater, but for a week during the summer at low tide, the waters recede and reveal the islands. During this time, the High King and his sons make a pilgrimage to the islands. Each of the six is dedicated to Khor and his five sons, those ancient ancestors of the Khorians.

The Wolfwood: The Wolfwood is the name given to the forest on the northern coast of Pelosa. Many ghosts from Vylessa the Red's war still haunt the place. Furthermore, deep in the wood are strange monsters — terrible dragons, large bestial humans (who some say are the last survivors of the old coastal kingdom descended into savagery), and impossibly fierce wolves that can take the shape of a man.

Tharestan

Government:	Hereditary monarchy
Ruler:	Caliph Aziz ibn Anwar
Capital:	Mossalah
Language(s):	Tharestani
Resources:	Farming, fishing, textiles
Arms/Symbols:	A horse rampant

Most Elweirnians think of Tharestan as a single kingdom located on the southwestern coast of Pelosa. In truth it's a loose confederation of realms, of which Tharestan is the largest. In recent decades the confederation shattered because of the vainglorious and arrogant actions of the Tharestani caliph, Aziz ibn Anwar.

HISTORY

For thousands of years a race the Tharestani call the *el'Drinsha*, which most Elweirnian historians believe to be the *Drindrish*, maintained outposts along the coast. Primitive tribesmen roamed the steppes that stretched to the north along the al'Tarabi Mountains. Nearly fifteen hundred years ago, the *el'Drinsha* departed the land, and men slowly but surely settled along the coast. As they did, they gave up wandering to become farmers along the rivers, and civilization eventually followed with the founding of several nations: Tharestan, Varzend, Shaya, and the city of Dalthyr.

Over the years these four separate and independent realms became interconnected by treaties and informal agreements until it was rare for one to take action without consulting the others. Then the old Emir of Tharestan died and his son, Aziz ibn Anwar, assumed the throne.

1017 VA: The Demand For Obeisance

For the coronation of the new Emir, all the other leaders traveled to Mossalah to honor this young man who was now their peer. Toward the end of the celebration, Aziz called the three men to this throne room for a private meeting. There that day were Faysal ibn Habib, Bey of Varzend, Cemal ibn Farid, Pasha of Shaya, and Mukhtar ibn Tahir, Sheikh of Dalthyr. The first sign of trouble to these three men was when Aziz did not descend from this throne to greet them. Instead he gave them haughty looks, staring boldly into the eyes of each in turn, then demanded they supplicate themselves before their new Caliph.

Tharestan was the largest, and easily the wealthiest, of the four realms, but until that moment it had treated the others as its equal. Now this young and arrogant emir was anointing himself Caliph of Tharestan, which would now include their own lands as provinces. The other three refused to bow to Aziz... at which point, soldiers came out from hiding and executed them, starting a war that has lasted until this day.

THARESTAN TODAY

The war goes well for Tharestan. It's almost as populous as the other three nations combined, and its wealth ensures that it can hire mercenaries

(often recruited from Elweir) to fill out its ranks. Two years ago, Shaya surrendered to Tharestan, and the caliph showed his mercy by only executing the pasha and his immediate family rather than putting its entire army to the sword as he had long threatened to. Shaya is now a province of Tharestan, provisionally ruled by the Vizier, Salah ibn Seif.

The Tharestani people love their Caliph and feel he is leading them to greatness and glory. The people of the two remaining lands, Varzend and Dalthyr, consider him a vain and arrogant boy despite his successes on the battlefield, and hate him with a passion that defies words.

Tharestan is large enough that the war has had little impact on its heartlands over the last few years. But bandits and other desperate men rove throughout the land, raiding where there are too few soldiers to protect the people. The most famous of these bandits is al'Raoud (page 30), a friend to the common man and a Shayan who claims to be the last descendent of the pasha. Many outside Tharestan consider him a hero not just because he fights the caliph's armies, but also because he delivers food to the starving and escorts refugees to safety.

THE LAND

Tharestan is an arid steppe, but the rivers that run through it provide the people with fertile farmland. The cities along the coast are grand places filled with airy palaces that hold beautiful gardens within their walls and slender towers topped by onion domes. Mosallah, the largest city in Tharestan, boasts a population of nearly fifty thousand souls; Dalthyr has almost twice that number.

Most Tharestani homes are only one story tall and made from whitewashed mud and clay, with tapestries dividing the single open area inside into rooms to give the residents a modicum of privacy. Away from the rivers communities spring up around wells and oases; here the Tharestani raise horses and attempt to farm the poor lands.

To the north horse nomads ride the steppes just as they have for millennia. Called the *Dezioun*, these hard-bitten and taciturn men often come south and find employment as mercenaries.

SOCIETY

Once all the people of this land were friendly with strangers and loved to hear stories of far-off lands. Now this only applies to the Tharestani. Elsewhere the war has taken its toll, and the people have grown sullen and suspicious of strangers.

The Tharestani have swarthy skin and black hair with sharp features and aquiline noses. The wealthy men wear curled mustaches and goatees shaped into points with fragrant oils. The poor simply keep beards. Both genders wear loose robes.

Though Mosallah is an important port along Blue Waters, the Tharestani know little of seafaring. The caliph has tried to correct this since he assumed the throne by purchasing barques from Abyzinia and hiring foreigners to captain his ships, but so far has seen little success.

THE CITY OF THE APES

Some stories say that in the northern reaches of the Ylsythen Jungle, near the foothills of the Nightlurk Mountains, there's an ancient, vine-covered city filled with buildings of green marble and statues of verdigrised bronze. The statues are of colossal lizard-men with two legs and four arms. They have four slitted eyes and wide maws filled with sharp teeth. Typically each of a statue's four clawed hands holds strange weapons, but some have orbs crusted with gemstones.

Inhabiting this city are tribes of speaking apes. No storyteller goes so far as to claim these apes have the intelligence of men, let alone enough wisdom to build the grandiose city they inhabit, but they all say the apes are far more cunning than other predators — and they have a taste for the flesh of men.

Some bards name the city Gyr-Orlyssa. The apes are said to be the former servants of the strange, reptilian race called Orlyssans, who built it. Some storytellers add in a hushed whisper that the apes were once men, but the Orlyssans transformed them into their current savage shape. What happened to the Orlyssans is unknown... but most people claim that since the apes still guard the city, the Orlyssans must be somewhere nearby...

ELSEWHERE ON PELOSA

Pelosa holds two other realms on its eastern coast. A lack of large ports and the nearness of the Maggot Isles isolates them from the rest of Il-Ryveras. Khorian longships commonly visit them, trade for goods, and then sell them for high prices in Elweir, and sometimes an adventurous — or desperate — Elweirnian captain risks the pirates because the potential for profit is so high.

ZIMARAVIA

Zimaravia produces the finest silks in Il-Ryveras. It's also legendary for its beautiful women, whom sailors say are always willing to spend some time with a handsome foreigner... and those women's jealous husbands or protective brothers, who are always willing to challenge a handsome foreigner to a duel for spending too much time with the woman. The duels are highly formalized affairs. They take place in an arena — a small circle of sand surrounded by risers where the Zimaravians gather to watch the duel. Only members of the leading families can sit on the riser nearest the sand; other spectators filling in the ascending risers in order of importance. All duels occur at the end of the week, and the whole populace delights in a full day's worth of fighting.

A council of eight people, four men and four women, rules the nation. Each pair is married, and each man or woman comes from one of the eight leading families. Together these families form a sort of nobility called the *brishanaga*, and they trace their origins back to when the Zimaravians were primitive tribes living in the Ylsythen Jungle. The *brishanaga* have become strange over the years of the interbreeding, which is why there's a council — if one of the members goes insane, the other seven can keep him in check. Appointments to the council are for the life of the couple — *i.e.*, if the husband dies, his wife must step down, and vice versa — and this, coupled with the madness that seems to possess so many among the *brishanaga*, has led to many assassinations of council members.

Zimaravia's best known city is Rastilla, both its only port and capital.

ZOTHEDRIS

To the south of Zimaravia is Zothedris, a land famous in Elweir for its feathered gowns and exotic perfumes made from the countless blossoms that grow in its gardens. The Zothedrans are an aesthetic people who consider the quiet contemplation of beauty the greatest of pleasures; they can find beauty anywhere and everywhere. Strutting through the streets of its main port, Xerbellia, are flocks of peacocks; a fan of peacock feathers is the nation's symbol. Covering the wooden buildings are blossoming vines, the flowers of which are myriad bright colors, and running down the middle of its streets are long gardens of blossoming bushes. Zothedran wine shops serve a liquor made from blossoms and fruits that despite its sweet taste, perfume-like smell, and strange yellowish-orange color has been known to cause hard-drinking sailors to lose their senses and see visions of other worlds.

Ruling the nation is a caste of men called the *X'hul*. In contrast to the startling colors of feathers other Zothedrans wear, these men wear drab hooded robes of grey. They walk through the cities taking in the sights, and sometimes they put an arm around a person and lead him away. No one knows where they take the person, but the chosen Zothedrans go quietly... never to be seen again.

The Zothedrans are a strange people with many strange beliefs. Perhaps the strangest of these is their story about the first man and woman. They believe the first man and woman grew from a tree, as if they were fruit, and that this tree still exists somewhere in the jungles west of their land. This tree is slow to grow and even slower to bear fruit, but the next time it bears fruit, the fruit will become the new race to populate the world and mankind will finally come to an end.

THE LANDS OF OCEANSPAST

Only the Khorians dare the open oceans, and they claim terrible dangers confront a ship once it has sailed out of sight of land:

—seas of seaweed that tangle the oars and trap a ship, then begin to creep aboard the ship like strangling vines, reaching out with sharp thorns to drink a man's blood

—terrible creatures (called in some places Poteidan's Get) that stand hundreds of feet tall, who have the lower body of a serpent and tentacles instead of arms. Poteidan's Get are said to guard the oceans from human who dare to travel them.

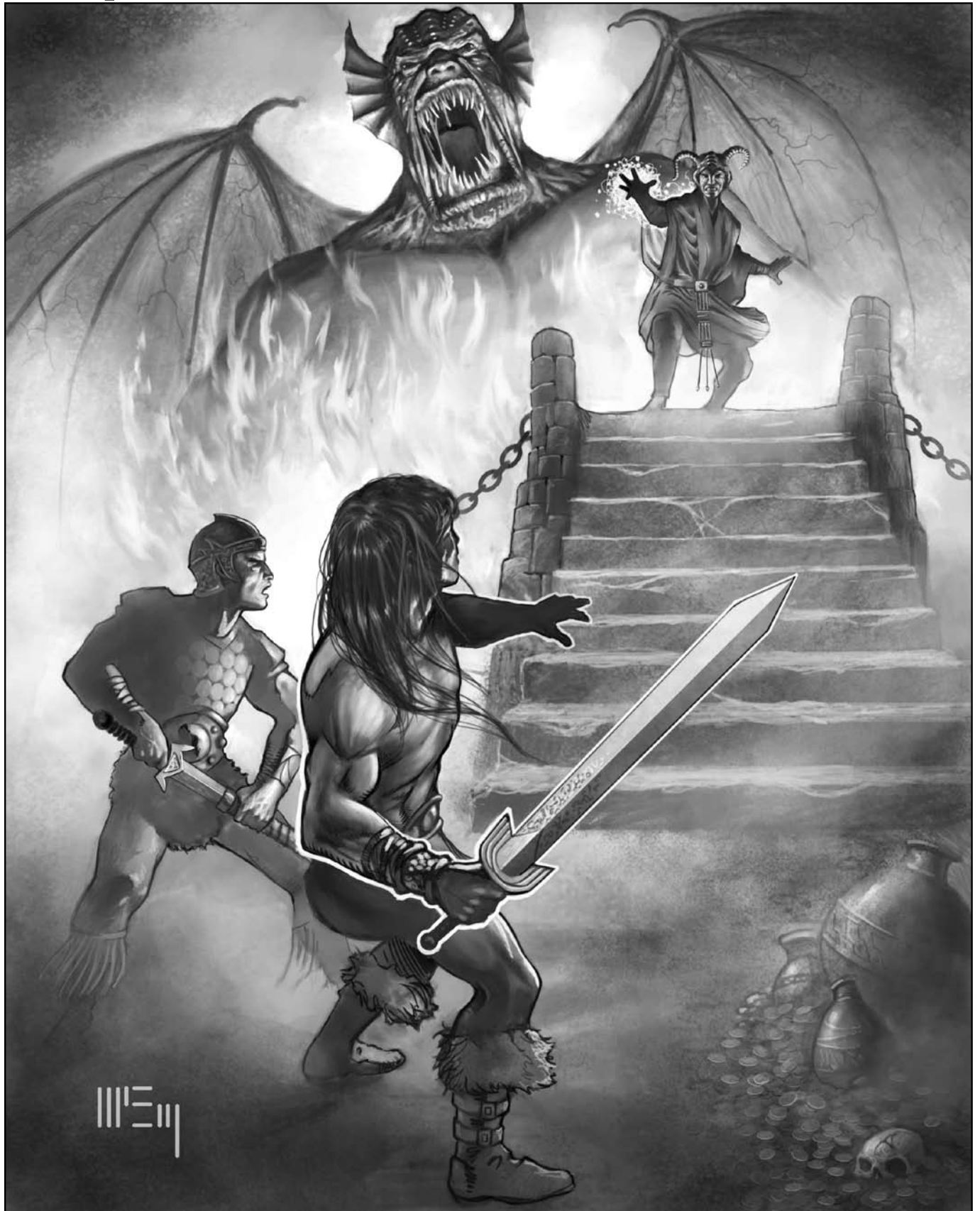
—a wall of water or storms — the stories change with each telling — that crosses from north to south the entire length of the Eastern Ocean.

In addition to these horrors there are whirlpools that suck ships down to underwater cities and underground grottoes, waves that stand miles high and rush across the ocean faster than any ship can travel, and sea serpents that love nothing more than wrapping a ship in their coils and crushing it. Amongst all these aquatic dangers are small islands where creatures and even stranger races of men live. The most commonly told tales are of islands of women just waiting for sailors to come ashore so they can commit various atrocities on their male visitors.

But one thing all Khorians agree on: none of their sailors have ever successfully crossed either ocean to see what lies beyond them. (Unless, they are quick to add, some of the many lost longships made the crossing and decided not to return.)

Many lands have stories about what lies beyond the oceans. Elweirnians call these lands Oceanspast, grouping them all together. Both Valdorians and Abyzinians agree that another world entirely lies on the other side of the oceans. For the Valdorians, this is where the hated *Drindrish* fled and likely still live, plotting their revenge on the men who chased them from their homeland. Abyzinian histories tell that once ships from these far-off lands came to ports in Pelosa and Sarth, and their captains told tales of sorcerous empires, which in power and magnificence rivaled those of Abyzinia, Drindria, and Elothia. For other lands, Oceanspast is simply a place where bards and storytellers can place their most fantastic and hard-to-believe stories — many a far-fetched tale begins with: "Once upon a time, in the lands of Oceanspast..."

chapter three:



CHARACTER IN THE VALDORIAN AGE

SWORDSMEN & SORCERERS

CHARACTER CREATION



A NOTE TO PLAYERS

To better model Swords And Sorcery style play, *The Valdorian Age* introduces some new ideas about character creation, as well as some specific limits on what you can spend your points on. Pages 164-65 discuss the impact these rules have on the game and offer other options for the GM. Before you create a character, you should consult with your GM to confirm which rules he's using.

The world of the Valdorian Age is a Swords And Sorcery setting — the sort of place where quick-witted swindlers, red-handed barbarians, and dark-hearted sorcerers strive for wealth, power, and glory. To ensure that you create characters appropriate for the setting, *The Valdorian Age* recommends some specific guidelines for character creation. This section covers everything from starting Characteristics and Character Points, to new uses for existing Skills, to which optional rules apply in combat, and focuses mainly on the swords part of Swords And Sorcery. The next section, *Sorcery*, starts on page 112 and discusses sorcerers and the magic they wield.

BASICS

Players have 150 Character Points — 75 Base Points + 75 Points from Disadvantages — to spend on their characters. They must abide by the rules for Normal Characteristic Maxima described on pages 28 and 32 of the *HERO System 5th Edition, Revised*.

Unlike character creation for other campaigns, a starting character begins with a starting value of 8 in his Primary Characteristics. During the Valdorian Age few people are competent, and even fewer are talented. This is a world in decline, a time when the end of days seems to loom near, and the Characteristics of the “average” hero reflect that. Those living during the Valdorian Age are less healthy, less intelligent, and even less attractive than people from other times. To claw one’s way out of the mass of incompetence and reach the heights of heroism is a longer and harder climb than in a High Fantasy campaign.

A character sheet, before a player spends any Character Points, looks like this:

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
8	STR	0	11-	Lift 75 kg; 1½d6 [1]
8	DEX	0	11-	OCV: 3/DCV: 3
8	CON	0	11-	
8	BODY	0	11-	
8	INT	0	11-	PER Roll 11-
8	EGO	0	11-	ECV: 3
8	PRE	0	11-	PRE Attack: 1½d6
8	COM	0	11-	
2	PD	0		
2	ED	0		
1.8	SPD	0		
4	REC	0		
16	END	0		
16	STUN	0		

Movement: Running: 6”/12”
Swimming: 2”/4”

About SPD: A player can either spend 2 points to raise his SPD to 2, or accept having SPD 1. He cannot sell back the .8 “unused” points of SPD.

CHARACTER ARCHETYPES

Many types of people find themselves caught up in adventures — during the Valdorian Age stability is a rare and precious thing, the commonplace is something less than common, and if a person isn’t careful, adventure finds him no matter how isolated his environs and cloistered his life. Below are several character archetypes a player can use as springboards for creating his character. These describe the archetype’s personality and background in broad strokes, merely providing a guideline for a character suitable to the campaign that a player can flesh out as he sees fit. Page 122 discusses archetypes for sorcerers (although some of the ones below can work as well).

Listed with each description are Disadvantages appropriate to the archetype. The Disadvantages and their values assume much of the action in the campaign takes place in or around Elweir. This means having a moral code is a hindrance, so it’s an appropriate Disadvantage. It also allows characters to take *Reputation* or *Hunted* Disadvantages that have a plausible impact on the game. If your game isn’t set in Elweir, you may need to change some of the listed values.

No Package Deals are provided, since many of the archetypes are broad ones and the people of the Valdorian Age are a diverse lot. But you can easily adapt many of the Package Deals from *Fantasy Hero* to this setting.

The main thing to keep in mind when creating a character is that True Good, meaning good as a moral absolute, is a very rare thing in the Valdorian Age. The vast majority of people are self-centered and immoral. Some, likely the PCs, are self-centered but also concern themselves with the welfare of their comrades and live by some sort of moral code — although it might be a moral code no institution or religion teaches, just one that acts as a sort of compass to help guide a person through life. The best men and women might help a stranger in need without the promise of profit if his plight is particularly stirring, but almost no one believes he can change the entire world for the better. The heroes of the epics are dead, the gods have turned their back on men, and world is sliding into chaos and eventually oblivion. It's a madman's quest to attempt to improve anything beyond the reach of one's strong swordarm.

THE BARBARIAN

The barbarian grew up in a harsh land, where he and his fellows abide by a strict code of conduct... for to do otherwise is to die. To him, a position of authority or respect is something a man earns, not something he's born into or appointed to. A person not worthy of his position is to be ignored (at best), killed (at worst), and certainly not obeyed. These traits shape the Barbarian's personality, and when he journeys into corrupt and decadent civilization, he finds others don't share this outlook — far from it, in fact. This brings him into conflict with his new environment — but he's far deadlier than the soft-bellied civilized men around him who, thinking him gullible and ignorant, seek to take advantage of him at every turn.

Possible Disadvantages

Enraged: when taken advantage of or swindled (Common), go 8-, recover 14- (20 points)

Psychological Limitation: Moral Code (Common, Strong) (15 points)

Social Limitation: Barbarian (Very Frequently, Minor) (15 points)

THE BEST THIEF IN ELWEIR

Whether this character truly is the best thief in Elweir is open to dispute — but he certainly has a reputation as one of the best. His reputation often gets him in trouble with the authorities because they attribute any and all unsolved thefts to him, and because other thieves challenge him to prove that he's as good as everyone says.

A variation on this archetype is the young thief who wants to earn himself a reputation, but doesn't have it yet. He often commits crimes based less on the financial rewards and more on how daring the deed and how infamous it will make him.

Possible Disadvantages

Psychological Limitation: Must Live Up To Reputation (Common, Strong) (15 points)



Social Limitation: Known Criminal (Minor, Frequently) (10 points)

Reputation: notorious thief, 11- (10 points)

THE DEADLIEST MAN ALIVE

The Deadliest Man Alive has chosen one weapon and made himself its master... but most importantly, he's a killer through and through. To become so skilled he has devoted his entire life to killing, but this doesn't necessarily mean he enjoys his profession. Far from it, in some cases — sometimes circumstances force a man to become good at killing or die. Maybe he even regrets a life spent learning only the skill of taking another's life.

As the Deadliest Man Alive's reputation grows, he finds himself forced to fight simply because some over-eager soul wants to prove himself the deadlier man. Alternately or in addition, he may find the friends and relatives of his past victims pursuing him to obtain vengeance.

Possible Disadvantages

Hunted: Friends Or Family Of Someone He Killed 11- (As Pow, Kill) (15 points)

Psychological Limitation: Regrets How Life Was Spent (Common, Strong) (15 points)

Reputation: deadliest man alive, 11- (Extreme) (15 points)

THE ENLIGHTENED OUTLANDER

The Enlightened Outlander is from more sophisticated and civilized lands — Graecoria or Abyzina, maybe, though sometimes he comes from an isolated place that has few dealings with the outside world, or maybe even a place Elweir-nians think is but a legend. For whatever reason — curiosity, a quest, some catastrophe at home — the Enlightened Outlander journeys out into the world, and when he does so, he comes into conflict with the venal and corrupt in places like Elweir because of his wisdom and moral code. The Enlightened Outlander often finds himself descending into what he considers savagery to survive, and this leads to angst-ridden struggles of conscience.

Possible Disadvantages

Distinctive Feature: “Not From Around Here, Are You?” — Distinctive Dress, Mannerisms, Accent (Concealable; Noticed And Recognizable) (10 points)

Psychological Limitation: Moral Code (Common, Strong) (15 points)

Psychological Limitation: Naive About Outside World (Common, Strong) (15 points)

Social Limitation: Outlander (Minor, Frequently) (10 points)

THE EXPLORER

In Il-Ryveras, much of the land remains unexplored and unknown. Kingdoms and empires are far-flung, with broad areas of wilderness between man's domains. Intrepid souls willing to venture into the wilderlands may find strange, exotic ruins and cultures there. The Explorer may claim he searches for treasure and wealth, but in truth he explores out of curiosity and desire to see the strange and exhilarating sights of the world — sights other men haven't seen for millennia, if they ever saw them at all. In his quest to discover the unknown, the Explorer allows no law or authority to stand in his way. Nor do threats to his life or soul — barbarous tribes, legendary creatures, foul sorcery, evil curses — keep him from penetrating the deepest parts of unexplored territories.

Possible Disadvantages

Psychological Limitation: Driven To Know (Common, Total) (20 points)

Rivalry: Professional (with fellow explorer or explorers, to be the first to make a discovery; Rival is Aware of Rivalry) (5 points)

THE HARD-BITTEN ADVENTURER WITH A HEART OF GOLD

It's a hard world, and only a hard man can make it. The Hard-Bitten Adventure has seen the worst the world has to offer and hardened his heart to survive. But still compassion and pity burn, albeit timorously and well-hidden, in his heart. Sometimes, when he thinks no one is looking, or when he simply cannot ignore such a dire and despairing plight, the Hard-Bitten Adventurer helps the disadvantaged or dispossessed without any thought for himself. He may even jeopardize

his own life to do it. Typically, no matter how cold-blooded and hard-hearted he has become, there's one thing he simply cannot abide — a child orphaned, a woman threatened with death, or the like — and when he witnesses such an event he flies into a rage, throwing caution to the wind.

Possible Disadvantages

Enraged: at witnessing defined form of suffering (Uncommon), go 14-, recover 11- (20 points)

Psychological Limitation: Secretly A Soft-Touch (Common, Strong) (15 points)

THE NOSTALGIC ROMANTIC

Everything was better in the past. The Nostalgic Romantic attempts to transform himself, and often the world around him, into someone from out of history, preferably a hero from the epics the bards sing. Sadly, no matter how hard he tries in this corrupted and degenerate world, sometimes the Nostalgic Romantic must stoop to the level of those around him to get things done — and even stay alive. Sometimes, he's sheepish about the underhanded actions he must take and hopes no one else notices; at other times, he merely shrugs it off and considers those action further proof that once upon a time everything was better. Ultimately it matters not: when the bards write songs about his deeds, they can gloss over those moments, or perhaps even turn events to his advantage. Or so he tells those around him. In his own mind, there's always a nagging doubt he's failing to live up to the past he so admires.

Possible Disadvantages

Psychological Limitation: Attempts To Live Up To Standards Of Past (Common, Strong) (15 points)

Psychological Limitation: Vain (Common, Strong) (15 points)

THE OUT-OF-WORK TRADESMAN

Il-Ryveras is a chaotic world where a man's circumstance can change in an instant. For the Out-Of-Work Tradesman, the world has suddenly taken away his means of making a living, and perhaps his family to boot, and left him with nothing but his wits (and hopefully, for his sake, a sword). Maybe the neighborhood's alderman conspired with the city guard to steal his lease. Perhaps he came from a village that bandits or raiders destroyed.

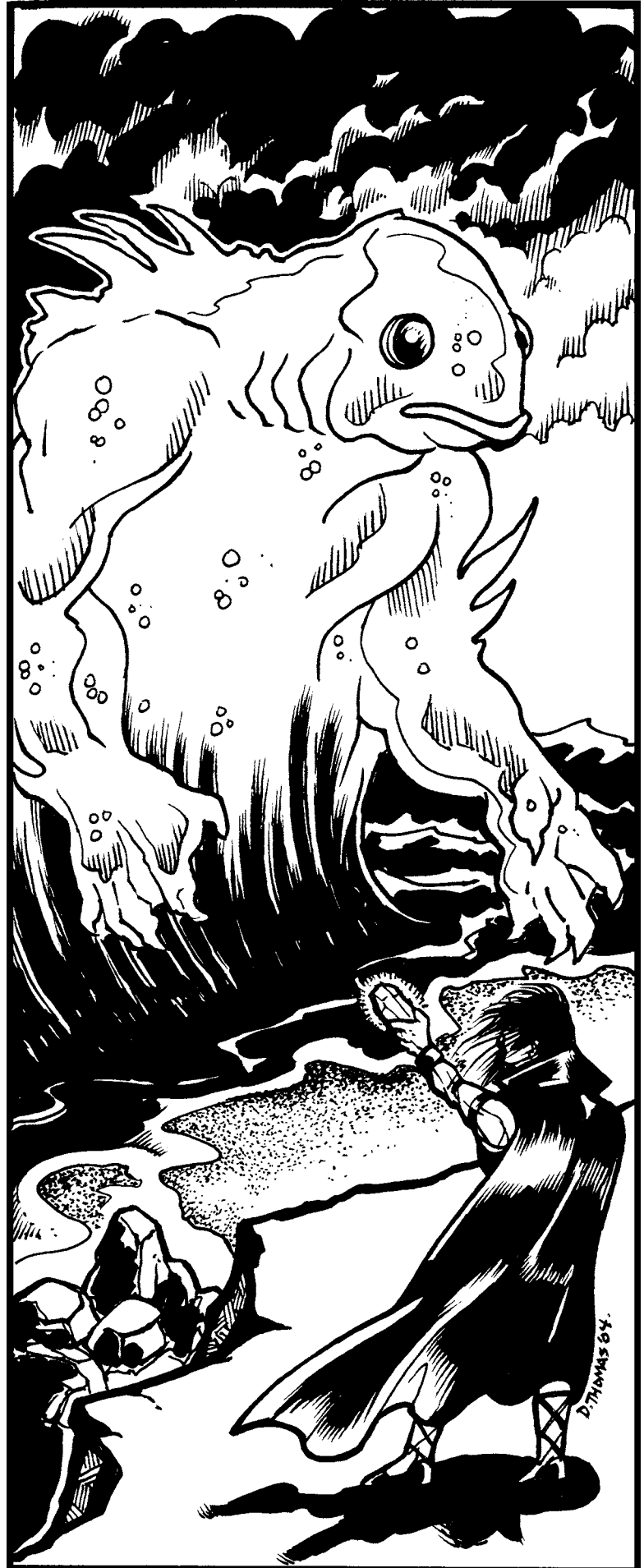
Whatever his past, the Out-Of-Work Tradesman has lived a life; he's now forced to start over even though he's middle-aged. In his mind, he's far too old to take to the road in search of adventure, but he may not have a choice. If he's lucky, he was once a soldier or guard who abandoned that calling to pursue a more peaceful life, and can resume his old ways — for in this world there's always a need for someone with a strong swordarm. Or perhaps he was a thief who gave up his lawless ways and settled down so he wouldn't have to look over his shoulder for the city guard constantly, and he can put his rusty old thieving skills to use. If he's not so lucky, he must learn quickly how to defend himself and earn a living in a hard, unjust world, or else he'll quickly lose his very last possession... his life.

Possible Disadvantages**Age:** 40+ (5 points)**Psychological Limitation:** Haunted By Lost Life (Common, Strong) (15 points)**Unluck:** 2d6 (10 points)**THE SWINDLER**

Quick talk and quicker wits are what characterize the Swindler. He believes in the power of words, specifically *his* words, to accomplish anything he wants. He makes a living convincing others to give him coin, or whatever else he desires, with nothing more than a clever line or two. A Swindler might be a courtesan who believe she can seduce her way out of — and into — any situation, an elixir peddler who wants to get wealthy convincing people to believe in the wondrous properties of the potions he sells, or a bard who believes a well-sung song or well-told story is all he needs to win men's hearts. Whether he has the skills (or goods) to back up his words isn't important, because if a Swindler is any good, his victims will never put his claims to the test. And for the best Swindlers, even if his claims are put to the test, people still believe them rather than the evidence of their own eyes.

Possible Disadvantages**Hunted:** Authorities (Or Those He's Swindled) 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Limited Geographical Area, Capture) (15 points)**Psychological Limitation:** Would Rather Talk Than Fight His Way Out Of Situations (Common, Strong) (15 points)**Reputation:** Ne'er-Do-Well, 8- (5 points)**THE WOMAN IN A MAN'S WORLD**

The city of Elweir is a place where men rule. From the leaseholders and ship captains, to the aldermen and magistrates, to the Prince himself, there are few women in positions of power. Even women who lead one of the Fifty have a position of power only over a household (albeit a very wealthy household), not in the political world. But not all women will settle for being a man's wife or servant. The Woman In A Man's World has determined she can do a man's job — in the case of a PC, most often either be a warrior, a thief, or both — as well as any man, if not better. Maybe she comes from some other land where women are treated as equals or superiors — in these cases, she shares much in common with either the Barbarian or the Enlightened Outlander. Or maybe she comes from the streets of Elweir and simply refuses to accept her "rightful" role. Whichever the case, to be taken seriously in the city, she must work twice as hard — and be twice as good — as any of her male peers.

Possible Disadvantages**Enraged:** when abilities or skills questioned because she is a woman (Common), go 11-, recover 14- (15 points)**Psychological Limitation:** Must Prove Herself Better Than Men Around Her (Common, Strong) (15 points)**Social Limitation:** Woman In A Man's World (Very Frequently, Minor) (15 points)

PACKAGE DEALS

Described below are Package Deals appropriate to Valdorian Age characters.

Elweirnian Package Deals

Inhabitants of Elweir, or those who’ve been in the city a long time, could certainly have either or both of the *Cityfolk* and *Criminal Cultural* Package Deals described on page 45 of *Fantasy Hero*. You can use several other *Fantasy Hero* Package Deals with few or no changes, as described below (page numbers refer to *Fantasy Hero*, not this book):

- Contemplative Priest (pages 55-56): remove the 30 points’ worth of magic, the *Faith* Skill, and the *Devotion To The God And His Purposes* Psychological Limitation (the latter becomes an option). Revised Package Deal: total cost of 31 points with no standard Disadvantage.
- All the Rogue Package Deals (pages 60-64)
- Light Warrior (pages 65-66)
- All the Miscellaneous Package Deals (pages 76-78)

Outlander Package Deals

Elweir is a cosmopolitan city, but not everyone’s from there. Here are some Package Deals for characters from other parts of the world. Each includes a list of standard weapons and armor (if appropriate), but this is only a recommendation. Characters must still purchase all their equipment with starting wealth.

ABYZINIAN MERCHANT

Calculating and cunning, the Abyzinian merchant fancies himself the most shrewd trader in the world. His people have been trading for millennia and were haggling over goods when Elweirnians

ABYZINIAN MERCHANT PACKAGE DEAL

Cost	Ability
4	+4 INT
4	+4 PRE
2	+4 COM
5	Bribery (+1)
6	Languages (6 points’ worth)
5	Persuasion (+1)
3	PS: Merchant (INT Roll)
7	Trading (+2)
3	Traveler
12	12 points’ worth of any Background Skills (especially Area Knowledges)
12	12 points’ worth of Skills from the following list: Acting, Bureaucratics, Concealment, Conversation, High Society, Navigation, Oratory, Seduction, Streetwise, Survival, Weapon Familiarity

Total Cost Of Package Abilities: 63 points
Suggested Weapons And Armor: A dagger and staff.

were living naked in mud huts. He’s seen much of the world in his travels, and few things impress him anymore. Sophisticated and elegant, he’s just as comfortable squatting in the snow in front of a small fire beside a southern barbarian as he is dining at a palace in Gold’s Reside. A character who’s an Abyzinian merchant might be searching for new markets to exploit, or he might have fled from his homeland for some crime he did or did not commit.

BARBARIAN FROM THE CRUMBLE

There are many people in Il-Ryveras the Elweirnians call barbarians, but none are so fierce as men from the Crumble, those frigid lands to the far south. The barbarian from the Crumble has heard the stories of the wealth of the far north and come to investigate those tales for himself. He snuck through the Amyklai, traveling alone or with a small group of his fellows, and after a long journey downriver the Serpentine finally arrived in legendary Elweir. He has little respect for the soft city-dwellers around him, and even less for the city guard. If he doesn’t learn how to disguise his contempt, he’ll find himself pulled down like a proud stag brought low by a pack of wolves.

BARBARIAN FROM THE CRUMBLE PACKAGE DEAL

Cost	Abilities
7	+7 STR
9	+3 DEX
14	+7 CON
12	12 points’ worth of Combat/Penalty Skill Levels
5	AK: The Crumble (INT+2)
6	Navigation (Land) (+2)
6	Survival (Arctic) (+2)
5	Tracking (+1)
1	TF: Sledges
4	WF: Common Melee Weapons, Common Missile Weapons
1	Environmental Movement (Icewalking)
9	9 points’ worth of Skills from the following list: Breakfall, Climbing, Healing, Stealth, WF, Weaponsmith, any Background Skill

Total Cost Of Package Abilities: 79 points
Suggested Weapons And Armor: Heavy Animal Hides (Hit Locations 7-18), Great Axe or Greatsword, Medium Longbow

COLD PEAKS HILLMAN

Inhabiting the Cold Peaks, a range stretching between Amyklai and the Cynthian Plains, the hillmen are a tough, rough-and-tumble people. They live in small tribes, inhabiting homes made of rough-cut stone. In those mountains, they’ve seen strange sights and heard even stranger stories, so a hillman is no stranger to terrors out of the past. Many hillmen come out of their mountains because their homes have been destroyed, either by raiders from another tribe or some much less mundane murderer.

COLD PEAKS HILLMAN PACKAGE DEAL

Cost	Abilities
4	+4 STR
8	+4 CON
10	10 points' worth of Combat/Penalty Skill Levels
5	AK: Cold Peaks (INT+2)
6	Survival (Mountains) (+2)
2	WF: Common Melee Weapons

Total Cost Of Package Abilities: 35 points

Suggested Weapons And Armor: Chain Shirt and Steel Cap, Battle Axe or Broad Sword

CYNTHIAN RIDER

A player character with this Package Deal has been exiled from the plains. Maybe he committed some crime, or he took bloody vengeance for some perceived slight, or he lost his last horse, or the priest of his tribe ordered him to leave because of some command from the goddess Cynthia. Thrust out into a world nearly entirely alien to him where most folk loath and despise him, he has little choice but to sell his sword to the highest bidder.

CYNTHIAN RIDER PACKAGE DEAL

Cost	Abilities
2	+2 STR
15	+5 DEX
8	+4 CON
2	+1 to PER Rolls with Sight Group
10	10 points' worth of Combat/Penalty Skill Levels
5	AK: The Cynthian Plains (INT+2)
2	Navigation (Land)
6	Riding Skill Levels: +2 OCV versus Mounted Combat penalties with all attacks
9	Riding (+3)
3	Survival (Temperate/Subtropical Plains) (+1)
5	Tracking (+1)
5	WF: Common Melee Weapons, Common Missile Weapons, Lances

Total Cost Of Package Abilities: 72 points

Suggested Weapons And Armor: Hand Axe, Light Lance, Small Wooden Shield

GRAECORIAN SCHOLAR

In the academies of the Graecorian city-states they speak much of history, but in the peaceful hills along the Smoldering Sea, scholars can only read about what goes on elsewhere. This character has decided to see the world for himself. Tired of hearing his instructors drone on about the wonders — and the perfidy — of the world outside of Graecoria, he wants to see things with his own eyes.

Graecorian scholars are famed throughout the world for their knowledge and reasoning abilities, so a character with this Package Deal may find employment with a noble who has pretensions to sophistication... if, in fact, the scholar wants such a job. Most scholars found outside Graecoria want to see the world, not the inside of some petty lord's throne room, and rarely stay long in one place.

GRAECORIAN SCHOLAR PACKAGE DEAL

Cost	Abilities
5	+5 INT
4	+2 EGO
4	+4 PRE
3	Bureaucratics
3	Inventor
5	AK: Graecoria (INT+2)
5	Oratory (+1)
5	Persuasion (+1)
3	Scholar
24	24 points' worth of any Background Skills
12	12 points' worth of any other Skills

Total Cost Of Package Abilities: 73 points

THREE FINGERS MARINE

Three Fingers has seen centuries of war, and so is often the place of birth for the marines who protect barges sailing the Serpentine. Maybe the marine started life practicing some other profession, but due to some tragedy had no choice but to take up the sword... or maybe he was born on a battlefield and has known no other occupation. The Marine from Three Fingers isn't the finest soldier in Il-Ryveras, nor the most savage, the most skilled with his weapon, or the most disciplined. But he is a survivor and has honed his cunning to a sharp edge — and developed a healthy respect of plain old luck.

THREE FINGERS MARINE PACKAGE DEAL

Cost	Abilities
2	+2 STR
12	+4 DEX
4	+2 CON
15	15 points' worth of Combat/Penalty Skill Levels
5	AK: The Serpentine River (INT+2)
2	PS: Sailor 11-
3	PS: Marine (INT)
4	WF: Common Melee Weapons, Common Missile Weapons
12	12 points' worth of Skills from the following list: Acting, Acrobatics, Breakfall, Climbing, Concealment, Conversation, Fast Draw, Gambling, Healing, Persuasion, Trading, any Background Skill

Total Cost Of Package Abilities: 59 points.

Suggested Weapons And Armor: Cuir Bouilli Vest and Cap, Medium Wooden Shield, Short Sword, Light Crossbow

VALDORIAN NOBLE

Born to the nobility, a character with this Package Deal has left his home in great Valdoria for some reason. Maybe he's the younger son of some ruler, and with no prospects of inheriting lands decided to leave. Maybe there was a struggle for succession and he was on the losing side (whether his side was on the right of the matter is another question entirely). Maybe he's fleeing some sort of disgrace or scandal. Or maybe, like some missionary priests of the Old Gods, he's set out into the

VALDORIAN NOBLE
PACKAGE DEAL

Cost	Abilities
5	+5 STR
12	+4 DEX
10	+5 CON
2	+2 INT
4	+4 PRE
4	+2 OCV with weapon of choice (typically broadsword)
5	AK: a region of Valdoria (either Frontier, Middlemarch, or Heartland) (INT+2)
3	High Society
2	KS: Valdorian History 11-
2	KS: The Valdorian Nobility 11-
3	Riding Skill Levels: +1 OCV versus Mounted Combat penalties with all attacks
3	Riding
5	WF: Common Melee Weapons, Common Missile Weapons, Lances
12	12 points' worth of Skills from the following list: Combat Skill Levels, Conversation, Healing, Literacy, Penalty Skill Levels, Navigation, Oratory, Persuasion, Survival, Tactics, any Background Skill
5	Fringe Benefit: Member of Valdorian Nobility

Total Cost Of Package Abilities: 77 points.

Suggested Weapons And Armor: Steel Breast Plate, Stud-ded Heavy Leather Skirtplate and Skirt, Broad Sword, Medium Lance

world to bring faith to the godless and law to the lawless. Whatever the case, as a noble he's a trained warrior, and though he looks on many places in the world with disgust, he also has a deep respect for his fellows, for all men are the children of Pythos.

WARRIOR OF AMYKLAI

The finest warriors in all the world are the men raised in the army of Amyklai learn to fight from their earliest days. If one chooses to take the surname Alone and go out into the world, he need never look far for employment in the war-torn and violent lands of Il-Ryveras. The tattoo on his forehead marks in his land of origin and profession.

WARRIOR OF AMYKLAI
PACKAGE DEAL

Cost	Abilities
5	+5 STR
15	+5 DEX
10	+5 CON
4	+2 OCV with weapon of choice (either a sword, a spear, or a bow)
7	Fighting Tricks (+2)
5	AK: Amyklai (+2)
2	AK: The Crumble (11-)
20	20 points' worth of Martial Arts
2	Navigation (Land)
2	PS: Soldier
2	Survival (Arctic)
3	Tracking
4	WF: Common Melee Weapons, Common Missile Weapons
12	12 points' worth of Fighting Tricks, combat-related Talents, Combat/Penalty Skill Levels, and/or Background Skills

Total Cost Of Package Abilities: 93 points

Suggested Weapons And Armor: Chain Byrnie, Dagger, weapon of choice (and possibly other weapons)

WARRIOR OF KHOR

Three qualities characterize the warrior of Khor: a deep wanderlust to travel the seas of the world; a curiosity about what the world holds; and a savage fury when angered that seems preternatural to those not of Khor. A character with this Package Deal has decided to leave sight of the beloved sea and witness what lies landward, in places he's only heard of in stories.

WARRIOR OF KHOR
PACKAGE DEAL

Cost	Abilities
5	+5 STR
6	+2 DEX
10	+5 CON
12	12 points' worth of Combat/Penalty Skill Levels
3	Combat Sailing
6	Navigation (+2)
2	PS: Predict Weather 11-
3	PS: Sailor
16	Berserk Fury (see page 104 of <i>Fantasy Hero</i>)
3	Traveler
12	12 points' worth of Area Knowledges

Total Cost Of Package Abilities: 78 points

Suggested Weapons And Armor: Scalemail Byrnie, Medium Wooden Shield, Battle Axe or Long Sword

SKILLS



Much of what PCs want to accomplish during an adventure requires the successful use of Skills — especially since a sorcerer rarely debases himself (and puts his soul at risk!) by performing simple tasks like opening locks or finding hidden objects. The sections below discuss the specifics of how Skills work in the Valdorian Age. In general all the rules for individual Skills on pages 83-97 of *Fantasy Hero* also apply.

General Rules

The following general rules apply to Skills in *The Valdorian Age*.

NORMAL SKILL MAXIMA

To err is human, and never is that old saying more true than during the Valdorian Age. No one is perfect — and that includes the PCs. In a Valdorian Age campaign characters have a *Normal Skill Maxima*.

Similar to Normal Characteristic Maxima, the Normal Skill Maxima places an upper limit on the level of ability a character can have with a Skill. The upper limit is 13-. To raise a Skill Roll above 13- requires twice as many points (and GM approval). For example, the player of Desdimona, an elegant and well-spoken chatelaine from a noble family, wants to raise her Conversation from 13- to 14-. This costs 4 points, rather than the normal 2.

If a character has a Characteristic that's so high that he acquires a roll of 14- or higher by paying the standard Skill Cost, the cost of the Skill remains unchanged. However, if he wants to improve the Skill Roll, the Normal Skill Maxima rule applies.

Would-be sorcerers take note: Normal Skill Maxima also applies to the various *Sorcery* Skills.

Skill Levels

Since they would provide an inexpensive work-around for Normal Skill Maxima, characters may not buy Skill Levels unless the GM specifically permits them to (which he rarely should). The exception is equipment that provides Skill Levels, such as a set of finely crafted lockpicking tools (+2 to Lockpicking rolls with the *Focus* Limitation).

Penalty Skill Levels

In the absence of Skill Levels, and with the increased cost of raising a Skill above 13-, Penalty Skill Levels become an important way for a character to improve his ability with a Skill (the Valdorian Age setting uses the optional rule from page 67 of the *HERO System 5th Edition, Revised* rulebook that allows characters to buy PSLs to counteract negative Skill Modifiers). They allow a character to learn how to use a Skill in certain situations that ordinarily

hinder people. For a more complete discussion of the different types of Penalty Skill Levels, see the individual Skill descriptions below.

Spending Experience Points

During the course of a campaign, a player may spend Experience Points on one of his Characteristics and as a result increase his Skill Roll. In this case, Normal Skill Maxima still applies, and the player must spend twice as many points to raise the Skill above 13-. Points previously spent on the Skill are not lost; they simply don't raise the roll until the total points spent raises it as per the rules above.

Example: *Sylarin has DEX 17 and Lockpicking 13- — he spent 3 Character Points on Lockpicking, and another +2 points to increase the roll by 1, to 13-. After a few adventures, he spends 3 Experience Points to increase his DEX to 18. That's enough to increase his base DEX Roll to 13-, and his base Lockpicking roll to 13- as well. Since his base roll is now at the Normal Skill Maxima, the +2 Character Points previously spent to increase his Lockpicking roll now have no effect — he still only has a 13- roll with Lockpicking. To raise it to 14-, he'll have to spend another +2 points (for a total of 4 points), per the Normal Skill Maxima rules.*

SKILL MODIFIERS

In addition to the standard Skill Modifiers described on page 45 of the *HERO System 5th Edition, Revised* rulebook, *The Valdorian Age* assumes the GM uses the optional Skill Modifiers for Encumbrance and Injury described on page 83 of *Fantasy Hero*. (Page 152 of *Fantasy Hero* lists the penalties for Encumbrance.) Thus, if you want to create a character who's particularly skilled at something regardless of the effects of carrying a heavy load or suffering an injury, you may want to buy some Penalty Skill Levels.

CRITICAL SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

A result of 3 on a Skill Roll always indicates a spectacular success... and a result of 18 a spectacular failure. Despite all modifiers, whether bonuses or penalties, or the value of the Skill Roll itself, a 3 always succeeds and a 18 always fails.

When a character achieves a critical success or failure, the GM decides exactly what happens (unless the character has the new Talent, *Master Of His Fate*, described on page 109). When deciding, he should devise results to better suit the situation and lend color or conflict to an encounter. If used correctly, a critical success or failure is more than just a really good or really bad roll — it's also a way of adding a twist, or at the very least some color, to the action in the game.

EVERYMAN SKILLS

Everyman Skills vary from location to location in Il-Ryveras. Campaigns taking place in and around the city of Elweir should use the following list of Everyman Skills:

Acting
Bribery
Concealment
Conversation
Deduction
CK: Elweir
Native Language (4 points' worth, no literacy)
Navigation (Urban)
Persuasion
Shadowing
Stealth
Survival (Urban)

VALDORIAN AGE LANGUAGES

Abyzinian
Elothian
High Abyzinian
Khorian
Tharestani
Tribespeak
Valdorian
Zimaravian
Zothedran

Here are some examples and guidelines for critical successes and failures. In general, a critical success or failure has a lasting impact (whereas a normal result for a Skill Roll usually doesn't have an effect beyond the immediate moment) that the character or his comrades benefits or suffers from later. In other words, he doesn't simply succeed or fail and move on — the critical has repercussions that make their effects known at a later date.

Successes

■ The character is so successful, he receives a bonus of +2 to his next use of the Skill, either because he's so confident or has gained some insight into general use of the Skill.

■ The character performs the task more quickly than normal — in other words, he completes the task earlier than expected. Move the time required to complete the task up one step (or more) on the Time Chart. The difference in the time he needed should be dramatic — for instance, the character announces it will take him an hour or so, and he finishes five minutes later.

■ If the situation requires multiple uses of the Skill, the critical success renders additional Skill Rolls unnecessary.

Failures

■ The character fails so badly he receives a penalty of -2 to his next use of the Skill because his confidence in his ability is shaken.

■ The character fails so badly no other PC can attempt the same task. For example, the character breaks his lockpick in the lock, and none of his comrades can make later attempts because he's jammed the lock beyond repair.

■ For Interaction Skills, the character fails so badly, his target believes the worst possible thing — worst, in this case, meaning whatever makes the PC's life more difficult. For example, suppose a PC attempts to use Persuasion to convince a guardsman he didn't rob the merchant. The PC fumbles, and the guardsman believes the PC not only robbed the merchant, but is also the murderer who killed the Prince's second cousin last night.

■ Someone witnessed the PC's failure, embellished the story, and told all his friends. For the next few days, wherever the PC goes he hears people snickering about him. He may suffer penalties on relevant Presence Attacks.

Notes About Individual Skills

Here's some information about how specific Skills function in Valdorian Age campaigns.

BRIBERY

Bribery is an important Skill in the city of Elweir, since very little of note can be accomplished without bribing someone somewhere. Without the *Bribery* Skill, a PC can still make bribes to magistrates and the like — most are happy to take the coin no matter how clumsily it's offered (assuming

there are no witnesses, of course!). But with the Skill, the PC can lower the amount of coin he needs to pay to make the bribe. In general, the better the success, the less he needs to pay. A critical success means the PC doesn't need to pay a bribe at all — maybe the NPC in question believes, whether rightly or wrongly, the PC possesses some dirt on him or the like. A critical failure means something happens that makes it impossible to bribe the NPC — maybe the Duke's Men show up to make sure the law is enforced, or the PC says exactly the wrong thing at the wrong time.

COMBAT SKILL LEVELS

Unlike normal Skill Levels, Valdorian Age characters can buy Combat Skill Levels normally — they may be less competent with more peaceful skills than characters in other campaigns, but they're just as good, if not better, at killing their fellow man. The exception to this is 5-point CSLs for DCV.

DCV Levels

Characters in Sword And Sorcery fiction don't wear much armor and rarely seem to suffer the consequences. Valdorian Age characters can only buy 5-point CSLs for DCV with the Limitation *Not When Wearing Heavy Armor* (-½). If a character wears 15 kg or more of armor, he doesn't benefit from his DCV Levels. He only receives the DCV bonus when he wears less than 15 kg of armor. This helps keep character in armor and those without on a more equal footing when they meet in combat.

A character can purchase Penalty Skill Levels to offset the penalties to DCV for Encumbrance when wearing armor if desired.

KNOWLEDGE SKILL: CITY KNOWLEDGE

City Knowledge is an important Skill for campaigns set in Elweir. Characters can also purchase each neighborhood as a separate CK. To use the Underfoot Path and Overhead Road, as described on page 45, a character should purchase AK: Underfoot Path and AK: Overhead Road separately. See also *Navigation*, below.

LANGUAGES

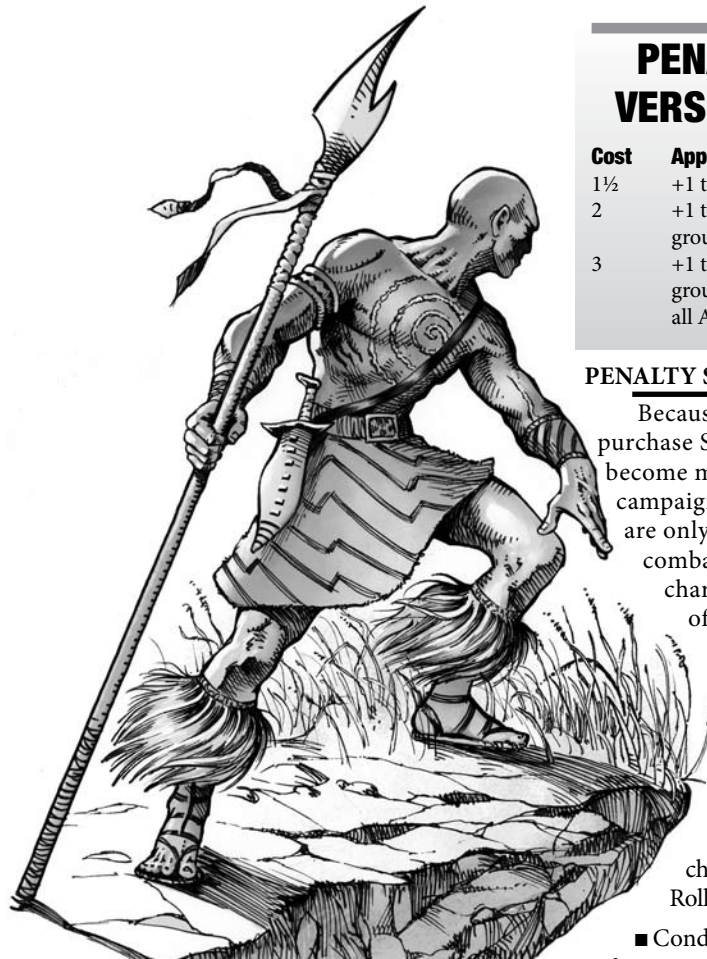
The language spoken in Elweir is Valdorian, the most common language spoken in Sarth. The *lingua franca* elsewhere in the world is Abyzinian. To read and write, a character must purchase literacy. You can find the languages spoken in various lands listed with the place descriptions in Chapter Three (see also the accompanying sidebar).

Language Familiarity

Valdorian and Elothian have 2 points of similarity. Abyzinian and High Abyzinian have 3 points of similarity; so do Zimaravian and Zothedran. All other languages have 1 point of similarity with other languages.

Argots

In Lowtown and Gibberish, many speak in argot, a form of other spoken languages that is distinctive enough that characters have to buy it as a Language in rules terms. The two common argots in Elweir are Gibberish Pidgin and Lowtown Cant.



Gibberish Pidgin: Gibberish Pidgin borrows from innumerable foreign languages and nautical terms. Its range of expression is generally limited to things a sailor cares about. For 1 point a character understands it perfectly well, but if a character is fluent in either Valdorian or Abyzinian, he can get the general gist of what's being said in Gibberish Pidgin. (In game terms, Gibberish Pidgin has 3 points of familiarity with Valdorian and Abyzinian.)

Lowtown Cant: This is a slang made purposefully confusing to ensure outsiders can't understand it. It evolves from month to month, constantly changing to make it impenetrable to those who aren't familiar with it. It costs 2 points; spending those points allows the character to quickly pick up on the new slang even if he's been out of the neighborhood for a while.

NAVIGATION

A new form of Navigation for campaigns in the Valdorian Age is *Urban Navigation*. It represents a character's general knowledge of how Valdorian cities tend to be arranged. It allows a character to make his way through a city, even one he's never visited before, without becoming lost (or at least not too badly lost), or to quickly find an inn, a tavern, the market, or some other general feature. A character can also use it to outrace a rival to a place in the city, or to lose pursuit in the twisty streets and alleys.

City Knowledge of a given city is Complementary to Navigation (Urban) used in that city. Navigation (Urban) can serve as a Complementary Skill for Shadowing in a city.

PENALTY SKILL LEVELS VERSUS SKILL PENALTIES

Cost	Application
1½	+1 to offset a specific penalty with one Skill
2	+1 to offset a specific penalty with a tight group of any three Skills
3	+1 to offset a specific penalty with a broad group of Skills, such as all Interaction Skills or all Agility Skills

PENALTY SKILL LEVELS

Because Valdorian characters can't purchase Skill Levels, Penalty Skill Levels become more important in a Valdorian Age campaign. Normally, Penalty Skill Levels are only used to offset OCV penalties in combat, but in Valdorian Age campaigns characters can also purchase them to offset specific DCV penalties, or specific penalties to Skill Rolls (including the *Fighting Tricks* and *Sorcery* Skills). The accompanying table lists the costs for PSLs versus Skill Roll penalties.

Example PSLs

Here are some conditions for which characters can buy PSLs that offset Skill Roll penalties:

- **Conditional Skill Levels:** offset penalties from poor conditions for performing the skill (*i.e.*, penetrating a person's disguise in the dark).
- **Encumbrance Skill Levels:** offset penalties from being weighted down with equipment.
- **Equipment Skill Levels:** offset penalties from a lack of equipment (*i.e.*, making do without a set of lockpicks because the character can use "lockpicks of opportunity")
- **Hurried Skill Levels:** offset penalties from moving a task up the Time Chart.
- **Injury Skill Levels:** offset penalties due to injury.

POWER

The *Power* Skill serves two important roles in Valdorian Age campaigns. It serves as the basis for the *Fighting Tricks* Skill (see below) and various *Sorcery* Skills (page 116).

- *Fighting Tricks* is DEX-based.
- *Sorcery* is EGO-based.

SURVIVAL (URBAN)

A character with this Skill knows how to beg for food or clothing, where he can sleep out of the elements and free of charge, how best to avoid the general notice of the city guard, and how to spot a person likely to give a poor starveling a bit or two. It's an essential skill for beggars or anyone attempting to survive in a city without a coin to his name.

FIGHTING TRICKS



A character can purchase Fighting Tricks (a DEX-based *Power Skill*) to represent his ability with his chosen weapon.

This can be Archery Tricks, Brawling Tricks, Dagger Tricks, Sword Tricks, Axe Tricks, or tricks with any other specific weapon the character wields. Characters must buy Fighting Tricks *by specific weapon type*; they cannot buy the Skill to apply to all weapons. (For these purposes, “Brawling” — the use of the fists to fight — counts as a “weapon,” provided the character doesn’t have an unarmed Martial Arts style.)

Fighting Tricks has four uses. First, a character can use it to impress others (and on the streets of Elweir an impressive reputation can be just as effective as actual ability). Second, many *Fighting Stunts* — special fighting abilities built using Powers in the Valdorian Age — have the Limitation, *Requires A Fighting Tricks Roll*. Third, the *Fighting Tricks* Skill is a prerequisite that allows a character to purchase maneuvers from a set of Martial Arts associated with his chosen weapon. Finally, a character can use the Skill in conjunction with an Attack Roll to perform a maneuver or stunt not explicitly covered by the rules, or to perform a one-time trick normally defined using Powers — maybe the character wants to force an opponent to step back into a pit while dueling with him, or to keep an inexperienced opponent from drawing a weapon without harming him. In other words, Fighting Tricks serves as a default when no other rule or ability applies. The first three of these uses are covered in more detail in the sections that follow.

A character can purchase Fighting Tricks with any weapon type he wishes (Axe Tricks, Mace Tricks, and so on). The ones described here — Archery, Brawling, Dagger, and Sword — are simply the most common for Elweirnian characters.

Being Impressive

Sometimes, at the GM’s discretion, a character might gain a bonus from clever use of this Skill while attempting to be impressive — a Surprise Move bonus or +1-2d6 for a Presence Attack are appropriate. But in general, proper use of Fighting Tricks for this purpose is less about benefitting from additional dice, bonuses to OCV, and the like, and more about being cocky, either to show an arrogant disdain for one’s opponent or to prove one’s magnificent prowess with one’s chosen mean of dispatching foes.

As a rule of thumb, as long as a character isn’t doing damage or an action doesn’t have an impact on combat, and the action is somewhat plausible (as well as entertaining), he can simply use a Fighting Tricks roll — sometimes in conjunction with an Attack Roll, sometimes not, depending on the circumstances — to accomplish the feat. This is sometimes called a “flourish.” (For actions that do cause damage or do have a major impact on combat, he must purchase a specific Trick, some of which are described starting on page 103.) The final and most important thing the GM should also keep in mind is the difference between Minions and Antagonists (page 110). With Fighting Tricks, humiliating a Minion is an easy thing, but showing up an Antagonist requires more work.

Some example “flourishes” include:

Archery Flourishes

- With a precisely-placed shot, the character can pin a target to the wall by his clothes. This doesn’t stop the target from running away — in other words, it’s not an Entangle — but it might make him freeze in his tracks with fear.
- When participating in an archery competition, the character can hit an opponent’s arrow that’s already stuck in the target, splitting it in two.

Brawling Flourishes

- The character knocks his opponent between the eyes, causing the foe’s eyes to involuntarily cross and stay that way for several seconds. This does no permanent harm or damage, but the target looks pretty ridiculous.
- Once the character has successfully Grabbed an opponent, he can use Brawling Tricks to add some impressive flourishes to his grappling, such as twirling the hapless opponent above his head, rubbing the poor guy’s face in something unpleasant on the ground, or spinning him like a top.

Dagger Flourishes

- With a flurry of dagger throws, the character can pin a target to the wall by his clothes. This doesn’t stop the target from running away — in other words, it’s not an Entangle — but it might make him freeze in his tracks with fear.
- Throwing two daggers in rapid succession, the character first knocks a mug down the bar and under the tap, then knocks the tap to pour his beer with the second dagger. Though this an impressive way of getting a beer, tavernkeepers don’t always appreciate it.

Sword Flourishes

■ In between blows and blocks, the character flips his sword, allowing it to twirl above his and his opponent's head. Impressively, the sword always lands in the character's hand just in time to block a blow or make the next slash.

■ The character slices through the strings of a person's breeches or flicks the buttons off his shirt, leaving him wearing rags (if anything at all).

■ In conjunction with a successful Disarm, the character knocks a mug of beer out of a person's hand and catches the mug by thrusting his blade through the handle.

BEING IMPRESSIVE IN A SKILL VERSUS SKILL CONTEST

Sometimes when two duelists (or other characters with the same sort of *Fighting Tricks* Skill) meet, proving one's superiority over the other is more a matter of impressive swordwork than hacking the other into little pieces — especially in the confines of a city, palace, or place where the authorities frown on murder. You can handle this situation with a series of Presence Attacks and Skill Versus Skill Contests using *Fighting Tricks*.

The character with the highest DEX goes first. He engages his foe in a Skill Versus Skill Contest. If he succeeds, he makes a Presence Attack; to win, he requires a PRE +10 result. If he fails, then the opponent goes next. This continues, and each subsequent time a character succeeds in the Skill Versus Skill Contest, he receives a cumulative +1d6 to his Presence Attack. The encounter ends when one of the characters makes a successful Presence Attack, which forces his foe to back off, disengage, or admit that he's outmatched... for now.

The GM can raise or lower the required result of the Presence Attack to better suit the circumstances. When facing off against an opponent who has a particularly harsh commander and has orders to capture the character, the required result might be PRE +30. When against some nameless bravo or bully in some rundown tavern, the required result might be PRE.

A character scoring a critical success during the Skill Versus Skill Contest always wins (without even making a Presence Attack), unless his foe also scores a critical success. A character suffering a critical failure loses, often in dramatic and humiliating fashion.

FIGHTING STUNTS

The Fighting Stunts below cost Character Points because they have a definite impact on combat. They all require a successful *Fighting Tricks* Roll, and a character *cannot* choose to remove this Limitation. Unless the GM determines otherwise, all Fighting Stunts must have this Limitation.

Furthermore, many of the Fighting Stunts below — especially those that involve melee combat — have the “subject to Skill Versus Skill Contests” modifier for the *Requires A Skill Roll* Limitation. This allows an opponents with the same *Fighting Tricks* Skill to thwart PC's attempt to perform his maneuver. Basically, the opponent knows what the character's attempting to do and takes appropriate action — a parry, a dodge, a step back, or the like — to avoid falling for the Stunt and causing the PC to fail.

Players may devise new Fighting Stunts if they like, but the GM must approve all new Stunts. As a rule of thumb, a Fighting Stunt should rarely, if ever, have a Real Cost of more than 10-15 Character Points. Anything that costs more either needs more Limitations or is simply too powerful for Valdorian Age games.

ARCHERY STUNTS

COMBAT ARCHERY

Effect: +5 OCV with Bows; Only To Prevent Hitting Non-Enemies When Firing Into Melees

Target/Area Affected: Self

Duration: Instant

Range: Self

END Cost: 0

Skill Roll Penalty: -2

Description: As described on page 104 of *Fantasy Hero*, but it requires a successful Archery Tricks roll.

Game Information: +5 OCV with Bows (25 Active Points); Only To Prevent Hitting Non-Enemies When Firing Into Melees (-2), Requires An Archery Tricks Roll (-½). Total cost: 7 points.

CRIPPLING SHOT

Effect: Drain Running 1d6

Target/Area Affected: One character

Duration: Instant

Range: Based on STR

END Cost: 3

Skill Roll Penalty: -3

Description: The archer targets the legs of his opponent, and by injuring them limits his ability to move instead of simply wounding him. For other effects see page 104 of *Fantasy Hero*.

Game Information: Drain Running 1d6, Ranged (+½), Delayed Recovery Rate (character heals the damage as if Recovering BODY; +2) (35 Active Points); OIF (bow and arrows of oppor-

MORE STUNTS

Some of the Stunts in this section can be easily turned into Stunts for other weapons. For instance, both Combat Archery and Crippling Shot can quickly become Stunts for daggers. Furthermore, Hero Games books such as *Fantasy Hero*, *Dark Champions*, and *The Ultimate Brick* have many abilities (often describes as “super-skills,” Talents, or the like) that a player or GMs can quickly turn into Fighting Stunt appropriate to the Valdorian Age.



tunity; $-\frac{1}{2}$), Healing BODY Heals Effect ($-\frac{1}{2}$), Requires An Archery Tricks Roll ($-\frac{1}{2}$). Total cost: 14 points.

RAPID ARCHERY

Effect: Autofire (3 shots) with up to RKA 2d6
Target/Area Affected: Self
Duration: Instant
Range: Self
END Cost: 1
Skill Roll Penalty: -1

Description: This Archery Stunt allows the character to fire multiple arrows in one Phase with a successful Archery Tricks roll.

Game Information: Autofire (3 shots; $+\frac{1}{4}$) with up to RKA 2d6 (7 Active Points); OIF (bow and arrows of opportunity; $-\frac{1}{2}$), Requires An Archery Tricks Roll ($-\frac{1}{2}$). Total cost: 3 points.

BRAWLING STUNTS

THE BIG GRAB

Effect: Area Of Effect for up to 20 STR
Target/Area Affected: One Hex
Duration: Instant
Range: No Range
END Cost: 1
Skill Roll Penalty: -1

Description: Typically used by large, strong brawlers, a Big Grab lets a character spread his arms wide and grasp everything in a single hex. To avoid the Big Grab the target must Dodge (or hope for the best).

Game Information: Area Of Effect (One Hex; $+\frac{1}{2}$) for up to 20 STR (10 Active Points); Only For Grabs ($-\frac{1}{2}$), Requires A Brawling Tricks Roll (subject to Skill Versus Skill Contest; $-\frac{3}{4}$). Total cost: 4 points.

BEAR HUG

Effect: NND for up to 20 STR
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: No Range
END Cost: 2
Skill Roll Penalty: -2

Description: Following a successful grab, the character squeezes his opponent so hard and so quick, he forces all the air from his lungs — sometimes merely stunning the opponent, other times causing him to pass out. A breast plate stops a Bear Hug, but less rigid armor like a chain shirt doesn't.

Game Information: NND (defense is Life Support [Self-Contained Breathing] or rigid covering over the torso [Hit Locations 10-12]; +1) for up to 20 STR (20 Active Points); Must Follow Grab ($-\frac{1}{2}$), Requires A Brawling Tricks Roll (subject to Skill Versus Skill Contest; $-\frac{3}{4}$). Total cost: 9 points.

BULL RUSH

Effect: Does Knockback for up to 20 STR, Only With Move Throughs
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: No Range
END Cost: 1
Skill Roll Penalty: -1

Description: The character is skilled at charging an opponent, taking him off his feet, and tossing or knocking him aside, whether by coming in low and grabbing his legs or simply by using brute force. Normally, Valdorian Age characters can only do Knockdown; with this Talent a character can do Knockback when performing a Move Through.

Game Information: Does Knockback (+¼) for up to 20 STR (5 Active Points); Only With Move Throughs (-½), Requires A Brawling Tricks Roll (subject to Skill Versus Skill Contest; -¾). Total cost: 2 points.

CRIPPLING BLOW

Effect: Drain 1d6, any physical body-based Power one at a time
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: No Range
END Cost: 3
Skill Roll Penalty: -3

Description: The character with this Stunt can deliver a crippling blow that inhibits his target's physical abilities. For detail, see page 104 of *Fantasy Hero*.

Game Information: Drain 1d6, any physical body-based Power one at a time (+¼), Delayed Recovery Rate (character heals the damage as if Recovery BODY; +2) (32 Active Points); Healing BODY Heals Effect (-½), Requires A Brawling Tricks Roll (subject to Skill Versus Skill Contest; -¾). 14 points.

DAGGER STUNTS**RAPID THROW**

Effect: Autofire (3 shots) with up to RKA 1d6+1
Target/Area Affected: Self
Duration: Instant
Range: Self
END Cost: 1
Skill Roll Penalty: -1

Description: This Dagger Stunt allows the character to throw up to three daggers in one Phase with a successful Dagger Tricks roll.

Game Information: Autofire (3 shots; +¼) with up to RKA 1d6+1 (5 Active Points); OIF (daggers of opportunity; -½), Requires A Dagger Tricks Roll (-½). Total cost: 2 points.

GRAB AND THROW BACK

Effect: Missile Deflection/Reflection (thrown objects)
Target/Area Affected: Self
Duration: Constant
Range: Self
END Cost: 2
Skill Roll Penalty: -2

Description: This Dagger Stunt allows the character to snatch a dagger (or like object) thrown at him out of the air and throw it back at his attacker in one smooth motion. The skill with which the attacker throws his dagger affects the likelihood of succeeding.

Game Information: Missile Deflection and Reflection (thrown objects) (25 Active Points); Costs Endurance (-½), Requires A Dagger Tricks Roll (subject to Skill Versus Skill Contest; -¾). Total cost: 11 points.

SWORD STUNTS**FOLLOW-THROUGH ATTACK**

Effect: Trigger for up to HKA 3d6
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: No Range
END Cost: 1
Skill Roll Penalty: -1

Description: This Stunt resembles the Talent *Follow-Through Attack* on page 106 of *Fantasy Hero*, but requires a successful Sword Tricks Roll.

Game Information: Trigger (when character kills an opponent in battle; +¼) for up to HKA 3d6 (11 Active Points); OIF (sword of opportunity; -½), Requires A Sword Tricks Roll (-½). Total cost: 5 points.

FORCE BACK

Effect: Running 1", Usable As Attack **plus** Teleportation 1", Trigger, Must Cross Intervening Space
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: No Range
END Cost: 1
Skill Roll Penalty: -1

Description: This Sword Stunt allows a character to press his foe, forcing him to take a step back. In effect, the opponent must leave his current hex and step into another an adjacent hex of the character's choosing. Then the character follows after him — effectively allowing him to Move *after an attack* because of the *Trigger* Advantage. This Stunt allows a character to back an opponent up a stair, into a pit, or the like. He can use it in combination with a normal attack as multiple-power attack, or by itself just to force the opponent back. By combining this Stunt with a Sweep maneuver, the character can force back a group of guardsmen or perform similar impressive feats of swordsmanship.

Note that characters with the *Trap Martial Maneuver* described below (a form of Bind) can perform a similar action using the rules on page 142 of *The Ultimate Martial Artist*.

Game Information: *Running* +1" (1" total), *Usable As Attack* (+1) (4 Active Points); *OIF* (sword of opportunity; -½), *No Noncombat Movement* (-¼), *Requires A Sword Tricks Roll* (subject to *Skill Versus Skill Contest*; -¾). (total cost: 2 points) **plus** *Teleportation* +1" (1" total), *Trigger* (when "Running Attack" succeeds, *Trigger* resets automatically immediately after activation; +¾) (3 Active Points); *OIF* (sword of opportunity; -½), *Linked* (-½), *No Noncombat Movement* (-¼), *Must Cross Intervening Space* (-¼), *Must Move In Direction Character Forces Opponent To Move In* (-0) (total cost: 1 point). Total cost: 3 points.

THROWN WEAPON

Effect: WF: Thrown Sword
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: Range Based On STR
END Cost: 0
Skill Roll Penalty: -1

Description: This Stunt allows the character to throw his sword with incredible accuracy.

Game Information: WF: Thrown Sword (1 Active Point); *Requires A Sword Tricks Roll* (-½). Total cost: 1 point.

Martial Arts And Fighting Tricks

Characters who purchase a *Fighting Tricks* Skill may also, if they wish, purchase maneuvers from a Martial Art devoted to that particular type of weapon or style of fighting. He must pay the normal Character Point cost for any Maneuvers he purchases (he doesn't get them for free just because he has *Fighting Tricks*) and must buy a minimum of 10 points' worth, as usual. Only characters with *Fighting Tricks* can buy these styles; to keep the styles "special" and distinctive in the game, and to encourage characters to buy *Fighting Tricks*, the GM may want to forbid characters to purchase any of the Maneuvers in them unless they have *Fighting Tricks*. The GM also should not allow characters to buy other weapon-based styles, nor to buy Extra DCs for any style, without permission.

The maneuvers listed in the accompanying table are the ones most commonly used by characters with *Fighting Tricks*. A character can purchase others with approval from the GM. (For more maneuvers, consult the *HERO System 5th Edition, Revised* rulebook or *The Ultimate Martial Artist*.)

VALDORIAN AGE MARTIAL ARTS MANEUVERS

ARCHERY MARTIAL ARTS

Maneuver	Phase	Cost	OCV	DCV	Rng	Damage/Effect
Basic Shot	½	4	+0	+0	+2	Strike, +2 DC
Defensive Shot	½	3	-1	+2	+0	Strike
Distance Shot	1+1	5	+0	-2	+6	Strike; +1 Segment
Moving Shot	½	5	-1	+0	+0	Strike; FMove
Ranged Disarm	½	4	+0	+0	+0	Disarm, +15 STR
Trip	½	4	-1	-1	+2	v/5, Target Falls

BRAWLING MARTIAL ARTS

Maneuver	Phase	Cost	OCV	DCV	Damage/Effect
Eye Gouge	½	4	-1	-1	Sight Group Flash 4d6
Disarm	½	4	-1	+1	Disarm, +10 STR to Disarm roll
Hoist ' n' Heave	½	5	-2	-2	Grab Two Limbs, +20 STR to Throw
Kidney Blow	½	4	-2	+0	HKA ½d6 (2 DC)
Tackle	½	3	+0	-1	STR +v/5 Strike; You Fall, Target Falls
Throw	½	3	+0	+1	STR +v/5; Target Falls

DAGGER MARTIAL ARTS

Maneuver	Phase	Cost	OCV	DCV	Damage/Effect
Counterstrike	½	4	+2	+2	Weapon +2DC, Must Follow Block
Cut	½	3	+2	+1	Weapon
Parry	½	4	+2	+2	Block, Abort
Slash	½	??	-2	+1	Weapon +4 DC Strike
Trap	½	4	+1	+0	Bind, +10 STR

SWORD MARTIAL ARTS

Maneuver	Phase	Cost	OCV	DCV	Damage/Effect
Counterstrike	½	4	+2	+2	Weapon +2DC, Must Follow Parry
Disarm	½	4	-1	+1	Disarm, +10 STR to Disarm roll
Disengage	var	4	+0	+0	+15 STR to escape Bind
Lunge	½	5	+1	-2	Weapon +4 DC
Parry	½	4	+2	+2	Block, Abort
Trap	½	4	+1	+0	N/A Bind, +10 STR

PERKS AND TALENTS



Skills aren't the only game elements Valdorian Age characters have. Many also possess appropriate Perks and Talents.

PERKS

Below are some guidelines and ideas for ways to use Perks in a Valdorian Age campaign. Unlike campaigns in which adventurers wander from place to place, much of the action in a typical Valdorian Age game likely takes place in a single city, Elweir. Because of this, some Perks (such as Contacts and Bases) become far more useful than in other Fantasy games.

CONTACTS

A player might find Contacts in the city of Elweir very useful over the course of a campaign — everything from a courtier in the Prince's retinue, to a black market fence, to a street urchin can play a frequent part in city-based adventures. To encourage PCs to take Contacts, the GM might want to reduce the cost of the Perk, or even adopt the Follower/Contact *Resource Points* rules from *Dark Champions*.

FRINGE BENEFITS

See the accompanying text box for a list of Fringe Benefits unique to Elweir. All of these require the GM's approval.

ELWEIRNIAN FRINGE BENEFITS

Value	Benefit
1-2	Member Of Gang
2	City Guardsman
3	Sergeant In Guard
3	Priest Of The Old Gods
5	Foreign Resident Of Elweir Acknowledged (Official or Unofficial) By Prince
5	Alderman
5	Captains' Guild Membership
6	Magistrate
6	Member of a family in the Fifty
7	Chief Magistrate
8	Lord/Lady Of The Fifty
9	Wife or child of the Prince of Elweir
10	Prince Of Elweir

MONEY

Typically the protagonists in Swords And Sorcery fiction are down on their luck, without much coin to call their own — in fact, this is a big part of why they go on adventures in the first place. Even if the protagonists strike it rich at the conclusion of an exploit, by the time the next one starts they've squandered their hard-earned wealth on companionship, drink, and ill-advised gambles or schemes, or lost it to thieves or misfortune.

A GM should carefully consider the tone and mood of his campaign before allowing his players to purchase Money as a Perk. One option is to allow the player to purchase Money, but establish in-game restraints on its use. For example, if the PC is the son of a wealthy family, he might have Money... but the patriarch of his family controls the purse strings. The PC can't simply get money whenever he wants — the patriarch must approve the expenditure. Think of it as an allowance with all the difficulties that entails.

The accompanying text box describes appropriate levels of Money for a Valdorian Age campaign. See page 20 for further discussion of the economy in Elweir (as well as most of the world).

INCOME LEVELS

This table lists the Coin Per Day a character of a given Income Level can expect to receive. This doesn't necessarily mean he makes exactly that much coin a day; it represents an average earnings over the course of a year. Out of this money he must pay his living expenses; anything left over he can spend as he likes.

If a PC chooses Destitute or Poor as a Disadvantage, it means somehow, somehow he squanders whatever wealth he gains over the course of his adventures. Maybe he gets taken in by a swindler, robbed by a gang or overly-friendly woman while his wits are addled by strong drink, strong-armed by bandits, must send all his booty to his family, or pay back his debts to an usurer. Whatever the case, he never keeps hold of his coin between sessions.

Level	Coin Per Day	Example
Destitute (10-point Disadvantage)	0 coin per day	Starveling, Beggar
Poor (5-point Disadvantage)	3 coin per day	Residents of Lowtown and Gibberish
"Middle" Class (0-point Perk)	6 coin per day	Residents of Uphills East and West
Well Off (5-point Perk)	20-30 coin per day	Alderman, River Captain, Magistrate
Wealthy (10-point Perk)	40-50 coin per day	Sea Captain, Chief Magistrate
Filthy Rich (15-point Perk)	Unlimited	Members Of The Fifty

VEHICLES AND BASES

Players should normally purchase Vehicles and Bases with their wealth, whether starting coin or loot accumulated after several adventures.

In many Fantasy campaigns, Bases are typically castles, manor houses, towers, or the like. This isn't always the case in a Swords And Sorcery campaign, where an inn or tavern can make an excellent Base for the PCs. The accompanying table, *Inn And Tavern Costs*, provides cost information about purchasing these in Elweir.

INN AND TAVERN COSTS

The below table assumes the inn or tavern is in Elweir (though a GM can easily apply the costs to other cities by substituting equivalent neighborhoods or districts). Location cost is based primarily on the sort of service a leaseholder can expect from the city guard.

Cost	Location
-10	Lowtown, Gibberish (except on Clink-Clink Square, which is +10)
0	Uphills East and West, Worm's Hole, Snake's Den
+10	The Canals
Cost	Reputation
-10	Watered-down ale; patrons roll drunks for their coin
-5	Boring
+5	Location has infamous history (murders took place here, former gathering place for criminals, or the like)
+5	Attractive wenches or entertaining barkeep
+10	Location is currently infamous (gathering place for criminals or the wealthy)

TALENTS

Pages 102 to 108 of *Fantasy Hero* discuss Talents for Fantasy games. Unless listed under *Disallowed Talents*, all of these apply to a Valdorian Age campaign. However, some of the Talents are now Fighting Stunts; these are listed on pages 103-06 (and for the sake of convenience, summarized in *Talents As Fighting Stunts*, below). Some new Talents specifically for the Valdorian Age setting are described below.

In the *Valdorian Age*, the main difference between a Talent and a Fighting Stunt is that a Talent is an innate ability due to good fortune (like Combat Luck) or some strange quirk of nature (like Deadly Blow against the supernatural). A Fighting Stunt is an ability the character learns, just the same as he learns to use a weapon or the like. This is just a general guideline and not a hard rule. For instance, if a character wants a mentor to teach him Beast Speech that's fine, but it's assumed not just anyone could learn to communicate with animals — in other words, the character had the ability to learn the Talent, but not everyone does.

DISALLOWED TALENTS

The following Talents are not available to characters, mostly because of the magic system: Combat Spellcasting, Shapechanging, Skill Master, Spell Augmentation, Turn Undead. Finally, many forms of Deadly Blow are not permitted; see below for more details.

TALENTS AS FIGHTING STUNTS

The following Talents are now Fighting Stunts: Combat Archery, Crippling Blow, Follow-Through Attack, Rapid Archery.

Notes On Existing Talents

Some standard Talents require additional explanation or rules in the Valdorian Age setting.

COMBAT LUCK

Characters in Swords And Sorcery typically don't wear much armor, and to model this Valdorian Age requires a slight, but important, change to Combat Luck.

Like 5-point Levels for DCV, Combat Luck has an additional Limitation, *Not When Wearing Heavy Armor* (-½), which reduces its cost to 5 Character Points. A character does *not* receive any benefits from his Combat Luck if he wears 15 kg or more of armor — more armor than that impedes him too much for him to benefit from his Combat Luck. Combat Luck adds to his total DEF as normal when he wears less than 15 kg of armor.

DEADLY BLOW

Of the types of Deadly Blows described on page 105 of *Fantasy Hero*, the following four apply in *very limited circumstances* and make appropriate Talents in a Valdorian Age game. Each is effective against a specific sort of Summoned creature and corresponds to one type of sorcery. Other forms of Deadly Blow are not allowed unless the GM specifically permits them.

Demonslayer: only works against creatures a Black Magician Summons.

Godsbane: only works against creatures a Sorcerer-Priest Summons.

Elementalslayer: only works against creatures an Elementalist Summons.

Undeadslayer: only works against creatures a Necromancer Summons.

DIVINE FAVOR

In the Valdorian Age, the gods have turned their back on man. Only the most naive and romantic fools believe otherwise, arguing that the gods merely work in more mysterious ways. To give them credit, a handful of these god-fearing folks do seem to possess uncanny luck when working toward their god's purpose. Many prefer to call it Fool's Luck, but nonetheless there still seem to be those blessed by the divine (*i.e.*, who have this Talent).

EVASIVE

Evasive functions as described on page 105 of *Fantasy Hero*, but has the Limitation, *Subject To Skill Versus Skill Contest* (-¼). An archer or attacker throwing a weapon can cause the character using Evasive against his attacks to suffer a penalty to his DEX Roll with use of his *Fighting Tricks* Skill Roll. In addition the Talent now costs Endurance to use. The new Talent description is as follows:

Evasive Cost: 11 Character Points (*bought as Desolidification (affected by any area-affecting attack, or any attack if Skill Roll fails); Only To Protect Against Attacks (-½), Character Must Abort To Use (-1), Requires A DEX Roll (assumes a DEX Roll of 12- or 13-, and is subject to Skill Versus Skill Contests (-1))*)

RAPID HEALING

While characters who heal quickly are suitable to Swords And Sorcery fiction, they still heal more slowly than their High Fantasy counterparts. The Talent description below replaces the one in *Fantasy Hero*.

Rapid Healing Cost: 4 Character Points (*bought as Healing BODY 1d6 (Regeneration; 1 BODY per Day), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½); Self Only (-½), Extra Time + Increased Time Increment (1 BODY/Day; -2½), Character Must Rest For Six Hours To Regain 1 BODY (-½)*)

New Talents

Here are some new Talents for Valdorian Age campaigns.

DESPERATION BLOW

With this Talent a PC who's driven by desperation and sheer need can will himself to score a critical success in combat. Once per day (or per game session, if the GM prefers), he can roll Luck 4d6 after making an Attack Roll. For each 6 he rolls, he can subtract -1 from his roll. If these cumulative -1s lower his result to 3, he receives a critical success. The bonus helps in no other way (for instance, it doesn't help him hit his target if his Attack Roll before the subtraction would miss the target).

Desperation Blow Cost: 4 Character Points (*bought as Luck 4d6; Only To Achieve Critical Successes In Combat (-2), 1 Charge (-2)*)

Desperation Attempt

A variation of Desperation Blow, Desperation Attempt allows the character to achieve a critical success with any roll that's not an Attack Roll. It works same, but cannot be used with an Attack Roll; the cost increases to 5 Character Points because the *Only To Achieve* Limitation is reduced to -1.

HARD TO HIT

With this Talent, the PC can ignore critical successes scored against him in combat if he rolls even a single 6 on a Luck 3d6 roll. The critical still hits him, he just doesn't suffer the additional damage that results from a critical success attack.

Hard To Hit Cost: 5 Character Points (*bought as Luck 3d6; Only To Avoid Effect Of Critical Success In Combat (-2)*)

MASTER OF HIS FATE

When a character with this Talent rolls a critical failure, he has a chance to dictate the outcome rather than the GM. The character still fails spectacularly, but rather than be the helpless victim of the vagaries of fate, he decides in what manner he suffers. Whenever he rolls a critical failure, he then rolls his Luck 4d6. If he rolls at least one 6, he decides what happens, though of course his decision is subject to the GM's approval and can't benefit him in any other way. If he rolls no 6s, the GM determines the outcome as normal.

Master Of His Fate Cost: 7 Character Points (*bought as Luck 4d6; Only To Determine Result Of Critical Failure (-2)*)

NOT THE FACE!

The character with this Talent can avoid getting hit in the head — either he luckily moves to the side or ducks, or somehow avoids the blow. Whenever a hit strikes Hit Location 3-5, the PC rolls his Luck dice. For every 6 result he can move the Hit Location roll one place away from the Hit Location rolled. For example, if he rolled two 6s, he could add 2 to the Hit Location roll. Thus, to succeed, the character has to achieve enough successes to move the result out of the 3-5 range (though even within that range, some Hit Locations may have heavier armor than others) For example, if the attacker's roll is a 3, a character with this Talent must roll three 6s to avoid getting hit in the head — one to move it from 3 to 4, one to move it from 4 to 5, and one to move it from 5 to 6. The blow still hits; it merely hits his hand.

Not The Face! Cost: 7 Character Points (*bought as Luck 4d6; Only To Avoid Getting Hit In The Head (see text; -2)*)

COMBAT AND EQUIPMENT



PRECISE WEAPONS

Weapons of quality in the Valdorian Age can have any of the qualities listed on page 183-84 of *Fantasy Hero*, but Rapiers, Short and Medium Spears, and Stilletos can also have a new quality, *Precise*.

Precise: This weapon is light, yet still strong, and its wielder can thrust more accurately and more quickly change his line of attack to throw off his opponent. Typically this is a quality of dueling weapons like the rapier. The wielder gains +2 PSLs to offset penalties for Placed Shots (this costs 3 Character Points).

Combat in Swords And Sorcery fiction is a blend of fast-paced cinematic action and tense, gritty swordplay. The protagonist might hack and slash his way through a horde of lesser warriors, dispatching opponents with little effort, only to reach his antagonist — at which point the action become a deadly duel, fraught with peril and dramatic tension. The combat rules below help model this style of play.

CRITICAL HITS AND FUMBLES

In a Valdorian Age campaign, a character scores a critical hit when he rolls a 3 and a critical fumble when he rolls a 18. Page 159 of *Fantasy Hero* describes the results of critical hits and fumbles.

MINIONS AND ANTAGONISTS

Valdorian Age combat distinguishes between *Minions* and *Antagonists*.

A Minion is a lesser opponent — one who doesn't have a particularly significant or noteworthy role in the adventure (the GM might not even bother to give him a name). He's usually built on fewer points than the PCs (often a lot fewer). Examples include a city guardsman, the villain's hireling, a nameless mercenary warrior, a tavern bouncer, a ragged cutpurse, or any one of the numerous foes a PC might face in combat.

An Antagonist, on the other hand, is a major opponent — one who has an important part to play in the PCs' adventure. He's usually built on at least as many points as the PCs, and may be built on more (even *much* more). Examples include the main villain of a particular story arc in the campaign, a city magistrate, a foul necromancer, a deadly assassin, or a PC's nemesis.

In game terms, the distinction between Minion and Antagonist matters because Minions cannot obtain critical successes or hits. They might suffer a critical failure or fumble, but the best they can hope to achieve is a standard success. The GM may also prefer not to roll Hit Locations for Minions' attacks, both to speed up the game and to prevent a Minion from inflicting better-than-normal damage when fighting PCs. Antagonists, on the other hand, use the same critical success/hits/fumbles/misses rules as PCs, and roll Hit Locations for their attacks — in other words, for rules purposes they function just like PCs.

EQUIPMENT

Valdorian Age characters must purchase equipment with money (rather than with Character Points). For the cost of most goods use the *Fantasy Hero Price List* on pages 144-148 of *Fantasy Hero*. As discussed in more detail on page 18 in Chapter One, the standard units of currency in Elweir are the Valdorian imperial and the Abyzinian *argele*. Both are round, silver, and weigh .5 ounces (.015 kg, so every 67 coins a character carries add 1 kg to Encumbrance). Collectively, they're simply called "coin." (In other words, if a person says he has two coins, he could have two *argeles*, two imperials, or one of each.)

The cost of most day-to-day transactions, like paying for a night in an inn, purchasing a meal, or buying a mug of beer, is measured in "bits." A bit is a coin cut into four approximately equal pieces.

To convert the prices from *Fantasy Hero*, 1 SP (silver piece) = 1 coin. 2.5 CP (copper pieces) = 1 bit (¼ of a coin).

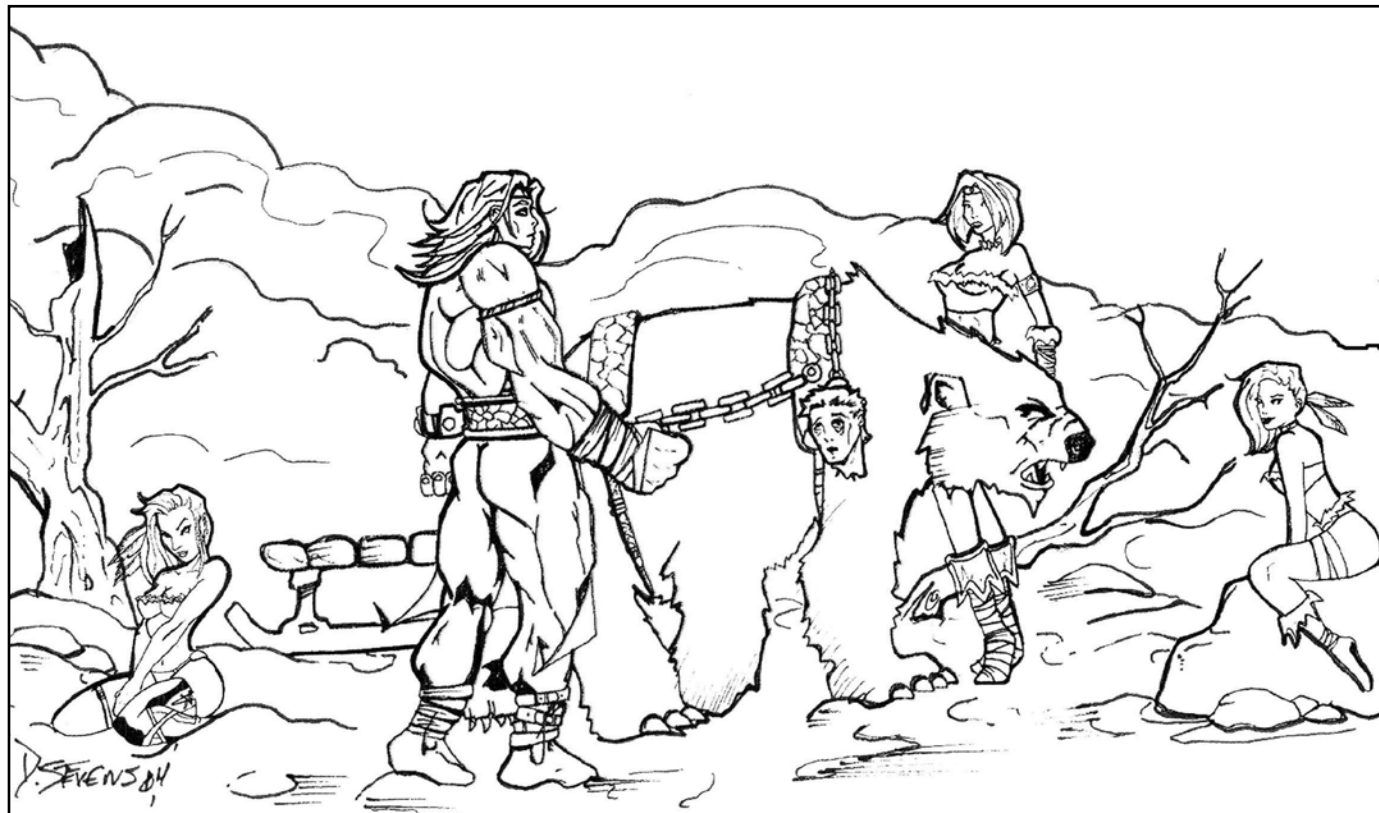
The recommended starting money for a 150-point character is 200 coin.

WEAPONS

A character can purchase any of the weapons listed on pages 164-66 of *Fantasy Hero*, except for Gunpowder Weapons and any others the GM deems inappropriate for his game.

The rapier and main gauche are the weapons of choice for Elweirians who style themselves fighting men, since the pair looks elegant with fine dress, are perfectly suited to duels (whether to first blood or the death), and prove exceedingly deadly in well-trained hands. (Of course, while many bravos swagger about with a rapier on the hip, few can use the weapon with any true skill.) More makeshift weapons like clubs, or inexpensive ones like daggers, are common among footpads, thugs, and cutpurses. City guardsmen carry cudgels and either short swords or short spears, depending on their posting and the task at hand.

Elsewhere in the world, the weapons of choice vary. Valdorian warriors usually favor slightly heavier weapons than Elweirians, such as long-swords, but some nobles wear the lighter rapier. The Cynthians use hand axes and slender lances (spears). The war-torn land of Three Rivers is home to soldiers using weapons of every variety. Graeco-rians use spears (heavier ones than those of the Cynthians) and short swords primarily, but sometimes larger weapons. The Amyklai learn sword, spear, or bow, as described on page 78. Abyzinians



use many different weapons, though Abyzinian soldiers usually wield scimitars, spears, and/or bows. Naraatans favor short weapons that they can easily conceal or wield aboard ship: daggers, cudgels, cutlasses, short swords, and so forth. Khorians favor heavy blades (longswords, greatswords, and so on) and axes. Tharestani swords and mercenaries are usually armed similarly to Abyzinian warriors. Zimaravians and Zothedrans favor daggers, short swords, and bows.

ARMOR

The *Valdorian Age* uses the rules for Sectional Armor on page 192 of *Fantasy Hero*. To determine the weight of armor, uses the Historical Sectional Armor Weight Table.

The accompanying chart, *Cost Of Sectional Armor*, summarizes the cost of sectional pieces of armor ("SP" in this case refers to coin). This only includes the armors most commonly found in Elweir; to figure the cost of more exotic armors use the following equation: (Number Of Hit Locations Covered/18) x Cost Of Full Suit. Round up any fractions to the nearest coin. For example, a chain byrnie costs (6/18) x 150 SP = 50 SP. Some of the armor pieces listed below are not historically accurate — for instance, it's unlikely any bandit ever wore "padded knee cops," and it's just as unlikely a knight ever wore "plate leggings" — but this chart assumes a PC can purchase something similar.

COST OF SECTIONAL ARMOR

Hit Location Name (Roll)	Type Of Armor (Cost Of Full Suit)		
	Chainmail (150 SP)	Cuir-Bouilli (75 SP)	Padded Cloth (40 SP)
Full Helmet (3-5)	25 SP	13 SP	7 SP
Coif (4-5,9)	25 SP	13 SP	7 SP
Helm (4-5)	17 SP	9 SP	5 SP
Cap (5)	9 SP	5 SP	3 SP
Gauntlets (6-7)	17 SP	9 SP	5 SP
Gloves (6)	9 SP	5 SP	3 SP
Brassards (7-8)	17 SP	9 SP	5 SP
Vambraces (7)	9 SP	5 SP	3 SP
Rerebraces (8)	9 SP	5 SP	3 SP
Pauldrons (9)	9 SP	5 SP	3 SP
Hauberk (7-14)	67 SP	34 SP	18 SP
Corselet (9-15)	58 SP	29 SP	16 SP
Byrnie (9-14)	50 SP	25 SP	14 SP
Cuirass (9-13)	42 SP	21 SP	12 SP
Vest (10-13)	33 SP	17 SP	9 SP
Breastplate (9-11)	25 SP	13 SP	7 SP
Skirtplate (12-13)	17 SP	9 SP	5 SP
Chausses (14-18)	33 SP	17 SP	9 SP
Leggings (14-17)	33 SP	17 SP	9 SP
Skirt (14)	9 SP	5 SP	3 SP
Greaves (16-17)	17 SP	9 SP	5 SP
Boots (17-18)	17 SP	9 SP	5 SP
Knee Cops (15)	9 SP	5 SP	3 SP
Demigreaves (16)	9 SP	5 SP	3 SP
Anklets (17)	9 SP	5 SP	3 SP

SORCERY



Sorcerers: seekers of knowledge lost in the sweep of history, wielders of power beyond the ken of mortals, men who bargain with beings not of this world, and mortals whose coin-in-trade is their very souls.

All magic in the Valdorian Age results from otherworldly, supernatural beings — the only power a man can call his own is his ability to either bind or convince these beings to do what he asks or commands. A sorcerer does not possess “personal mystical might” he can use to create magical effects; nor does he manipulate some “magical weave” to create effects. Magic is neither a innate spiritual quality nor a natural force — it is a force beyond the ken of mortals, beyond the ken of nature itself, and those who seek to use it had best beware its terrible risks.

Some say mortals have no right to wield magic, and magic has no place in the natural world. Judging by the fate of most sorcerers, these naysayers are probably right.

THE MORALITY OF SORCERY

Within the context of the Valdorian Age, especially in the city of Elweir, there's nothing intrinsically evil about sorcery. Simply knowing how to summon a creature isn't evil. But because of how sorcery works, with its bargaining and favors, it's a rare sorcerer who doesn't end up performing an evil act at the behest of a supernatural creature at some point.

Furthermore, some cultures and societies look upon sorcery harshly — and punish its practitioners just as harshly. Because sorcery is so rare, few lands have codified laws concerning its practice. The exception is Valdoria, which has a deep hatred of sorcery. Valdorian law states plainly and explicitly the practice of sorcery is punished with death. The only land that reveres sorcerers is Abyzinia.

Most commoners fear sorcery — a fear that quickly becomes hate if a sorcerer pushes them too far or shows a moment's weakness. Most sophisticates know better than to ever completely trust a sorcerer. They realize that eventually, the sorcerer will work to further the agenda of some being who cares little for humanity's mores and well-being.

In short, sorcery is a slippery slope, and a sorcerer must be careful, disciplined, and talented if he doesn't want to become the pawn of powers that, if not entirely evil, have a morality alien to mankind and care little, if anything, for the fate of mortals.

THE BASICS

All sorcerers have two Powers, one Power Framework, and two Skills in common: a Summon; an Endurance Reserve; a Multipower; and a *Sorcery* Skill and Knowledge Skill appropriate to the type of sorcerer the character is.

A sorcerer character must purchase some level of ability and skill with all five of these things. Any character lacking any one of these is *not* a sorcerer. He might be an apprentice, or he might be a hedge magician (see the sidebar, *Apprentices And Hedge Magicians*, on page 113), but he's not a sorcerer.

The basic special effect of all magic in the Valdorian Age is that a sorcerer summons a supernatural being to perform a task. Further special effects might flow from this one — for example, a fire elemental might project a blast of flame that has a Fire special effect — but no matter how a spell or mystic power is defined in *HERO System* terms, in setting terms the sorcerer has summoned a supernatural being.

Sorcery falls into one of the four types described below. The nature of the being the sorcerer summons determines the type of sorcery he practices. A sorcerer can practice more than one type of sorcery (see the sidebar on page 122 for details).

The Black Magician: The Black Magician summons demons from the Nether Realms, the hellish place where the Infernal Princes rule and the souls of mortals find eternal torment. Of all sorcerers, it is the Black Magician who most often falls into the ways of evil. Though he might start out believing he can bend demons to his will, the creatures at his beck and call are evil through and through. Eventually, the Black Magician becomes as foul and malign as the beings he consorts with.

The Elementalist: The Elementalist summons elemental spirits — powers of fire, air, water, and earth — whom the Primal Lords rule. The more an Elementalist deals with elementals, the further and further removed from humanity he becomes. Elementals have minds almost entirely alien to mortals, and the Elementalist becomes increasingly like them — prone to fits of moodiness, swinging wildly between apathy and berserk rage — until he can no longer understand even the simplest human need or desire.

Common folk and noble alike usually refer to Elementalist by the type of magic they prefer to use: Fire Mage, Earth Mage, or the like. Graecorian scholars sometimes use more abstract terms such as aeromancer, aquamancer, and so forth.

The Necromancer: The Necromancer summons the restless spirits of the dead, the souls of the departed who do not exist under the protection of the god, Aides, but have yet to fall into the Nether Realms. As he progresses further in his arts, the Necromancer becomes increasingly strange. The dead exist outside the rational world — time and the physical dimensions are meaningless to them, and so is the difference between life and death. The Necromancer becomes like them; he neglects his physical needs and gains an increasing disregard for life... for life never ends, it merely continues in a different place.

The Sorcerer-Priest: The Sorcerer-Priest summons the servants of the divine — those beings who once served as emissaries of the Old Gods, but now dwell masterless in the higher planes. He's only rarely a devout servant of the gods, although many Sorcerer-Priests begin their apprenticeship with this attitude. After years spent dickering with divine servitors as one would haggle over the price of fish in the marketplace, and knowing that the gods have truly turned their backs on men, the Sorcerer-Priest no longer reveres the Old Gods. Instead, just as the divine servants use him to further their goals, he uses them to further his own.

SORCERY POWERS AND SKILLS

Here are descriptions of the five Powers and Skills a sorcerer possesses, as well as the Favor — the cornerstone of all dealings with the supernatural.

The Summon

To work his magic, a sorcerer must conjure an otherworldly being to obey his commands and create the power or ability he needs.

In game terms, the Power *Summon* lies at the heart of sorcery. All sorcerers *must* purchase the following power. Furthermore, they must purchase *all* the Advantages and Limitations *exactly as described below*. For instance, a character may not increase the Extra Time to more than 5 Minutes, or decrease it to less than that; he must apply the *Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)* Limitation. A sorcerer may increase the number of Character Points on which his Summoned creatures are built, but may not decrease it below 200.

Summon 200-point [Supernatural Creature], Expanded Class (any [supernatural creature]; +½) (60 Active Points); Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1 [see text]), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A [Power Skill] Roll (-½). Total cost: 17 points.

[Supernatural Creature]: The type of supernatural creature a sorcerer Summons depends on the type of sorcery he practices — a Black Magician has Summon 200-point Demon; a Elementalalist has Summon 200-point Elemental; and so on.

Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1): A sorcerer can perform his Summon more quickly than the 5 Minutes dictated by the *Extra Time* Limitation using the standard rules for performing a task more quickly (*HERO System 5th Edition, Revised*, page 45). For example, if he wishes to perform the Summon in 1 Phase instead of 5 Minutes, he can try to do so, but he suffers a -9 penalty to his *Sorcery Skill Roll*. Alternately, he can use the rules for taking extra time to perform a Skill. For example, if a sorcerer takes 6 Hours to perform his Summon, he receives a bonus of +3 to his *Sorcery Skill Roll*.

Because this isn't normally possible for abilities that require Extra Time, the value for the *Extra Time* Limitation is halved.

Requires A [Power Skill] Roll (-½): The player should substitute the appropriate type of magic — Black Magic, Elementalism, and so on — for [Power Skill].

Gestures (-½) and Incantations (-½): The value of these Limitations is doubled because of the *Extra Time* Limitation. A sorcerer doesn't have to continue gesturing and incantating once the creature has appeared.

SUMMON ADVANTAGES

While a sorcerer's Summon doesn't have the *Specific Being* Advantage, for "setting flavor" purposes it's assumed he tends to Summon the same beings more often than not. It adds a fun bit of roleplaying to the act of Summoning by developing an ongoing relationship between the sorcerer and his arcane "servants." Players should work with their GMs to come up with names, personality quirks and traits, special powers and abilities, and agendas their characters' Summoned beings have. The GM will keep these in mind when haggling over tasks and the like.

A sorcerer may take the *Weak-Willed* Advantage (or *Strong-Willed* Limitation) for his Summon. He may not take any form of the *Amicable* Advantage.

BARGAINING WITH THE SUMMONED CREATURE

Page 223 of the *HERO System 5th Edition, Revised* describes how a character using Summon "negotiates" with the Summoned being via an EGO Roll Contest. As usual for such Contests, the character has to succeed with his roll to have any hope

PENALTY SKILL LEVELS AND SORCERY

Though a sorcerer can purchase Hurried PSLs (page 101) to offset the penalties resulting for casting a spell more quickly than normal, he cannot purchase PSLs to offset the penalty to his Skill Roll for the Active Point cost of the spell.

All penalties a character suffers due to Encumbrance also apply to his *Sorcery Skill Roll* because of the gestures required to practice sorcery. A character cannot purchase Penalty Skill Levels to offset these penalties.

APPRENTICES AND HEDGE MAGICIANS

Apprentices are the students of sorcerers — usually ones who have for some reason departed the service of their master (a common background for PC apprentices). Hedge Magicians are mystics who have very little power, but maybe an innate talent for magic and some haphazardly learned knowledge of the supernatural — these are everything from tribal shamans to the itinerant potion peddlers.

Apprentices and Hedge Magicians do *not* have the Summon, Endurance Reserve, and Multipower abilities of true sorcerers. They have an appropriate Knowledge Skill and *Sorcery Skill*, and can perform all the abilities associated with those two Skills described on page 116. Because of this, they can communicate with magical creatures via the *Sorcery Skill*, and in theory, they can haggle for a favor, just as a person could haggle with a merchant for a favor. They cannot force a supernatural creature to do anything, nor can they go into debt (meaning they cannot accumulate Favor Points), so any favor is handled solely via roleplaying and is left entirely to the GM's discretion. Most (if not all) of these favors should take the form of information.

An apprentice or hedge magician might also have a "magical" Talent or two. If the GM uses the optional rules for brewing potions and the like (see page 168), they can also purchase these.

VALDORIAN MAGIC (-2½)

All slots in a *Sorcery* Multipower have the common Limitations: Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1), Gestures (throughout; -½), Incantations (throughout; -½), and Requires A [Power Skill] Roll (-½). For the sake of thoroughness, the Game Information for each spell lists these Limitations separately. On your character sheet, you can simply list this as the Limitation *Valdorian Magic* (-2½) to save time and space.

of compelling the Summoned being — if he fails entirely, then the Summoned being automatically resists his efforts (i.e., it “wins” the Contest because it doesn’t even have to roll). However, some tasks rarely, if ever, require a Skill Versus Skill Contest, depending on the nature of the Summoned creature. These tasks suit the nature and personality of the Summoned creature, so it performs them with only limited haggling. Generally, these tasks are:

Black Magic: Any task that inflicts harm on another sentient being and/or disrupts man’s social structures and institutions.

Divine Magic: Any task that falls within the purview of a divine servant’s god.

Elementalism: Any task that requires the elemental to rage uncontrolled, inflicting havoc and harm using its elemental powers.

Necromancy: Any task that allows the dead to torment, whether psychologically or physically, the living.

The Sorcery Multipower

A sorcerer’s Summon represents his ability to make a supernatural being manifest in the Material World — in other words, give it a physical form, or at least a voice. The Summoned being can then perform myriad tasks for the sorcerer, limited only by what the two agree to and the abilities of the Summoned creature. On the other hand, the sorcerer’s Multipower represents his ability to conjure a creature to perform a simple, discrete task of limited duration. In effect, this is a quick and dirty way of summoning a being without the rigmarole of haggling.

Each slot in the Multipower represents a specific creature the sorcerer has learned of in his studies. This creature is perfectly suited to performing a specific, brief, well-defined task. There’s no chance of the creature twisting the sorcerer’s commands to mischievous (or more malign) purposes. Thus, in game terms these abilities are defined using Powers other than *Summon*, and are bought through a Multipower. Despite this, the sorcerer still runs the risk of failing his *Sorcery* Skill Roll and becoming indebted to the supernatural being.

A Sorcery Multipower reserve cannot exceed the Active Points in the sorcerer’s Summon. For example, if the sorcerer has the 200-point Summon described above, the reserve of his Multipower cannot exceed 60 points (though it can certainly be less). He cannot raise the Multipower reserve unless he first raises the Active Points in his Summon. The typical Multipower for a starting sorcerer is as follows:

Multipower, 60-point reserve (60 Active Points); all slots Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1 [see text]), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A [Power Skill] Roll (-½). Total cost: 17 points.

All these Limitations work as described above for the Summon. The Multipower reserve and all

slots must have all of them. In general, a sorcerer can have just about any type of slot, with several caveats:

■ The GM must approve all slots. In addition to evaluating a slot for game balance and the like, the GM should make sure the ability is appropriate to the Swords And Sorcery nature of the Valdorian Age setting. Remember, this is not a High Fantasy campaign; arcane powers should not be easy (or risk-free!) to use, or extremely powerful. In particular, sorcerers should not be highly combat-effective; Swords And Sorcery battlefields don’t feature wizards tossing around lightning bolts and fireballs, Teleporting from one place to another, or the like.

■ A sorcerer cannot have any of the following Powers as a Multipower slot: *Summon*; *Dispel* *Summon*; *Dispel Magic*. (There’s one exception for necromancers — *Animate Body*).

■ All slots must cost END. A character cannot purchase any form of the *Reduced Endurance Advantage* for a slot (including *Costs Endurance Only To Activate*), nor may he apply the *Costs Endurance* (only to activate) Limitation. If a Power would not normally cost END, the player must apply the Limitation *Costs Endurance* (-½). For Powers that only cost END to activate, but remain at full effect afterward — for instance, *Entangle*, *Force Wall*, or *Mind Control* — the sorcerer must apply the Limitation *Costs Endurance* (to maintain; -¼). This makes the power work like a Constant Power in terms of required END expenditure. This does not apply to Powers with fade rates, or Powers whose effects fade on their own (e.g., *Flash* or *Transform*); the sorcerer only has to pay END to activate them.

■ A sorcerer’s Multipower can have both fixed and flexible slots, but no matter what kind of slots he purchases for the Multipower, its reserve can never be more Active Points than his Summon.

The Endurance Reserve

The sorcerer’s Endurance Reserve represents his mystical might — a combination of both his mental toughness in the face of the supernatural, and the rigors his soul can withstand when battered about by demanding, wheedling otherworldly creatures.

Both the Summon and Multipower draw END from the sorcerer’s Endurance Reserve, not his personal END. The typical Endurance Reserve for a starting sorcerer is:

*Endurance Reserve (100 END) (total cost: 10 points) **plus** Endurance Reserve (20 REC) (20 Active Points); Concentration (0 DCV throughout Recovery process, see text; -1), Limited Recovery (see text; -2), Slow Recovery (1 Hour; -2) (total cost: 3 points). Total cost 13 points.*

The amount of END in the Reserve, and the value of the REC, is entirely up to the player to decide, but the Reserve’s REC *must* have the three listed Limitations.

LIMITED RECOVERY

Recovering one's sorcerous strength requires something more than just sleep and relaxation — that sort of rest is fine for mundane men, but the sorcerer is something far more powerful. To regain his might, he must participate in ritual cleansing, sensory deprivation, mind-expanding narcotics, hallucinogenic dreams, or similar consciousness-altering processes.

Subject to the GM's approval, a player determines exactly how his sorcerer's Endurance Reserve Recovers. It must involve either:

- difficult to obtain and costly materials (like extract of spotted tree frog, or the crushed petals of the rare purple orchid of Abyzinia); or
- a specific location, or type of uncommon location (like a desolate cliff, within a jungle, or a site or temple sacred to a god).

Regardless of the method chosen, the entire process requires the sorcerer's complete attention (hence the *Concentration Limitation*) and takes 1 Hour for each REC.

With the GM's approval, a character can increase or decrease the time required for each Recovery by making the process more or less difficult. For instance, Black Magic might require some sort of sacrifice. Sacrificing animals means the ritual takes 1 Hour for each Recovery, but sacrificing a human moves the it up the Time Chart (1 Recovery per 5 Minutes) because such an act involves more risk for the black magician.

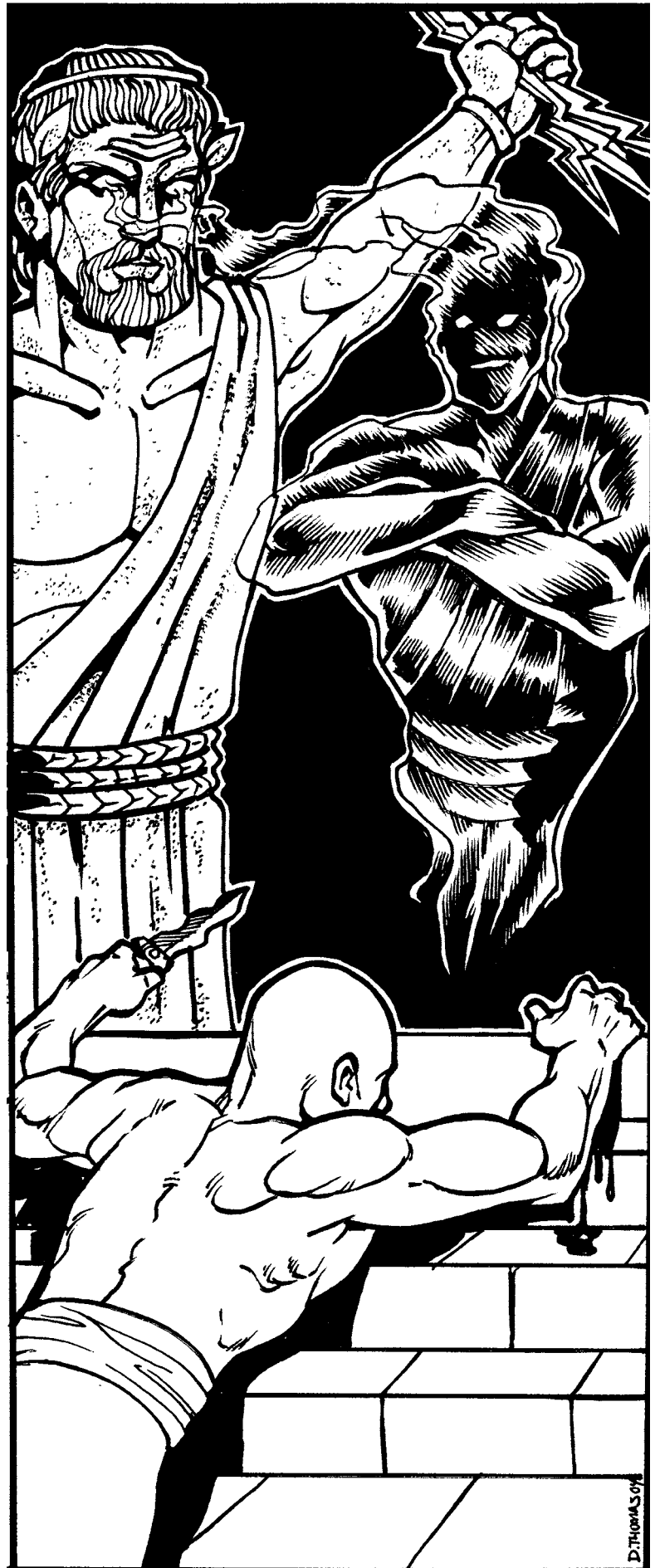
Some possible methods of Recovery include:

Black Magic: The sorcerer must perform ritual sacrifice of a living being to the demonic rulers of the Nether Realms. The time spent during ritual depends on the nature of the sacrifice — an animal requires a ritual that lasts all night, a human being a ritual that lasts only an hour.

Divine Magic: The sorcerer must hold a vigil in a temple or shrine dedicated to the divine. He must undergo some sort of physical deprivation during this vigil, whether fasting for a day or more before starting the ritual, self-flagellation during it, or the like.

Elementalism: The sorcerer must remained unprotected in the face of nature's grandeur for several hours. This might involve standing naked on a desolate cliff while cold winds blow, staying outside during a typhoon or other severe weather, sitting unprotected and without light in a deep, dark cavern, or treading water in a raging sea.

Necromancy: The sorcerer must inhale the smoke of the purple orchid, a strange flower native to the Ylsythen Jungles. The smoke renders him completely insensible to the physical world, his soul flying through the gulfs of night, for the duration.



The Sorcery Skill

All sorcery requires successful use of the *Sorcery Skill* — a type of the *Power Skill* based on EGO. Each type of sorcerer has his own skill: Black Magic, Elementalism, Divine Magic, and Necromancy. (Thus, a character who wants to cast more than one type of sorcery spell needs two or more *Sorcery Skills*.) However, failing a *Sorcery* roll doesn't necessarily mean a spell doesn't work; see *The Favor*, below, for more information.

In addition to his magics (which all require the use of this skill), a sorcerer can use his *Sorcery Skill* to communicate with the supernatural and perform minor feats of power with a successful roll.

Communicating With The Supernatural

The sorcerer casts his senses out into the otherworldly realms and searches for the being he wishes to speak with. A successful roll means the sorcerer finds who he's looking for; a failed roll means he does not. The more powerful the being the sorcerer tries to speak with, the greater the penalty the GM should apply to the player's Skill Roll. As a rule of thumb, for every 50 points of a being's Total Cost, apply a -1 penalty to the Skill Roll.

A successful *Sorcery* roll does *not* guarantee the being listens or even acknowledges the sorcerer's presence — that requires *Summon*. This is simply a means of trying to converse with a supernatural being without running the risk of ending up indebted to it.

Minor Feats Of Power

Similar to the way a warrior uses his *Fighting Tricks Skill* to overawe unworthy opponents, a sorcerer can use his *Sorcery Skill* to perform minor supernatural feats designed to impress or terrify other people. Examples include: a Black Magician trailing sulphurous yellow smoke from his fingertips; a Sorcerer-Priest causing his shadow to take the shape of a divine figure; an Elementalist making a brief but strong wind blow from behind him; a Necromancer opens his mouth to emit a doomed howl from the grave. The GM may allow minor feats of power to add dice to a Presence Attack or the like, they should have no game effects beyond that. They're simply a means to show off a little sorcery — as well as prove one is a sorcerer — without running the risk of accruing Favor Points.

The Knowledge Skill

Every sorcerer has to have a KS of his particular type of sorcery (for example, KS: Black Magic or KS: Elementalism). In addition to providing general knowledge, the KS allows a sorcerer to do three things, described below. If other types of characters take these KSs, all they get is the knowledge; they can't use these three additional functions. (Apprentices and hedge magicians are an exception, if the GM gives his permission.)

Protective Charms

By spending 1 Day and making a successful KS roll, a sorcerer can fashion a protective charm that works against one specific type of creature or in one specific circumstance. This charm can take various forms — an amulet incised with the name or image of Aides to protect against demons, a complicated knot to protect against the spirits of the dead, and so on. The charm provides 5 Active Points' worth of an appropriate game element — typically a +2 OCV with one weapon against the defined type of creature, +1 DCV against the defined creature's attacks, 5 points of Mental Defense or Power Defense against the defined creature's attacks, or Luck 1d6 against that one type of creature. A character can only wear one charm at a time, and a charm only lasts for 1 Day (the GM may add +1 Day, or some other time increment, to a charm's duration for each point by which the sorcerer's KS roll succeeded).

Protective Circles

A sorcerer can create a Protective Circle that wards off supernatural creatures. Creating the circle requires 1 Hour (the GM may allow the character to do it more quickly, using the standard rules for that), and the sorcerer needs appropriate materials to draw the circle with — pigments, chalk, a stick in the dirt or sand, blood, or the like. At the GM's option, better, rarer, or more expensive materials provide a bonus of +1 to +3, and taking extra time can provide the usual Skill Roll bonus. The circle can be anywhere from two feet (.3") to ten feet (1.5") in diameter.

When a Summoned creature attempts to pass into the circle, it has to win a Skill Versus Skill Contest against the KS roll the sorcerer made when creating the circle (be sure to make note of the sorcerer's roll for future reference). If the sorcerer wins, the Summoned creature cannot break the barrier or use any attacks or powers against anyone or anything within the circle (not even beneficial or helpful powers). Of course, this doesn't mean the Summoned creature leaves the area.... typically it tries to cajole, threaten, or otherwise force the circle's creator and whoever else it protects to voluntarily leave the circle.

Summoned Creature's Weakness

Because of their nature, all supernatural creatures embodied in the physical world have a specific weakness, usually defined as a Susceptibility or Vulnerability. While these change from being to being, and even from incarnation to incarnation of the same creature, the being always displays some telltale sign of its weakness. A character with the appropriate Knowledge Skill can identify the weakness with a successful roll. A character gets one chance for each specific creature he encounters; if he fails he cannot try again later during this same incarnation (though he may try if he encounters the being in another incarnation).

THE FAVOR

The entire practice of sorcery hinges on one thing: supernatural beings require mortal agents in the world to accomplish their goals, while mortals can only tap supernatural power via the agency of supernatural beings. Thus, supernatural beings perform the tasks a sorcerer sets them because they know eventually the sorcerer will end up indebted to them... and then the roles are reversed, with the sorcerer doing their bidding.

The Favor mechanic described below is how you track a sorcerer's dealings with the supernatural. It tells you where his account stands: whether he has credit with the supernatural or is indebted to those inhuman beings.

All sorcery in the Valdorian Age requires a *Sorcery* Skill Roll, but failing the roll doesn't mean the spell "doesn't work" or has some other harmless non-effect. Instead it means the supernatural creature has appeared or manifested in the Material World, but the sorcerer doesn't have complete control over it. Supernatural creatures are intelligent beings, not just bloodthirsty spirits, and they have their own plans for the Material World, a realm they have difficulty accessing. When a sorcerer fails to perform his spell perfectly, the Summoned creature seeks to take advantage of him and turn him into its agent in the world.

DETAILING THE FAVOR POINT SYSTEM

As the main text notes, sorcerers just note their overall Favor Point total; they don't keep track of exactly how many Favors they owe to, or have from, specific beings. This simplifies the bookkeeping and speeds up game play.

However, if the GM's willing to do a little more work, he can add in an extra level of detail. The sorcerer still just lists an overall Favor Point total on his character sheet, but the GM makes note of the specific beings the sorcerer deals with, and how (if at all) those beings relate to one another. This effectively involves the sorcerer in "supernatural politics," since not all supernatural beings get along with one another. Not every supernatural being appreciates having to "owe one" to a potential enemy or rival, and he may take out his resentment on the sorcerer if he gets an opportunity.

For example, suppose a sorcerer accumulates some Favor Points through his dealings with the fire elemental Shaarga'ash. He later spends a Favor Point to get the water elemental Verinus to do something for him. In pure game terms, this doesn't affect the sorcerer one way or another — Favor Points are kept track of and spent "generically." But in setting terms, Verinus has, in effect, "paid off" one of Shaarga'ash's "markers," and Shaarga'ash now "owes him one." Since Shaarga'ash and Verinus are rivals, Verinus having this leverage annoys Shaarga'ash to no end. The next time the sorcerer seeks Shaarga'ash's aid, Shaarga'ash may prove harder to invoke or harder to persuade. Depending on how far the GM wants to take things, this may involve Skill Roll penalties, or even require the sorcerer to spend extra Favor Points.

Favor Points

On a sorcerer's character sheet, you should list Favor Points as a lump sum total with either a positive or negative amount: +2 Favor Points; -3 Favor Points; and so on. Though sorcerers owe Favors to, or accumulate them from, different beings, they serve as the "coin of the realm" when it comes to making deals between sorcerers and supernatural creatures. A sorcerer can trade a Favor from one being to another being for some task, just like a merchant can sell a wolf pelt for coin and then use that coin to purchase some other good.

In setting terms, sorcerers have numerous ways of describing how they keep track of who owes whom what: metaphysical ledgers; mystical auras; and so on. All of these are euphemistic ways of disguising the truth — Favor Points are tallied as indelible marks on the sorcerer's very soul, and supernatural beings can perceive this "indebtedness."

GAINING POSITIVE FAVOR POINTS

A sorcerer gains Favor Points in one of several ways:

Critical Successes: When a sorcerer rolls a critical success on a *Sorcery* Skill roll or an EGO Roll to control a Summoned creature, he gains 2 Favor Points. The sorcerer has exercised such mastery over the Summoned creature that he's doing it a kindness by giving it a task and then setting it free. Of course, exercising that mastery is much more difficult than it seems, but it behooves the Summoned creature to owe the sorcerer a Favor rather than waste time with an extended struggle.

Character Or Experience Points: A sorcerer can spend Character Points or Experience Points to buy Favor Points. 1 Favor Point costs 1 point. A starting sorcerer cannot begin the game with more than 10 Favor Points (unless the GM permits him to have more).

GM Reward: A GM can reward a player with Favor Points (just like normal Favors, as described on page 81 of the *HERO System 5th Edition, Revised* rulebook). The GM can also give a sorcerer Favor Points for any other reason and at any time.

Requested Tasks: A sorcerer can request a task from the GM. Normally, a sorcerer ends up in debt to the supernatural, and then a being comes to call in a Favor. In this case, the sorcerer approaches a supernatural being and offers to do some task in return for a Favor. He uses his *Sorcery* Skill as described on page 116 to communicate with the supernatural being. Whether the being accepts the deal is up to the GM. Whether the sorcerer accepts the task is up to the player (just because he asked doesn't mean he has to go through with it — the deal the being offers might be more than he's willing to risk). This method of gaining Favor Points is a good idea if the sorcerer is preparing to attempt some task he *knows* will require heavy use of sorcery (like, for instance, attacking another sorcerer).

The number of Favor Points a character gains this way depends on the difficulty of the task — whether it's Intermediate, Major, or Life-Threatening. (See *Working Off Debt*, below, concerning these categories of difficulty.) A character cannot request a Minor task; they're too niggling to make it worthwhile for the supernatural being. The number of Favor Points received upon completion of the task is the same as the cost listed for the appropriate category (20 for Intermediate, 30 for Major, and 40 for Life-Threatening).

Supernatural beings usually want the sorcerer to complete the task successfully before they'll fork over the Favor Points — mortals die so easily and so quickly. However, at the GM's discretion a supernatural being can grant Favor Points for some future task.

As a courtesy to the GM, if possible a player should make his intention to request a task known to his GM in the days before the next game session. That gives the GM time to prepare for the request, and if necessary to run a solo adventure in which the sorcerer performs the requested task.

GAINING NEGATIVE FAVOR POINTS

A sorcerer gains negative Favor Points in several ways: either he fails a Sorcery roll (normally or critically); or he fails in the EGO Roll Contest with a Summoned creature.

Failed Sorcery Skill Rolls: The primary way a sorcerer gains negative Favor Points is failing his *Sorcery* Skill Roll. For each point he fails by, he either spends 1 positive Favor Point or gains 1 negative Favor Point. The sorcerer *must* spend as many positive Favor Points as it takes to "counteract" the failed roll; only if he doesn't have enough does he accumulate negative Favor Points. The sorcerer still has to engage in an EGO Roll Contest to negotiate with the creature — the fact that the creature chose to appear doesn't mean it will do whatever the sorcerer wants.

In setting terms, the creature is doing the sorcerer a favor by appearing, and will collect on that favor at a later date. The sorcerer has no choice but to acquiesce — such is dealing with the supernatural. (However, at the GM's option, a failed Sorcery roll may, in some circumstances, be treated as pure failure, with the creature not appearing and no spiritual debt incurred.)

Example: *Tylren One-Eye, a Black Magician, attempts to Summon a demon. He has Black Magic 15- and currently has 2 Favor Points. The demon is a 200-point infernal creature, so the Summon is 60 Active Points, resulting in a -6 to his Skill Roll. He must roll a 9 or less on 3d6 to succeed. Tylren rolls a 14, failing by 5. He first spends his 2 Favor Points, and then he gains -3 Favor Points to make up the difference. Tylren has a total of -3 Favor Points now, and the demon appears (i.e., is successfully Summoned). Now the two must haggle over the task.*

Critical Failures: If a *Sorcery* Skill Roll results in a critical failure, the attempt fails and the sorcerer loses *double* the appropriate number of Favor Points (as described above for a failed *Sorcery* Skill Roll) — either he has to spend 2 positive Favor Points for each point the roll failed by, and/or he incurs 2 negative Favor Points for each point the roll missed by. In setting terms, he bungled his magic so badly he left himself entirely at the mercy of the being he tried to Summon, and that being is doing the sorcerer a favor simply by not dragging his soul off to other-dimensional realms.

Example: *Tylren One-Eye performs another Summon. This time because of preparations and beneficial circumstances, he needs a 19 or less to succeed. His player rolls an 18, a critical failure, and Tylren loses 2 Favor Points. He fails to Summon.*

Failed EGO Roll Contests: If a sorcerer makes his EGO Roll in the EGO Roll Contest with a Summoned creature, but he loses the Contest because the Summoned being makes its roll by more, he can choose to lose positive Favor Points or gain negative Favor Points, as described above for failed Sorcery rolls — 1 point for every point by which the Summoned being won the Contest (or 2 Favor Points per point of failure if the sorcerer rolls a critical failure). In that case, the Summoned being acts as if the sorcerer won the EGO Roll Contest.

However, the sorcerer may choose simply to fail, without invoking the Favor Point system either way. In this case, the Summoned being is free to do what it wants... which may involve inflicting harm on the sorcerer (though many beings prefer to take advantage of their power to act in the Material World to further their own agendas or work random mischief). The Summoned being remains in existence in the Material World for a number of "tasks" equal to its EGO/5 (see pages 223-25 of the *HERO System 5th Edition, Revised* for information on what constitutes a "task").

Example: *Tylren tells his Summoned demon the task he wants it to perform — spying on a rival sorcerer. The GM decides the demon doesn't want to perform this task, since a sorcerer is a threat and the demon must keep its presence hidden, which means it can't have fun by performing foul tricks on the target. Thus, Tylren must succeed in an EGO Roll Contest with the demon. Tylren has an EGO Roll of 12-; the demon has an EGO Roll of 13-. Tylren rolls first and applies a -6 penalty because of the Active Points in his Summon. Amazingly, he rolls a 4, making it by 2. Therefore the demon must roll 11 or less (13- with a -2 penalty) to ignore Tylren's command. The demon rolls a 10 and succeeds with his EGO Roll by 1. Tylren may choose to take on another -1 Favor Point to succeed in the EGO Roll Contest. In this case, Tylren's total Favor Points would stand at -4 — in other words, when all is said and done, Tylren owes 4 points' worth of Favors. Or Tylren can simply give up and let the demon go its own way (in which case, Tylren still has the -3 Favor Points from the previous failed Black Magic roll).*

Calling In Favors

In addition to ensuring success/preventing failure with various rolls, as described above, a sorcerer can spend Favor Points in other ways.

As A Normal Favor: The sorcerer can spend positive Favor Points in the same way he'd use a mundane Favor, as described on page 81 of the *HERO System 5th Edition, Revised*. Sometimes the sorcerer can take on negative Favor Points in a similar way, but only rarely and with the GM's approval.

To Bribe Summoned Creatures: When confronted with a Summoned creature serving a rival sorcerer of the same type, and who's agreed to its task without an EGO Roll Contest, the sorcerer can spend positive Favor Points to "bribe" the Summoned creature, causing it to return whence it came. (The sorcerer cannot incur negative Favor Points to do this.) This is all the Summoned creature agrees to (although it might reveal information through roleplaying, possibly as a way of furthering its own agenda). The sorcerer cannot take control of the Summoned creature or compel it to perform another task. He can only bribe it to abandon its current task and return to its home realm.

To do this, the sorcerer must first succeed with a Bribery roll (or, at the GM's discretion, a roll with some other Interaction Skill like Persuasion, a successful PRE Roll, or do some fast-talking roleplaying). Then he must spend 1 Favor Point for every 10 Character Points + Experience Points on which the *rival sorcerer* is built (since the Summoned being has more to fear from the rival sorcerer's wrath the more powerful he is). Thus, if the rival sorcerer is a 150-point NPC, the PC sorcerer must spend 15 Favor Points to convince the Summoned creature to abandon his task.

A sorcerer can only do this if the Summoned creature originally agreed to its task without the need for an EGO Roll Contest. If the Summoned creature lost the EGO Roll Contest, then it must perform as its summoner (the rival sorcerer) demands. And of course, the GM can always rule that based on the circumstances, no amount of Favor Points will sway the Summoned creature (or that the sorcerer can bribe it for less than the usual cost).

Miscellaneous: A sorcerer may suggest other uses for his Favor Points, keeping in mind their nature and rationale. So long it makes a certain kind of sorcerous sense and fits the tone of the campaign, anything is possible. The GM must approve all such requests.

Working Off Debt

Eventually, after a sorcerer accumulates a healthy amount of negative Favor Points, someone calls in his debt. The more negative Favor Points a sorcerer has, the sooner someone comes a-calling.

Similar to the sorcerer's use of his *Sorcery* Skill to communicate with the supernatural, the supernatural can also communicate with him. A supernatural being doesn't materialize, nor is it audible to anyone but the sorcerer himself. Typically these communications take place in dreams, but other methods are possible.

In many ways negative Favor Points equate to the points of the *Hunted* Disadvantage, and they're treated in a similar way.

LIKELIHOOD

The sorcerer needs to start looking over his shoulder at -15 Favor Points, and his total dictates how likely something comes to collect on those favors. The accompanying *Working Off Debt* table lists the roll for the Likelihood of someone collecting on a sorcerer's debt based on the amount of negative Favor Points he has. Typically the GM rolls the Likelihood once per game session before play begins (similar to the *Hunted* Disadvantage), but he may choose to defer a roll if success would interfere with his scenario plans. If the roll succeeds, at some point during the session the sorcerer gets a task to perform.

THE TASK

The GM decides on the difficulty of the task. His decision takes into account both the total negative Favor Points a sorcerer has and what he (the GM) has planned for the game session. The task falls into one of four categories of difficulty:

Minor: The sorcerer can perform a *minor* task in the course of whatever else is going on — meaning he doesn't have to go out of his way to complete the task. A minor task only requires several seconds to several minutes to accomplish. The task does not have to make logical sense — at least any kind of logic mortals follow. Examples include moving a stone from one side of the room to another; destroying by fire a seemingly innocuous book; or making sure a stranger leaves the tavern a few seconds later than usual. Though not very difficult for the sorcerer to accomplish, and seemingly not very important or dangerous, even minor tasks might have serious repercussions in the future — even though it might be centuries in the future — and like any of the tasks, even a minor one can go hideously wrong if the sorcerer bungles it.

Intermediate: An *intermediate* task requires the sorcerer to go out of his way during the course of his normal activities. The task requires a few minutes to an hour to complete, and for the most part is similar to a minor task, but more involved. Examples include: knock down a wall; destroy by fire an entire library of seemingly worthless books; make sure a stranger sleeps somewhere other than his own home for one night. The task might bring the sorcerer into conflict with the authorities or

SUMMON SORCERER

In many ways, you can think of a supernatural being calling in a favor similar to it Summoning a sorcerer. And just like a Summoned creature, a sorcerer performing a task need only perform according to the letter of the agreement. He might twist the command to his own benefit or the supernatural being's detriment. Of course, this isn't a good way to win friends among the supernatural....

WORKING OFF DEBT

Value	Likelihood
-15	8-
-25	11-
-35	14-

Cost	Task
10	Minor
20	Intermediate
30	Major
40	Life-Threatening

his friends and allies, but the resulting conflict should be little more than an inconvenience — for instance, if a sorcerer's caught taking down a tavern's sign in the pre-dawn hours, he can bribe his way past the guardsmen with a coin or two.

Major: A *major* task requires the sorcerer devote himself to the task. It requires a commitment of time (typically anywhere from a couple of days to a week) and an expenditure of resources (whether coin or other, less tangible resources). Most importantly, a major task might put the sorcerer in harm's way and/or affect his reputation. He might have to betray his friends and allies, break a promise to a loved one, or protect some reprehensible person. He does *not* have to kill anyone (although he might find killing someone, or several someones, makes his task easier, and decide to do so) — murder falls within the purview of the life-threatening task.

Life-Threatening: A *life-threatening* task puts the sorcerer's life at risk — not *might* put his life at risk, but *will* put his life at risk — and after the task's completion, the sorcerer's life will not be the same. The time required to complete the task can be anywhere from a couple of days to a couple of months. Typically these tasks involve killing another person, destroying an important building, chasing an entire village from their homes and then destroying those hovels, setting free a great evil, or a similar large-scale act of destruction.

ACCOMPLISHING THE TASK

The task must be accomplished, but the sorcerer doesn't have to be the one who actually accomplishes it. He can, at his discretion, get someone else to perform the task. He can hire, coerce, trick, persuade, or otherwise employ an agent. However, the agent's failure is the sorcerer's failure, and the sorcerer's the one who pays the price.

The supernatural being and the sorcerer agree to the amount of time the sorcerer has to accomplish the task. The haggling can be performed solely through roleplaying, or at the GM's discretion, successful use of the *Persuasion* Skill (typically in a Skill Versus Skill Contest with the supernatural being).

Once the sorcerer accomplishes the task, he removes a number of negative Favor Points equal to the cost for the task's difficulty listed on the Working Off Debt Table. For example, if Tylren has -20 Favor Points and successfully performs a minor task for some demon lord, afterwards he has -10 Favor Points — he "bought off" 10 points' worth of his debt through the task.

FAILURE TO ACCOMPLISH THE TASK

If the sorcerer fails to perform the task within the agreed amount of time, or somehow makes accomplishing the task impossible, he suffers the consequences of failure. At the GM's discretion, he can try to get an "extension" or explain his failure away, and in return for agreeing to a new task, avoid the negative effects described below. This can be done through roleplaying or use of the *Persuasion* Skill as appropriate. But supernatural beings make for harsh taskmasters and rarely accept excuses.

When a sorcerer fails a task, the negative Favor Points become a permanent Disadvantage, the severity of which depends on the difficulty of the task — the value of the Disadvantage(s) the sorcerer receives should (roughly) equal the "cost" of the task. The sorcerer loses the negative Favor Points as if he'd accomplished the task, but he does not gain Character Points for the new Disadvantage.

Possible Disadvantages are listed below. The GM chooses which one (or more) the sorcerer suffers.

Distinctive Feature: The supernatural being curses the sorcerer, and this curse manifests itself by twisting the sorcerer's physical body: a hunchback; skin discoloration; palsy; or the like. (The GM may add, or substitute, an appropriate Physical Limitation). The feature is always detectable by commonly-used senses, so the value of the Disadvantage ranges from 5 to 30 points. For more mystical sorts of curses, use Reputation and Unluck.

Hunted: Supernatural Being: The supernatural being decides to kill the sorcerer or merely teach him a lesson (Mildly Punish). Other Summoned creatures might attempt to gain favors from the Hunter by punishing or killing the sorcerer; if the GM successfully rolls the Hunted at the beginning of the game session, he can choose to have a Summoned creature turn on the Summoner. The supernatural being might also work through other sorcerers, calling in Favors to have them oppose the Hunted sorcerer. The supernatural being is always More Powerful with extensive Non-Combat Influence, and is never just Watching, so the value of the Disadvantage typically ranges from 20 to 30 points.

Reputation: reneges on favors: Since the sorcerer interacts frequently with the supernatural, the Reputation is considered to be known to the "general public" (even though non-sorcerers probably know nothing about it) and is Extreme. Depending on the likelihood of the sorcerer being recognized, the value of this Disadvantage ranges from 10 to 20 points. Whenever the sorcerer Summons a creature or encounters a Summoned creature, the GM rolls for the Reputation. If successful, the creature recognizes the sorcerer, and the sorcerer cannot use Favor Points in that encounter. This means if the sorcerer's Skill Roll fails, the Summoned creature does not appear, or the attempted spell fails.

Unluck: The supernatural being curses the sorcerer with dice of Unluck. The value of this Disadvantage ranges from 5 points to 25 points (1-5d6), and when possible, Unluck should come into play during sorcerous operations.



With the GM's permission, a player can buy off these Disadvantages with a combination of Experience Points and in-game story reasons, just as described on page 555 of the *HERO System 5th Edition, Revised*. He can also spend positive Favor Points to buy the Disadvantages off—one positive Favor Point for one point worth of the Disadvantage, just like with Experience Points.

REFUSING THE TASK

And now the fine print...

A sorcerer is always free to refuse a task, but doing so puts his soul in jeopardy. First, he gains a Disadvantage(s) just like he had failed to accomplish the task. Second, he had better never again roll a critical failure while attempting to Summon a being.

If a sorcerer who refused a task rolls a critical failure on a Summon, his soul is torn from his body and given over to whoever owns his debt. The sorcerer dies and cannot be brought back to life except through the intervention of the gods (and since they abandoned men long ago, he's pretty much out of luck) or the GM (see below). A sorcerer cannot protect himself from this—he entered into these contracts with the supernatural and gave up any right to protest such treatment or find refuge from his creditors.

At the GM's discretion, rescuing the soul of a PC sorcerer can become the purpose of a group's adventures. But this shouldn't be an easy undertaking; fighting supernatural beings and dealing with their minions is no simple thing for Swords And Sorcery characters.

This effect continues until the sorcerer buys off the Disadvantages that resulted from his refusal. The sorcerer must buy off those Disadvantages totally—reducing their value doesn't help.

Trading Favors

As stated above, Favor Points are the currency of sorcery, and as such are traded among sorcerers and supernatural beings—a sorcerer owed Favors from one supernatural being trades those Favors to another being for a task, and a supernatural being desiring a task from a sorcerer “buys” Favor Points from other beings of his type until it has enough to call in the favor from the sorcerer.

Sorcerers can also trade Favor Points among themselves. Generally this is a form of payment in which one sorcerer (often an apprentice) agrees to accept negative Favor Points in exchange for some service or knowledge. Sorcerers do not provide services freely, and do not have much need for coin. In most circumstances, anyone requesting a service from a sorcerer finds himself accepting negative Favor Points in exchange. Finally, a sorcerer can also convince or trick non-sorcerers into taking on their negative Favor Points. A non-sorcerer who takes on the negative Favor Points is commonly referred to as a *scapegoat*. Trading Favor Points in these ways requires the use of a *token*.

A second way of trading Favor Points that does not require a token is to form a *cabal*.

TOKENS

The token is always something unusual—a skull painted with arcane runes, a figurine with a monstrous appearance, an incredibly well-wrought holy symbol, a gemstone of an odd color—and in some way relates to the sorcerer's type of magic. In addition to its unusual appearance, the token has an unsettling aura. It raises the hairs on the back of a person's neck, inspires brief visions of strange vistas, causes a stomach-churning queasiness in the

MULTIPLE TYPES OF SORCERY

A sorcerer can practice one or more types of sorcery, but for each type he must purchase the Summon described on page 113. In other words, he cannot simply purchase the *Expanded Class Advantage* for a single Summon power, making it able to Summon various types of supernatural creatures. He also cannot place multiple types of Summon in a Power Framework. He must pay the cost for each Summon to represent multiple areas of knowledge.

Similarly, he must buy a new Power Skill, Knowledge Skill, Endurance Reserve, and Multiplier for each type of sorcery.

Finally, the sorcerer must keep track of two (or more) separate Favor totals, one for each type of Summon he knows.

onlooker/handler, or the like. In other words, no sorcerer can pass off a token as some mundane item (although he can pass it off as a magical artifact, charm, or downplay the strange effect of the token to his heart's content).

Tokens are special objects — a sorcerer cannot simply make a random object a token. He must either find an appropriate item, whether he quests for it or stumbles upon it in the course of his travels, or with the GM's approval make it himself. To make one typically requires a goodly amount of coin (several ounces of gold is a good amount) and a lot of time (a day or more), and a found object appropriate for use as a token should have a like value.

Into this token a sorcerer places negative Favor Points — 2 negative points for each point by which he succeeds with a *Sorcery Skill Roll*. The sorcerer cannot keep placing negative Favor Points in a single token — he gets one opportunity and then cannot use the same token again until someone has discharged the debt. If his first attempt to put negative Favor Points into a token fails, the sorcerer can never use that item as a token.

After a sorcerer has imbued a token with negative Favor Points, he can give it to another person, whether that person's a sorcerer or not. Until the sorcerer gives away the token, he still has the negative Favor Points; once he gives it away, he loses the negative Favor Points imbued in it. The recipient must accept the token willingly — he cannot be compelled in any way by any person or being (Mind Control, physical torture, threatening his family...). However, he need not know what he's receiving; the sorcerer can use deception or guile to get him to accept. For example, another person could accept a token as a gift (even if he doesn't know it's a token), as a way of repaying an obligation to the sorcerer, as payment for a debt (after the sorcerer convinces him it's just a mundane valuable object), or by stealing it from the sorcerer.

The Scapegoat

A scapegoat is a non-sorcerer who accepts a token from a sorcerer and now has negative Favor Points. The supernatural will collect on these negative Favor Points, just as if the person were a sorcerer. However, unlike a sorcerer, the scapegoat cannot request a task from the supernatural to work off the Favor Points, since he possesses no means of communicating with the supernatural. Furthermore, since he's not trained to deal with the supernatural, he suffers ill effects from this burden on his soul. Until he works off the Favor Points, the scapegoat suffers from one two Disadvantages: Distinctive Feature: Cursed (Not Concealable, Noticed and Recognizable, Detectable By Virtually Everyone); or Unluck 3d6. The Distinctive Feature is nothing identifiable, but all creatures can sense it — people shy away from him (which may impose a -1 on some Interaction Skill rolls), dogs bark at him, cats hiss at him, and so on. In addition, as long as he has the token the scapegoat suffers nightmarish dreams, premonitions of doom, inexplicable happenings like catching sight of a ghost out of the corner of his eye or hearing the sibilant whispers of demons in his ears, and so on.

Once a scapegoat accepts a token, the only way to get rid of the effects is to work off the negative Favor Points. Lacking proper sorcerous training, he can't give it to someone else.

CABALS

A cabal is a group of sorcerers of the same type bound together by ritual and vow who can trade Favor Points among themselves. They can do this instantaneously without tokens. The main advantage of forming a cabal is that the members can "even out" negative Favor Points among the group. For instance, they can make sure none of them ever have more the 14 negative Favor Points at one time, thereby ensuring no supernatural creature comes calling in a favor. This way they limit the likelihood of one of their members becoming too indebted to the supernatural. They can also give positive Favor Points to one of their members if the need is dire. Again, all these trades are instantaneous — performing one is a Zero Phase Action — but the participants must be in the same hex.

SORCERER ARCHETYPES

Below are four archetypes you can use to help craft backgrounds and personalities for sorcerer characters. These archetypes can fit any of the four types of sorcery — they describe more why the character became a sorcerer in the first place than how he has chosen to accomplish this goal.

INHERITOR OF A SORCEROUS LEGACY

The Inheritor Of A Sorcerous Legacy is the latest in a long line of sorcerers, usually from the same family, but sometimes he just holds a position others of his ilk have held for centuries. Most sorcerers must only worry about the repercussions of their own actions, but in the eyes of the supernatural, the Inheritor is often just the same as those who came before him... and thus is held responsible for his predecessors' actions as well as his own. On rare occasions this is a boon, but mostly the Inheritor spends much of his life dealing with the repercussions of things he didn't even do! Furthermore, while all sorcerers suffer from an evil reputation in society, the Inheritor's reputation is usually far greater because of his predecessors. Typically, the Inheritor Of A Sorcerous Legacy also bears some burden or responsibility that comes along with his legacy — a task he must accomplish, or a person, people, place, or thing he must protect.

Possible Disadvantages

Distinctive Features: Something That Marks Him And Reveals His Position To The Supernatural (a signet ring, a mystic aura, a name) (Not Concealable; Always Noticed; Detectable Only With Unusual Senses) (10 points)

Psychological Limitation: The Burden Of His Legacy (Uncommon; Total) (15 points)

Reputation: inheritor of sorcerous legacy (Extreme; Small Group) 14- (15 points)

THE POWERHUNGRY

The Powerhungry has sold his soul to the supernatural in return for power. Some men seek wealth to increase their power, and others master weapon in their quest, but this sorcerer has taken far greater risks. The reason he wants power often differs from other sorcerers — perhaps he grew up poor on the streets of Elweir and swore to not live his life at the mercy of other; perhaps he wanted power for some purpose, maybe even originally to create a better world; or perhaps he's insane. Whatever the case, lust for power drives him above all other considerations.

Possible Disadvantages

Enraged: when thwarted (Uncommon), go 11-, recover 11- (15 points)

Psychological Limitation: Powerhungry (Common; Total) (20 points)

Reputation: sorcerer (Extreme) 8- (10 points)

THE SEEKER AFTER KNOWLEDGE

For this sorcerer, sorcery is only a means to an end, a tool he's developed to uncover lost knowledge. A need to know drives him, and only the supernatural can help him learn knowledge he pursues — perhaps the true history of the world, the nature of the divine, the origins of mankind, or any one of the fields of knowledge man was not meant to know. For this sorcerer, his magic is an intellectual object, not something he pursues for its own sake; only knowledge provides real power.

Possible Disadvantages

Enraged: when thwarted (Uncommon), go 11-, recover 11- (15 points)

Psychological Limitation: Obsessed With Uncovering [Specific Type Of Lore] (Common; Strong) (15 points)

Reputation: sorcerer (Extreme) 8- (10 points)

SWORN TO VENGEANCE

Because of some wrong, real or perceived, this sorcerer has sworn himself to seek vengeance. Whether the wrong was done to him, his family, or his community matters little; the sorcerer has taken it upon himself to see that the wrongdoer comes to a terrible fate. These wrongdoers are powerful people in their own right (maybe even sorcerers themselves), which is why the character makes deals with otherworldly beings to obtain the power he needs to get revenge. Having paid the price of his soul, the sorcerer will make any sacrifice to succeed in his quest — or so he tells himself and others. But there might be a nagging doubt in the back of his mind... a doubt that, even after his tremendous sacrifices, makes the sorcerer wonder if he has chose rightly, or has squandered his life in pursuit of a hollow vengeance.

Possible Disadvantages

Hunted: By Object Of His Vengeance 8- (Mo Pow, Kill) (15 points)

Psychological Limitation: Obsessed With Revenge (Common; Total) (20 points)

Reputation: sorcerer (Extreme) 8- (10 points)

SORCERER TALENTS

Below are some Talents sorcerers can purchase. These talents are “paranormal” abilities that fall outside the scope of sorcery *per se*. They are generally a reflection of the sorcerer's high inhuman will and his frequent trafficking with the supernatural, and GMs and players should keep those qualities in mind when coming up with their own unique Talents. A Talent should rarely cost more than 10 or so Character Points. In other words, a Talent should not substitute for a slot in the *Sorcery* Multipower.

FEARFUL ASPECT

What are mortal concerns to a man who traffics with beings from the otherworld? By drawing himself up to his full height and speaking his words in a eerie tones, the sorcerer can cause lesser mortals to tremble in fear (this adds +3d6 to fear-based Presence Attacks). Often times a sorcerer uses his *Sorcery* Skill to add to the effect by making his voice echo, causing amorphous shapes to form in the darkness, and the like.

Fearful Aspect: 7 Character Points (*bought as +15 PRE; Only For Fear-Based Presence Attacks (-1)*)

LONG LIFE

Supernatural energy infuses the sorcerer and extends his life. This could result from his frequent use of sorcery, some quirk of his bloodline that also gave him sorcerous skill, or some magical ritual he performed or elixir he imbibed.

Long Life Cost: 2 Character Points (*bought as Longevity: ages at ¼ normal rate*)

MESMERISM

The sorcerer is a man who has forced the supernatural to bow to his will; to do the same with most mortals poses little difficulty. By looking into the eyes of his target and speaking his words in a special voice, the sorcerer can force the weak-willed to obey his commands.

Mesmerism Cost: 14 Character Points (*bought as Mind Control 7d6; Concentrate (0 DCV; -½), Eye Contact Required (-½), No Range (-½)*)

PREMONITIONS

The sorcerer, who often casts his senses out into otherworldly realms, has the ability to glimpse visions of other places and even other times. The visions are never perfect; they're often hazy with faces masked by shadows and ending before the sorcerer can see the end result of the actions he glimpses. He also only has limited control over when they occur — he can throw bones across the ground, search the entrails of a sacrificed animal, gaze into a crystal ball, or try other methods of divination, but there's no guarantee any of it works. Most often the premonitions come in dreams or are triggered by a every-

SORCERERS' DISADVANTAGES

In addition to the Disadvantages that come from failing to pay off Favors, and those associated with a given archetype, some other possible Disadvantages a sorcerer might take are as follows:

Dependence: Some means of Recovering the sorcerer's Endurance Reserve can also quickly become Addictions. This can be either physical dependence or mental (a Psychological Limitation), depending on what the sorcerer does to Recover.

Hunted: The master-apprentice relationship is without doubt a dysfunctional one, and many sorcerers end up Hunted by their former masters (or former apprentices).

Reputation: There are few sorcerers in the world, and almost all of them have some unpleasant reputation.

Social Limitation: This section assumes most campaigns take place in or around the city of Elweir, where being a sorcerer is not illegal. However, if the campaign takes place in Valdoria or some other place where sorcery is illegal, then the sorcerer can purchase a Social Limitation to represent this.

SUPERNATURALS SUMMARY

Here's a quick summary of the position the supernatural holds in the Material World.

Demons: The creatures of the infernal embody evil and suffering, whether the evil a man causes another, or the suffering one experiences because of another man's evil.

Divine Servants: The Old Gods are *not* moral forces — in other words, they are not simply some simplistic embodiment of all that's good in the world. Instead they represent stages of a man's life or aspects of his inner life, and these contain both weal and woe.

Elementals: Elementals embody the substances used to create the Material Realms.

The Dead: These are the spirits of the departed, who now exist in a different world, but will someday fall into the Nether Realms.

day occurrence like seeing a flock of birds take flight or a strange cloud formation. When the sorcerer experiences a premonition, the vision renders him insensible to his surroundings.

Premonitions Cost: 8 Character Points (*bought as Precognitive Clairsentience (Sight Group); Precognition Only (-1), Blackout (-½), No Conscious Control (-2), Vague And Unclear (-½)*)

SUPERNATURAL PACT

A common Talent for sorcerers who are Inheritors Of A Sorcerous Legacy, Supernatural Pact gives a character the benefits of a bargain made long ago with the supernatural. The deed done for the supernatural being was accomplished long ago, and now the supernatural being owes the character a boon — one far greater than the normal exchange of favors. The Supernatural Pact applies to a specific supernatural being, and at the GM's option the character can lose the benefits of the pact (temporarily or permanently) if he does something to anger that being.

Supernatural Pact Cost: 2 Character Points (*bought as +2 with Sorcery Skill; Only To Summon One Specific Being (-1)*)

THE NATURE OF MAGIC

The text below describes the denizens of the otherworld that a sorcerer Summons and provides some sample spells. (See pages 174-83 for character sheets for supernatural beings).

When it comes to their origins, history, and agendas, supernatural beings lie. The best of them simply refuse to tell anything one way or the other; the worst give an impossible-to-believe story that changes as the being tells it. Furthermore, every sorcerer has his own pet theories about the nature of Reality; the text below just provides an overview of the common ground most sorcerers agree on.

No supernatural being, not even divine servants, will share the truth about the gods' departure from the world. Demons lie about it, telling a new story — which always portrays the gods, and mankind especially, in the poorest light — each time someone asks. Elementals do not care and won't even acknowledge the gods' existence in the past, let alone the present. The spirits of the dead, originally human, offer up the same stories humans do, but even more tinged with woe and suffering. And the divine servants simply refuse to speak on the matter, only admitting the gods are no longer active in the Material World. Most sorcerers feel this is because of fear — and no matter what threats a mortal sorcerer issues, his power can never match that of the gods.

Black Magic

"And as the first man and woman opened their eyes to see the world and gaze in worship of their creator, Sky-Father and Descender, lurking in the corners of their sight were demons, cavorting, hunched over in the shadows conspiring their downfall. Already present in the world were the horned and gibbering hordes, their toothy mouths that speak blasphemy and whisper temptation and giggle with madness. Man and woman's first disobedient thought had brought demons into the world, pulled them out of the Nether Realms where the four Princes rule the domains of the infernal: Foulness — that which defiles the divine's creation, Guile — that which attempts to deceive the Sky-Father's eyes, Power — that which only rightfully belongs to the Descender; and Strength — that which one man uses to force another to turn away from his rightful lord."

Black Magic is as old as mankind, and the demons the black magician summons claim to be far older than the world itself. Demons reside in the Nether Realms, a place of burning fires and soul-chilling ice, foul stench and eternal agonies, lands myriad in shape and form and name, but not in purpose — which is to provide an abode for evil and place of suffering for mortals after they die. The souls of all mortals fall into the Nether Realms, and once there, the souls of those who were godless in life are tortured by demons for time neverending.

Demons delight in causing wickedness in the mortal realms and inflicting harm on humans. Some say this is because Aides, the god who watches over the mortal souls of the faithful in the Nether Realms and protects them from the infernal, prevents the demons from torturing the souls of all mortals as is their due. Because of this, demons come into the world to tempt men from faithful worship of Aides, so men might fall into their clutches when they die. Others provide a more simple explanation, one that requires no complex metaphysic for its justifications: the evil demons inflict in the mortal world is far more entertaining than torturing helpless souls.

A strict hierarchy rules the Nether Realms, with the souls of mortals as slaves at the bottom, and the Infernal Princes as the rulers on top. Each demon

has a title that explains its rank in terms familiar to men and women: Lord, Count, Baron, Duke, Prince. The domains they rule have malign and ill-favored names, each representing an aspect of mankind's evil or suffering — and the higher the title, the more pervasive and broad the evil or suffering: the Lord of Father-Killers' Tears, the Count of Widows' Suicides, the Baron of Murderous Envy, and the Duke of Murder; the Lord of a Husband's Needful Lies, the Count of Wrongful Justification, the Baron of Broken Promises, and the Duke of Deceit; the Lord of Maggot-Eaten Meat, the Count of Starving Children, the Baron of Blight, and the Duke of Corruption; the Lord of Abandoned Childrens' Cries, the Count of Abusive Fathers, the Baron of Unjust Rulings, and the Duke of Authority.

All these evils and more exist among the infernal hierarchies, and standing above all this woe and malignancy are the four Princes who rule the demons, each embodying one aspect of evil:

- Errgrish-Volmet, Prince of Foulness, whose bloated stomach bursts with foul wine and feces, and who rules the Dukes of Corruption, Drunkenness, Gluttony, and Addiction;
- Lysantha-Drool, Prince of Guile, half-man and half-woman who rules the Dukes of Deceit, Seduction, Greed, and Temptation;
- Shrak-Ulethya, Prince of Power, the unmoving edifice of tortured souls, the top of which disappears into fiery heavens, who rules the Dukes of Authority, Knowledge, Pride, and Envy; and
- Ranslik-Krosh, Prince of Strength, the gore-splattered beast with ten blood-stained horns and twenty never-closing mouths, who rules the Dukes of War, Slaughter, Rape, and Murder.

The tasks demons require black magicians to perform in return for Favor Points typically involve acts of malice, chaos, and deceit: murder (particularly of someone the magician knows, or whose death will pain him in some way); betraying friends and allies; spreading terrible falsehoods; inflicting plagues; and so on.

DEMONIC FRENZY

Effect: Aid STR and CON 3d6
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: 300"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The black magician calls forth a gore-splattered demon of slaughter to kiss someone, gifting that person with demoniac strength. But the gifts of demons always come with price, and the subject might also fly into an uncontrollable rage, attacking both friend and foe.

Game Information: Aid STR and CON 3d6, Range (+½), two Characteristics simultaneously (+½) (60 Active Points); Costs Endurance (-½), Side Effect (subject suffers from Enraged: all the time (Berserk), go 11-, recover 8- until points fade; -½), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Black Magic Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 13 points.



THE FIRES OF THE DAMNED

Effect: RKA 4d6
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: 300"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The black magician summons one of the demons who keeps the fires of the Nether Realms burning hot. It releases a burst of fire at the target before returning to the torture of the damned.

Game Information: RKA 4d6 (60 Active Points); *Gestures* (throughout casting; -½), *Incantations* (throughout casting; -½), *Requires A Black Magic Roll* (-½), *Extra Time* (5 Minutes; -1). *Total cost:* 17 points.

Options

1) The Fiery Explosion: Reduce RKA to 2d6 and add Area Of Effect (Radius; +1). *Total cost:* 17 points.

A GLIMPSE OF HELL

Effect: Entangle 2d6, BOECV
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Constant
Range: 20"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -5
END Cost: 5

Description: The black magician calls up a demon to share with the target a glimpse of the hell that awaits him after he dies. The target is paralyzed with fear until he can shake free of this glimpse of his fate, or the black magician allows the demon to return to the Nether Realms.

Game Information: *Entangle 2d6*, 2 DEF, BOECV (*Mental Defense applies*; +1), *Transparent To Physical Attacks* (+¼), *Works Versus EGO*, *Not STR* (+½) (55 Active Points); *Mental Defense Adds To EGO* (-¼), *Cannot Form Barriers* (-¼), *Costs Endurance* (to maintain; -¼), *Gestures* (throughout casting; -½), *Incantations* (throughout casting; -½), *Limited Normal Range* (20"; -½), *Requires A Black Magic Roll* (-½), *Extra Time* (5 Minutes; -1). *Total cost:* 12 points.

IN A MIRROR, DEMONICALLY

Effect: Sight, Smell/Taste, and Hearing Group Images, -4 to PER Rolls
Target/Area Affected: 8" Radius
Duration: Constant
Range: 280"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The black magician calls forth a demon skilled in the arts of deception to create a potent illusion. Close examination of the illusion reveals some darkly twisted aspect — a demon cannot create a pleasant scene without something malign lurking somewhere.

Game Information: *Sight, Smell/Taste, and Hearing Group Images*, -4 to PER Rolls, *Increased Size* (8" radius; +¾) (56 Active Points); *Gestures* (throughout casting; -½), *Incantations* (throughout casting; -½), *Requires A Black Magic Roll* (-½), *Extra Time* (5 Minutes; -1). *Total cost:* 16 points.

KISS OF PESTILENCE

Effect: Drain 1d6, any Characteristic one at a time
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: 185"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -4
END Cost: 4

Description: The black magician conjures up a plague-bearing demon with leprous flesh and oozing sores. The demon bites the target, giving him some terrible plague before returning the Nether Realms. This can be a palsy (Drain DEX), brain fever (Drain INT or EGO), muscle aches (Drain STR), disfiguring poxes (Drain COM), or exhausting sicknesses (Drain CON or END).

Game Information: *Drain 1d6, any Characteristic one at a time* (+¼), *Ranged* (+½), *Delayed Recovery Rate* (points return at the rate of 5 per Month; +2) (37 Active Points); *Gestures* (throughout casting; -½), *Incantations* (throughout casting; -½), *Requires A Black Magic Roll* (-½), *Extra Time* (5 Minutes; -1). *Total cost:* 11 points.

Options

1) Stronger, But Less Long-Lasting: This version causes a plague that has a more detrimental effect, but doesn't last as long. Increase Drain to 2d6. Change recovery rate to Delayed Recovery Rate (points return at the rate of 5 per 6 Hours; +1¼). 60 Active Points; total cost 17 points.

TEMPTING WORDS

Effect: +12 with PRE Skills
Target/Area Affected: Self
Duration: Constant
Range: Self
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: After consulting with a demonic fiend skilled in temptation, the black magician knows just what words will sway his target. He must spend END to maintain the spell and keep receiving the demon's advice.

Game Information: +12 with PRE Skills (60 Active Points); Costs Endurance (-½), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Black Magic Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 15 points.

WHISPERED BETRAYAL

Effect: Mind Control 9d6, Telepathic; Only To Betray Friends
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: LOS
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The black magician summons a demon who serves the Prince of Guile. Invisible and intangible, the fiend whispers tales of treachery and conspiracies in the ears of the target, attempting to turn one friend against another, or the demon makes false promise of wealth and glory if the target betrays his comrades.

Game Information: Mind Control 9d6, Telepathic (+¼) (56 Active Points); Set Effect (only to cause the target to betray his friends; -1), Costs Endurance (to maintain; -¼), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Black Magic Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 12 points.

Options

1) Whispered Threats: Rather than compel a target to betray his friends, this causes a demon to whisper threats in the ear of his target, filling him with fear and causing him to flee. Change the Set Effect Limitation to "only to inspire fear"(-1). Total cost: 12 points.

2) Whispered Messages: The demon whispers in the target's ear the fate of the target's loved ones who have passed into the Nether Realms. Change the Set Effect Limitation to "only to make target collapse in sadness" Total cost: 12 points.

Divine Magic

*"From their essence the gods shaped
 idolons — vessels for their power
 that took on the form and powers of
 the god. These would serve as the ser-
 vants of the divine — harbingers and
 heralds, emissaries and messengers,
 soldiers and slayers — for man had
 grown populous, and the gods had
 need of servants."*

Once the priests wielded great powers granted by the divine as a reward for lifelong devotion and faithful service, but this is no longer the case. After the gods turned their back on the world, the priests searched for both answers and a means of replacing the power they had lost. For as long as the gods had existed, they had used the divine servants as messengers to the mortals who served them, and it was to the divine servants the priests looked when they sought answers regarding the whereabouts of their gods. But the divine servants didn't answer the priests' prayers, no matter how fervently the priests begged them to come and give them comfort. So some of those mortal priests, filled with arrogance and a driving need to know, sought a means of compelling them to come into the world. They created the ways and means of Divine Magic in a world without gods.

For a time, this magic was considered a boon. But it soon became obvious that priests who summoned divine servants were no different from other sorcerers. The divine servants have no love for the mortals who presume to command them. They serve the gods, not their mortal followers, and just like any sorcerer, a priest must haggle, bargain, and even compel the divine servant to do his bidding. To make matters worst, such dealings shake a priest's faith in the Old Gods to the core.

In Valdoria, the sorcerer-priests were quickly purged from the ranks of the priesthood. Many were slain, but their blasphemous knowledge was free in the world. Some survived by fleeing the Empire and finding homes elsewhere.... but rumors of a cult of sorcerer-priests lurking within the ranks of the Valdorian priesthood never die completely. The cult has had many names throughout the centuries, but the most frequent is the Gods' Regents. They supposedly believe it is their right, in the absence of the gods, to command the divine servants. People who believe this rumor suspect the cult is the power behind the throne in Valdoria.

There are seven types of divine servant, one for each of the Old Gods. Each type takes on the form of the god he formerly served (see *The Old Gods*, page 31), and each concerns himself with an aspect of his god's domain. The Old Gods are neither good or evil (at least in terms of moral absolutes; a priest, of course, argues serving the gods is good, and not doing so is evil) — they embody all aspects



of man's life, both outer and inner: man's creation and his leading of other men, including his family (Pythos); a man's loves, as well as his hates (Kypris); his journey into the unknown in a dangerous world (Poteidan); his quest for wealth and desire or need to travel (Erebos); his need to compete and contest, often violently, with other men (Anyu); his learning, intellect, and ignorance (Enodia); and, finally, his life after death (Aides). When choosing which sort of divine servant to Summon, a sorcerer-priest must keep these domains in mind.

In common parlance, a type of servant is referred to as a Servant of Pythos, a Servant of Kypris, and so on. The servants inhabit an otherworldly place called the Divine Abode. The tasks they require sorcerer-priests to perform in return for Favor Points typically involve making sure mortals remain faithful to the Old Gods — everything from restoring a shrine, to recovering a statue of a god lost to time, to killing a godless leader of men. They have no respect for a man's free will... or for that matter, his life. In some ways, sorcerer-priests view the divine servants as automatons. The Old Gods set them in motion millennia ago, and the divine servants simply seem to continue going through the motions even after their creators have departed. But arcane rumors claim that the souls of sorcerer-priests who become indebted to the divine servants and fail at a task become the raw material for creating new divine servants.

THE DARKNESS OF ENODIA

Effect: Sight Group Flash 6d6, BOECV
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: 300"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The sorcerer-priest summons a servant of Enodia, who clouds the target's mind with darkness so he cannot see.

Game Information: *Sight Group Flash 6d6, BOECV (Mental Defense applies; +1) (60 Active Points); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Divine Magic Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 17 points.*

KISS OF KYPRIS

Effect: Mind Control 9d6, Telepathic; Only To Cause Love/Hate
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: LOS
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: A servant of the Envy-of-All appears and fills the target with an irresistible love... or hate... of whomever the sorcerer-priest wishes.

Game Information: *Mind Control 9d6, Telepathic (+¼) (56 Active Points); Set Effect (only to inflict love or hate; -½), Costs Endurance (to maintain; -¼), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Divine Magic Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 13 points.*

THE PROTECTION OF AIDES

Effect: -13 to opponent's Black Magic or Necromancy Skill Roll
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Constant
Range: 290"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: When facing a black magician and his demons, or a necromancer and his souls of the dead, the sorcerer-priest can call upon a servant of Aides for protection. The target suffers a -13 to his *Sorcery* Skill Rolls (regardless of what specific type of *Sorcery* Skill(s) he has). Thus, if the target fails his *Sorcery* roll, he doesn't necessarily fail completely — he just has to spend/gain more Favor Points to accomplish his magic. In other words, because of the presence of a servant of Aides, the demon or soul of the dead is doing the sorcerer a very big favor to show up and do as he asks.

Game Information: -13 Negative Skill Levels to *Sorcery* Skill, Ranged (+½) (58 Active Points); *Gestures* (throughout casting; -½), *Incantations* (throughout casting; -½), *Requires A Divine Magic Roll* (-½), *Extra Time* (5 Minutes; -1). *Total cost:* 17 points.

THE RAGE OF ANYU

Effect: Succor STR and CON 3d6
Target/Area Affected: 3" Radius
Duration: Constant
Range: 225"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -4
END Cost: 4

Description: The summoned servant of the Manslayer gives the gift of battle to a group of men in melee. His gift is indiscriminate, providing the same might... and berserk madness... to friend and foe alike. The effect ends once the sorcerer-priest stops paying END to maintain the divine servant's existence in the world.

Game Information: *Succor* STR and CON 3d6, two Characteristics simultaneously (+½), *Area Of Effect* (3" Radius; +1), *Ranged* (+½) (45 Active Points); *Side Effect* (subject suffers from *Enraged: all the time* (Berserk), go 11-, recover 8- until effect ends; -½), *Gestures* (throughout casting; -½), *Incantations* (throughout casting; -½), *Requires A Divine Magic Roll* (-½), *Extra Time* (5 Minutes; -1). *Total cost:* 11 points.

THE SKY-FATHER'S JUDGMENT

Effect: RKA 3d6, Indirect
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: 280"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The sorcerer-priest demands a servant of Pythos appear and deliver a wrathful judgment on the target of the sorcerer-priest's ire. Lightning roars down from the sky, even on a cloudless day, to strike the target.

Game Information: *RKA* 3d6, *Indirect* (always from above; +¼) (56 Active Points); *Gestures* (throughout casting; -½), *Incantations* (throughout casting; -½), *Requires A Divine Magic Roll* (-½), *Extra Time* (5 Minutes; -1). *Total cost:* 16 points.

Options

1) The Godless Are Numerous: Reduce RKA to 1d6 and add *Area Of Effect* (64" Radius; +2¼). 52 Active Points; total cost 15 points.

THE TELLER OF SECRETS

Effect: Telepathy 12d6; Only To Know Secret
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: LOS
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The sorcerer-priest summons a servant of Enodia and directs it to look into a target's soul and learn some secret about him. The servant does so, and then whispers the secret in the sorcerer-priest's ear before disappearing.

Game Information: *Telepathy* 12d6 (60 Active Points); *Only To Learn A Target's Deepest, Darkest Secret* (-½), *Gestures* (throughout casting; -½), *Incantations* (throughout casting; -½), *Mandatory Effect* (EGO +20 required; -½), *Requires A Divine Magic Roll* (-½), *Extra Time* (5 Minutes; -1). *Total cost:* 13 points.

THE VOICE OF PYTHOS

Effect: 60 PRE
 Target/Area Affected: Self
 Duration: Instant
 Range: Self
 Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
 END Cost: 6

Description: The sorcerer-priest calls up a servant of Pythos to issue an edict of the sorcerer-priest's choosing. The servant, stating he speaks for the sorcerer-priest, delivers the edict and departs, returning to the Divine Abode. Whatever words the sorcerer-priest has the servant speak are accompanied by a 12d6 Presence Attack. (Note that the PRE *does not* add to the sorcerer-priest's PRE; it's a separate thing.)

Game Information: 60 PRE (60 Active Points); Cost *Endurance* (-½), *Gestures* (throughout casting; -½), *Incantations* (throughout casting; -½), *Requires A Divine Magic Roll* (-½), *Extra Time* (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 15 points.

THE WRATH OF POTEIDAN

Effect: Change Environment, -4 to all DEX Rolls and DEX-Based Skill Rolls
 Target/Area Affected: 256" Radius
 Duration: Constant
 Range: 285"
 Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
 END Cost: 6

Description: The sorcerer-priest calls upon a servant of Poteidan to rouse a terrible monster below the earth. The ground shakes for as long as the sorcerer-priest spends END to maintain the effect, making it difficult to walk or stand. The sorcerer-priest can use the same spell to stir up the ocean and toss a ship on rough seas. All characters on the ships in the affected area suffer from the penalty to DEX Rolls and DEX-Based Skill Rolls.

Game Information: *Change Environment* 250" radius, -4 to all DEX Rolls and DEX-Based Skill Rolls (57 Active Points); *Gestures* (throughout casting; -½), *Incantations* (throughout casting; -½), *Requires A Divine Magic Roll* (-½), *Extra Time* (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 16 points.

Elemental Magic

"From the divine abode, Pythos descended into a world of fire — blood red and ice blue, heart-warming yellow and smudged orange — and he passed into its white-hot heart where dwelt the Kiss of Flame, and he struck his bargain and placed the Sun in the Sky.

"From fire to air, Pythos descended into a world of winds — cold gales and bone-chilling howls, hair-tousling breezes and soothing westerlies — and he passed into the calm void at the realm's center where dwelt the Voice of Wind, and he struck his bargain and loosed the winds into the world.

"From air to water, Pythos descended into a world of waves and currents — creaking ice floes and choking whirlpools, thirst-quenching streams and cleansing pools — and he passed into the murky depths at its center where dwelt the Roar of Waves, and he struck his bargain and flooded the world with life-giving water.

"From water to earth, Pythos descended into a world of weight and mass — haughty granite peaks and ever-rolling boulders, gleaming veins of gold and rich black soil — and he passed into the oppressive vault at the realm's center where dwelt the Groan of Stone, and he struck his bargain and gave substance to the world, unmoving and unchanging, where his beloved children, man, could make their home and raise their crops and mine the depths for their bounty."

The god Pythos created the world, but like any craftsman, he only shaped it — the materials for his work came from elsewhere. The source of these materials were the Elemental Realms, the first source of Fire, Air, Water, and Earth, where the Primal Lords rule: the Scorched Lands (fire), ruled by the Kiss of Flame; the Howling Void (air), ruled by the Voice of Wind; the Infinite Depths (water), ruled by the Roar of Waves; and the Vaulted Warrens (earth), ruled by the Groan of Stone. The priests say Pythos struck bargains with the Primal Lords to obtain the materials; others say Pythos tricked and swindled the Primal Lords out of the materials.

Whatever the case, when a sorcerer causes an elemental to manifest, it violently struggles to break free from the sorcerer's constraints and rage across the world. It pleads with the sorcerer to allow it into the world unchecked so it can free the substances trapped in the forms and shapes that comprise the world — forms and shapes the elemental considers a corruption of elemental purity.

Unlike demons, elementals are not separate entities (at least according to most sorcerers) — an entire Elemental Realm is an entity unto itself, with its Primal Lord as its “mind.” The elementals are simply parts of a “body” — facets of a composite being. While individual elementals are intelligent, their mentality is wholly alien to mankind. They view flora and fauna like a man would view a cancerous growth, mines and tunnels as deep cuts and stabs into a man's flesh, water in a cup or bowl as a man in a cage, trapping the wind in a sail as a man in chains, smelting ore as maiming, alloying metals as rape. The concept of property baffles them, for in the Elemental Realms everything is part of the whole — can a man's right hand own his left? When dealing with elementals, a sorcerer must be clear and concise not just because elementals will try to twist his commands, but because easy communication between two such alien beings is difficult at best. The Favors elementals require of elementalists typically involve destroying man-made objects, ranging from simple statuettes and crafted items, to buildings, to entire towns and cities.

ADVERSE GROUND

Effect: Entangle 6d6, 6 DEF
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Constant
Range: 300"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The elemental calls upon an earth elemental to cause the ground to impede his enemy. The elemental either sinks the target to sink into the ground below his feet and traps him; or he causes the ground to rise up and engulf him.

Game Information: Entangle 6d6, 6 DEF (60 Active Points); Costs Endurance (to maintain; -¼), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires An Elementalism Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 16 points.



AN AIRY GUARD

Effect: Missile Deflection, +8 with Missile Deflection
Target/Area Affected: One
Duration: Constant
Range: 50"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The elementalist gathers an air elemental around him, his robes rustling unnaturally, and directs that wind to tear missiles out of the air before they hit him or his comrades.

Game Information: *Missile Deflection (arrows/projectiles), Range (at range; +1) (20 Active Points); Cost Endurance (-½), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires An Elementalism Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1) (total cost: 5 points) plus +8 with Missile Deflection (40 Active Points); Cost Endurance (-½), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires An Elementalism Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1) (total cost: 10 points). Total cost: 15 points.*

BREATHABLE AIR

Effect: Life Support (Self-Contained Breathing)
Target/Area Affected: Self
Duration: Constant
Range: Self
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -1
END Cost: 1

Description: The sorcerer can cause an air elemental to surround his head with breathable air, so in effect he need not breathe.

Game Information: *Life Support (Self-Contained Breathing) (10 Active Points); Costs Endurance (-½), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires An Elementalism Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 2 points.*

Options

1) Air Within Water: This option allows the elemental to provide his comrades with breathable air also. Add Area Of Effect (4" Radius; +1½). 25 Active Points; total cost 6 points.

EMANCIPATE THE ELEMENTAL COMPONENTS

Effect: Drain BODY 4d6; Only Works Against Man-Made Objects
Target/Area Affected: One Object
Duration: Instant
Range: 300"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The elementalists summons an earth elemental and orders it to restore some man-made object to its elemental components. This ranges from "unalloying" steel, to separating weaves of fabric, to toppling buildings. If the attack reduces the target object to 0 BODY, it's destroyed; otherwise it "heals" quickly.

Game Information: *Drain BODY 4d6, Ranged (+½) (60 Active Points); Only Works Against Man-Made Objects (-½), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires An Elementalism Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 15 points.*

FIERY NIMBUS

Effect: HKA 1d6, Damage Shield
Target/Area Affected: Self
Duration: Continuous
Range: Self
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -4
END Cost: 4

Description: The elementalist wreathes himself in a fire elemental that, while cool on inside, is preternaturally hot on the outside.

Game Information: *HKA 1d6, Damage Shield (does damage in HTH combat; +¾), Continuous (+1) (41 Active Points); No STR Bonus (-½), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires An Elementalism Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 10 points.*

FLAME BLAST

Effect: RKA 2d6, Variable Advantage (+1)
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: 300"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The elemental calls forth a fire elemental to blast an enemy. The fire elemental has perfect control over the flames that comprise its physical form, and the sorcerer can command it to adopt a variety of forms, represented by the Variable Advantage.

Game Information: RKA 2d6, Variable Advantage (+½ worth of Advantages; +1) (60 Active Points); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires An Elementalism Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 17 points.

WALK THE WAVES

Effect: Flight 6", Only To Walk Across Water
Target/Area Affected: Self
Duration: Constant
Range: Self
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -1
END Cost: 1

Description: A summoned water elemental floats below the elemental and carries him across the waves. To onlookers it looks as if he were literally walking on water! This only works if the surface of the water is reasonably calm, though.

Game Information: Flight 6" (12 Active Points); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Only In Contact With A Surface (-¼), Only To Cross Reasonably Calm Water (-½), Requires An Elementalism Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 3 points.

Necromancy

"So the gods gathered around the pyre of ash and oak to mourn the death of the first man and first woman. All the gods stood there, their heads bowed with sorrow, the Sky-Father leading the mortal children of the first man and first women in the rites of burial. The sky cracked with a terrible scream, and the earth shook with a fearful trembling. And then a cackling, malignant laughter swirled in the air like a whirlwind of hate and despite and terrible evil.

"As the mourners looked on, they saw the demons dragging down into the fiery pits the souls of the first man and first woman. The gods and the children of those departed mortals knew a deep sorrow. The demons had claimed their due, for while a man's life was given to the gods, his life after death the demons ruled.

"But Aides, Lord-Of-The-Sun and Beloved-Of-Man, threw himself on the pyre, for his love of mortals was greater than even the Sky-Father's own. As the flames consumed his divine flesh, his divine soul followed after the souls of the first man and first woman into the Nether Realms. Even the demons knew fear in the face of his wrath, and Aides protected his beloved mortals... but only those mortals who loved him in return, for the pride of a god does not allow him to embrace those who spurn him in life."

The soul of a man lives on after his body dies, but it inhabits a world very different from that of mortals. The dead have many names for this world — the Lamenting Land, the Wailing Void, the Black Sea — but most often they call it the Desolate Plain. Once in this land, the soul slips free of the constraints of the Material World, existing outside space and time. The souls of men faithful to the Old Gods go onto Aides's realm and live under his

THE DEAD AND THE UNDEAD

Necromancy in many *Fantasy Hero* campaigns involves creating mummies and vampires and other creatures that have physical bodies, often referred to collectively as the undead.

Necromancy in *The Valdorian Age* adopts a more traditional view of a sorcerer's interactions with the dead. The necromancer calls forth spirits of the dead. These are *not* the undead, nor even creatures possessing some sort of unlifelike. They exist in a place between the Material World and the Nether Realms. They will eventually pass into the Nether Realms, but until then a necromancer can make them manifest in the world. These spirits have powers such as the ability to possess a person, inflict terror in the living, see the future, and move physical objects around (with great effort). But they aren't vampires, mummies, ghouls, liches, and so on.

When a necromancer performs a Summon, he calls a dead man's soul into the world. A manifested soul has a variety of powers. The necromancer can cause this soul to inhabit a skeleton or corpse and animate it (see the spell *Animate Dead*), but this is temporary and must be purchased as a slot in the necromancer's Multipower. The necromancer *cannot* create vampires or the like (which isn't to say vampires, mummies, and their ilk don't exist in Il-Ryveras...).

protection — or at least, once they lived under his protection, but now that the gods have gone, the case is less clear. But other souls linger on, drifting aimlessly through the Desolate Plain. Eventually the soul falls into the Nether Realms, but a soul can remain in the Desolate Plain for decades, or centuries, or even millennia. Time has no meaning and little influence on the dead; all that matters is how desperate the soul is to remain free of the Nether Realms and the force of its personality. Until a soul slips into the Nether Realms, a necromancer can summon it forth into the Material World and make it do his bidding.

The tasks the dead require of necromancers in return for favors often involve the soul's life and worldly possessions and loved ones. Sometimes he spitefully wants a treasured possession destroyed so no one else may ever hold it. Sometimes he wants a message or object delivered to a loved one, or revenge on someone he hated in life. The longer a spirit has resided on the Desolate Plain, the more strange its requests become. Some necromancers claim that seemingly mundane actions can invoke deep passions in the dead — their perceptions of the world and time are far different than those of the living, and witnessing an object that has sat unmoving for millennia can cause a feeling akin to joy in a spirit.

Necromancers also speak in hushed whispers about the rumored rulers of the Desolate Plain. They call these the Never Fallen, spirits who have existed since the beginning of time... and who will continue to abide on the Desolate Plain until the end of time. No sorcerer has ever spoken with the Never Fallen, but arcane legends claim the true reason the dead perform favors for mortals is that they hope to buy the necromancer's soul, which they can trade to the Never Fallen for eternal existence on the Desolate Plain so they won't fall into the Nether Realms. Another story tells that a necromancer who loses his soul because he fails in some task finds himself traded to the Nether Realms in exchange for a dead soul the Never Fallen wish to redeem for some reason. But the truth of the matter is that a necromancer doesn't know what happens to his soul if he loses it to the supernatural.

ADVICE FROM DEAD MEN

Effect: -4 to any Skill Rolls
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Constant
Range: 300"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: A spirit of the dead clings to the target's shoulders and whispers words in his ear. Just before the target attempts some action, the spirit tells him about another man who tried the same action, failed, and paid the price of his life for his failure. No matter how minor the action seems at the time, the spirit knows of a dead man who met his fate because of it... and he shares this story with the target, rattling the target's confidence to the point where failure becomes much more likely.

Game Information: -4 Negative Overall Skill Levels, Ranged (+½) (60 Active Points); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Necromancy Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 17 points.

Options

1) Good Advice: Rather than receiving portents of doom, the target receives good advice from the spirit clinging to his shoulders. Change to +3 Overall Skill Levels, Ranged (+½), Usable By Other (+¼) (52 Active Points); Costs Endurance (-½), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Necromancy Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 13 points.

ANIMATE BODY

Effect: Summon 16 179-point Skeletons
Target/Area Affected: 16 Skeletons
Duration: Constant
Range: No Range
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The necromancer calls up a spirit and forces it to animate a skeleton. He can call up to 16 spirits to do so. He must have enough skeletons (or bodies) to animate, and he must pay END every Phase to maintain the effect, since the spirits can only make a temporary home in bodies not their own. The skeletons do not automatically obey the necromancer; he has to compel or persuade them to obedience. For a skeleton's character sheet, see page 123 of *The HERO System Bestiary*.

Game Information: Summon 16 179-point Skeleton (56 Active Points); Costs Endurance (to maintain; -¼), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Must Have Body Or Bones (-1), Requires A Necromancy Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 12 points.

Options

1) **No Skeletons, Only Corpses:** Change to Summon 16 178-point Zombies and Must Have Body (-1) (all other Limitations are the same). A character sheet for a Zombie can be found on page 127 of *The HERO System Bestiary*. 56 Active Points; total cost 12 points.

2) **Both Skeletons And Corpses:** Change to Summon 4 179-point Animated Bodies, Expanded Class (both zombies and skeletons; +¼); Must Have Body Or Bones (-1) (all other Limitations are the same). 57 Active Points; total cost 12 points.

THE CHILL OF THE GRAVE

Effect: EB 6d6, NND
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: 300"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The necromancer causes spirits to fill a target's mind with the dull hopelessness of the dead. The sudden despair momentarily stuns the target, sometimes causing weak men to faint. Only those who know no fear can resist its effect.

Game Information: *Energy Blast 6d6, NND (defense is Mental Defense or the Fearless Talent; +1) (60 Active Points); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Necromancy Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 17 points.*

A DEATHLY HAZE

Effect: Darkness to Sight Group
Target/Area Affected: 6" Radius
Duration: Constant
Range: 300"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The necromancer commands the dead in the area to take on an ephemeral substance with no more mass than a dense fog... and just as difficult to see in.

Game Information: *Darkness to Sight Group 6" radius (60 Active Points); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Necromancy Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 17 points.*

EMBODIED SPIRIT

Effect: Telekinesis (10 STR)
Target/Area Affected: One object or character
Duration: Constant
Range: 125"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -2
END Cost: 2

Description: The necromancer causes a spirit to materialize enough in the world to pick up an object, strike an opponent, open a door, and so on. On-lookers can see a hazy human form, but can't affect it.

Game Information: *Telekinesis (10 STR), Fine Manipulation (25 Active Points); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Necromancy Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 7 points.*

POSSESS THE LIVING

Effect: Mind Control 9d6, Telepathic
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: LOS
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The necromancer commands a spirit to possess a living target and perform some deed. The two psyches war over control of the body for the entire time, so the command must be simple and "non-emotional" — in other words, the spirit only takes control of the body and its actions.

Game Information: *Mind Control 9d6, Telepathic (+¼) (56 Active Points); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Necromancy Roll (-½), Set Effect (controls physical actions only, not beliefs or emotions; -½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 14 points.*

A TOUCH OF FEAR

Effect: Drain PRE 4d6
Target/Area Affected: One character
Duration: Instant
Range: 300"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The necromancer causes a spirit to materialize near the target and give him a glimpse of the horrors of dying. The target momentarily experiences how the spirit the died and feels great terror. Necromancers often follow up this spell with a Presence Attack.

Game Information: *Drain PRE 4d6, Ranged (+½) (60 Active Points); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Necromancy Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1). Total cost: 17 points.*



VOICES OF THE DEAD

Effect: Hearing Group Images, -8 to PER Rolls
Target/Area Affected: 16" Radius
Duration: Constant
Range: 290"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The necromancer commands the dead to speak whatever words he wishes, distracting and confusing his enemies. The dead can mimic voices and sounds to near perfection.

Game Information: *Hearing Group Images*, -8 to PER Rolls, *Increased Size* (16" Radius; +1) (58 Active Points); *Gestures* (throughout casting; -½), *Incantations* (throughout casting; -½), *Requires A Necromancy Roll* (-½), *Extra Time* (5 Minutes; -1). *Total cost: 17 points.*

THE VISION OF THE DEAD

Effect: Clairsentience (Sight And Hearing Groups)
Target/Area Affected: Self
Duration: Constant
Range: 9600"
Sorcery Roll Penalty: -6
END Cost: 6

Description: The dead see space differently than the living. The necromancer conjures up a spirit and tells it to cast its senses to some far away place. Then the spirit tells the necromancer what he sees and hears.

Game Information: *Clairsentience* (Sight and Hearing Groups), 64x Range (9600", or about 12 miles) (60 Active Points), *Gestures* (throughout casting; -½), *Incantations* (throughout casting; -½), *Requires A Necromancy Roll* (-½), *Extra Time* (5 Minutes; -1). *Total cost: 17 points.*

Options

1) A Vision Of The Future: The dead see time differently also, and with this version the necromancer has the dead look into the future. Of course, because the dead see things so differently than the living, and especially see time differently, the necromancer often has difficulty understanding what he's told. Change to Clairsentience (Sight And Hearing Group), Precognition, 4x Range (1,000"), Vague And Unclear (-½). 60 Active Points; total cost 15 points.

chapter four:



GAMEMASTERING THE VALDORIAN AGE

CAMPAIGN IDEAS



This section includes suggestions for your campaign in the Valdorian Age, as well as plot seeds to help get a campaign started. Of course, an ongoing campaign might evolve as it progresses, covering all these ideas and more as the PCs travel in and out of Elweir.

THE BEST THIEVES IN ELWEIR

In this sort of campaign the PCs are criminals. They might be “steal from the rich, give to the poor” criminals considered heroes among the common folk... or simply greedy men with a love of coin and the skills to get it illicitly. The campaign takes place mainly in Elweir, with the PCs only removing themselves from the city if the guard comes down hard on them. The PCs definitely need to have rogue Skills — Lockpicking, Stealth, Climbing, Shadowing, and so on (if possible, get the players to differentiate their characters through different thieving specialties and the like). They should also have Contacts.

Plot Seeds

The Black-Hulled Ship: The PCs have decided to plunder a ship of Ureth-Kalai that’s currently tied up in Gibberish. Why are they attempting this deed that makes most daring thieves tremble with fear? Maybe one night they were drinking and bragging, and someone tricked them into agreeing to it. Maybe they’re trying to establish their reputation in the city. Or maybe they just want to see what goes on aboard the black-hulled ships. Once aboard the ship, they spy the Grave One (pages 32, 149) conferring with the ship’s captain and uncover the prophet of the King in Sapphire Robes’ plot... and then both sorcerers turn in their direction. If the PCs escape, what will they do with the information they’ve learned? Who will buy such information? And if no one, will the PCs feel duty-bound — or maybe just curious enough — to investigate?

Infiltrating Little Romnal: Little Romnal, home to the Duke’s Men, has been turned into a fortress. But word comes down the grapevine that Sir Onaiwu’s offering a hefty reward for any documents stolen from Sir Ravning’s office. Will the PCs take him up on his offer? The reward is tempting, and maybe the PCs have a score to settle with the Duke’s Men because they showed up once when the PCs were trying to bribe their way out of an arrest. But whether they realize it, getting involved in the spying going on right now the city might not be good for their health....

A Friendly Wager: Godstime is coming soon and the PCs, while sharing a mug with another crimi-

nal group, agree to a friendly wager. To thumb their nose at the intrusive Valdorians, both parties agree to commit as many thefts as they can over the seven days of Godstime. The winner will be the group that steals the most coin. Will the PCs take the safe route and merely burgle as many homes as they can while the residents are at the temple? But rumor is that many members of the Fifty are retiring to their newly-completed Winter Palace... Will the PCs dare the nearly vacant Gold’s Reside? Or maybe they’ll take a trip to Lonetree and see how strong the guard is there....

FOR A FEW COINS MORE

In this campaign the PCs are mercenaries hiring their swords to the highest bidder. Not all of them need be warriors... a sorcerer might fetch a high price with some lords, and rogues can always find work as spies. Things you should consider: do you want the PCs to participate in Mass Combat, maybe as captains of units, or would you rather they act as group of specialists — saboteurs, scouts, spies, assassins, and so on? Also, how political do you want the campaign to be? Mercenaries can make good coin turning sides in the middle of battle, but doing so is likely to make enemies. This campaign can also involve constant fighting and might lead to many PC deaths. There are plenty of places for the PCs to find work — many men come to Elweir looking to hire mercenaries for their employers.

Plot Seeds

Us? Lords?: Everyone in Three Fingers knows that all a man needs to win a land to rule is a few strong soldiers. The PCs have agreed to accompany a man upriver to Three Fingers and help him win a lordship. Maybe he’s promised them good coin for their bloody work. Or maybe he’s offered them a share of the land, a place where they can rule. Whatever the case, the PCs are going to find themselves as more than just mere warriors fighting on the battlefield — now they must deal with the other Lords of the River Land, and their first task is to identify which of those Lords will be the easiest to topple. Even if they successfully conquer the land, they and their employer don’t automatically become Lords — they must defend their “domain” against others just like themselves who are seeking to seize a land and rule it.

Arabian Fights: Al’Raoud’s manservant, Farqua, approaches the PCs and begs them humbly to accept a commission — not much coin, but very much gratitude — to fight against Tharestan and help Shaya regain its independence. Will the PCs

join this lost cause, perhaps to meet the legendary Al'Raoud in person? Or maybe to steal the legendary jewel he's rumored to have stolen from the ruler of Tharestan? And if so, will they come up with a plan that can help turn the tide in a seemingly hopeless war?

To Fight For The Witch-Queen: Zenobia T'numbra is dead, and it's time for Maizah D'langri to make her bid for the title of Witch-Queen. Captain Ushindi approaches the PCs in the name of his mistress and asks if they're interested in a commission. The wars over the succession are infamous for their viciousness — and also for being one of the few times in the modern day when sorcerers still meet on the battlefield. Already sorcerers are coming out of the woodwork to stake their claims. Will the PCs accept this challenge... or will they decide they've seen enough demons for one lifetime, even if they've never seen a demon at all, and sit this one out? And if they do agree, how will they react when their first task is to assassinate one of the sorcerers vying for the crown? (And if one of the PCs is a sorcerer, might he discover just how deep his ambitions run and throw his hat in the ring?)

A SORCERER AND HIS GUARD

In this sort of campaign, one PC (or potentially more) is a sorcerer and the rest of the PCs are his valued minions, hirelings, and companions. Because it places one PC in the central role, not all groups are comfortable with this sort of game (but of course you can use this as a starting point for a campaign that evolves into a different sort of campaign after a few sessions). Your challenge is to make sure that, although the sorcerer is central to the plot, the other PCs get their chance in the spotlight. Some of the enjoyment in this sort of game derives from the sorcerer dealing with the tasks he must perform for the supernatural, and this provides a ready source of adventure hooks, but you need to be careful about tasks that require the sorcerer to betray the other PCs.

Plot Seeds

Apprentice No More!: The first game session: the PC sorcerer is an apprentice who's mastered the art and is ready to set off on his own. But his master doesn't want to give up his apprentice. He never intended the PC to learn any real sorcery; he was only using him as a servant and scapegoat. Now the PC must get out from under of the thumb of a sorcerer more powerful than himself. He enlists the aid of the other PCs. Do they kill the master — if they don't, he'll certainly come hunting for the PC sorcerer — and if so, how will they accomplish that?

A Signet Ring: The sorcerer learns that a signet ring from ancient times has turned up. The signet ring provides its wearer with the *Talent Sorcerous Pact* — but only if it's given willingly. It's in the possession of an old lady who considers it a family heirloom and won't part for it for any reason. How will the sorcerer get the ring from the old woman? And if he does gain the ring, what sorcerous legacy

has he now inherited... and who will come calling because of it?

A Place Of Power: It's time for the sorcerer to establish his own base of operations. Most sorcerers try to locate these at places that provide some benefit to their magic. First, the sorcerer must discover such a place, figure out how to get there, and then deal with the current inhabitants. And once he has, he must forever be on guard against another upstart sorcerer doing the same to him.

THE DUKE'S MEN

This is the perfect campaign for players who don't like playing criminals. The PCs are Valdorians and members of the Duke's Men. They spend their time on the streets of Elweir making sure the law is enforced. They don't all have to be warriors and nobles — after all, it takes a thief to catch a thief. They don't even have to all be Valdorians — Valdorians can learn to respect any honest man who honors the Old Gods.

Plot Seeds

Break In!: Spies have made it into Little Romnal and stolen some of Sir Ravning's papers. The PCs must first and foremost retrieve the papers. Along the way, they'll likely want to catch the thieves and discover who hired them to steal the papers. But how will they deal with the cold shoulder they get from anyone and everyone in Lowtown? Will they stoop to disguising themselves and denying their heritage? And once they capture the thieves will they take justice in their own hands or turn the men over to city guard... just to watch them go free after paying a bribe?

Foul Sorcery!: The PCs have witnessed foul sorcery performed in Elweir — they don't know who and don't know why, but they won't rest until the sorcerer is found and faces justice. After some investigation, will they be so adamant when they discover the sorcerer is Sir Tyche Longlass? The Prince will protect his Royal Astrologer — that's for certain. The PCs could act as judge, jury, and executioner themselves, and no one would be the wiser about the sorcerer's fate....

Please! Please, You Must Help Me!: A god-fearing, attractive young woman throws herself at the PCs' feet and begs them to help her find her father. A resident of Lowtown and surely involved in some criminal doings, the man went missing three days ago. Will the PCs help this young woman? And what will they do when they find themselves caught up in a conspiracy that involves all the major players in the city: the Prince, Sir Onaiwu, the Silver-Crossed Palms, and even their own Sir Ravning Coeur? And will they realize the young woman has led them into a trap? After all, *cherchez la femme*....

SAILING THE WIDE BLUE SEAS

In this campaign, the PCs have a ship and set sail to explore the world. The advantage of this sort of game is that you get to use a great variety of adventures, since the PCs sail from one place to the next. Instead of treating the sailing as a means of getting from one place to another, with the occasional pirate attack to spice things up, you can get the PCs involved in mercantile commerce. The downside is that it's difficult to have an extensive and well-developed cast of NPCs, and that's part of what makes *Sword And Sorcery* and city campaigning so much fun. However, the PCs could have a contact in every port on Blue Waters, and they likely need some sailors who all have interesting stories to tell...

Plot Seeds

Fires Off The Starboard Bow! As the PCs' ship rounds the western coast of Pelosa heading for Dalthyr, they see tongues of flame leaping high into the night sky — the armies of Tharestan have reached the city-state and refused to accept its surrender. Now they've put the place to the torch and are massacring the residents. The PCs can hear the desperate, frightened screams drifting across the waves. Do they sail nearer, hoping to rescue some of the people? Tharestan isn't known for its navy — in fact, just the opposite — and the ships guarding the harbor look easily avoided. And if the PCs do rescue some people, what do they do when a very attractive veiled woman bats her eyes and pleads with them to take her to the capital of Varzend, where her wealthy uncle will surely reward them richly for their trouble? And will the PCs discover the girl's uncle is the Bey of Varzend before they take her gratitude a little too far?

From Out Of The Depths: In the middle of the night, the watch cries a strange warning — *iceberg* to starboard?!!?!? As the PCs emerge to investigate, they see a city rising from out of the depths, water sparkling in the moonlight as it cascades down from the city's twisting spires and seaweed-covered domes. Do the PCs tie up to the city and investigate? (They had better if they fancy themselves explorers!) What strange sights... and creatures... and treasure does the city hold? As they disembark to journey into the city, they hear a scream, and turning suddenly, they catch sight of a strange creature with green scaly skin leaping from their ship and disappearing with a splash... what cursed city of Poteidan have they stumbled on? And what did that creature steal from their ship?

An Unmarked Passage: It seemed an easy enough task: take this crate from a port in Valdoria and deliver it to Elweir. Then when a storm struck the Western Ocean, and as their ship as tossed by the waves, the crate struck the hull and broke open, revealing a small young woman and several weeks' worth of food and water. And then behind them appeared on the horizon three Valdorian triremes. When the woman finally tells the PCs that her father was a sorcerer-priest and member of the Gods' Regents, and claims the Valdorians want

to execute her for her father's crimes, what will the PCs do? And will they ever realize the young woman is actually the sorcerer-priest's apprentice and not his daughter — an apprentice with a small talent in sorcery herself?

GOOD ALE FOR ONLY TWO BITS!

In this campaign the PCs have come into possession of a lease on a tavern — preferably in Lowtown. Drunkard's Rest might make an even better place, since the *Valdorian Age* provides some details about the competition. Obviously, unless your players are a strange group who like counting the till after a hard game session of selling ale to NPCs, the tavern is little more than a front for some more extensive operation — maybe something along the lines of *The Reveling Rat* (pages 48, 147). The PCs must not only deal with keeping the tavern in operation — which also means paying the rent and the city guard — but also with whatever pitfalls happen when they're doing the real work. And of course a tavern tends to attract regulars who are nosy about what's going on.

Plot Seeds

Give A Buddy A Hand: One of the regulars has a problem: seems he defaulted on a loan from an usurer and now the usurer's going to sell him into slavery. Will the PCs wash their hands of the situation, or will they get involved? And if they do, how will they react when the usurer refuses any offers to pay back the loan, insisting that the man must be sold into slavery? How long will it take them to realize that this whole thing involves the sorcerer, Getab Yren, attempting to pay back some favors to the spirits of the dead? And then what will they do?

"In This City Of Sin And Wickedness...": A prophet of a New God has been filled with divine inspiration by his deity, a god devoted to temperance, and taken up a position right beside the door to the PCs' tavern. A crowd gathers to listen, but all they do is block the entrance — they never come in for a drink after listening to the prophet go on about the evils of ale and spirits. To make matters worse, the city guard has been standing across the street... and since the tavern's a front for some criminal operation, that's not good. Every time one of the PCs pokes his head out the door, the prophet points at him and accuses him of being a servant of evil because he sells ale. Then the guardsmen begin to study the PCs' face. And then the PC spots some of the Duke's Men standing across the way. Then he hears the worst thing he's heard all day — the chanting of Reslin Bitterbend and the faithful from Uphill East coming down the street on one of their Sacred Purges. There's only one question left for the PCs to ask themselves: can this really be a coincidence?

You Must Pay The Rent! One evening when the PCs are broke, the alderman bursts in waving a bunch of parchment. He points the finger of accusation at the PCs and claims they didn't pay their rent. The PCs know they paid their rent, and they don't

have the coin to pay it again, so what will they do? Will they find out that another criminal group has uncovered the PCs' secret plans and has bribed the alderman to get them evicted from the tavern so they can move in? If the PCs discover that, what will they do?

THE EPIC

An epic scope to a Swords And Sorcery campaign isn't entirely without basis in the fiction. Many a barbarian has found himself king of a great land and become a legend to later generations. There might even be a Swords And Sorcery story or two about a protagonist who brought about the end of the world and ushered in a new age. One facet of Il-Ryveras and its history makes it perfect for an epic story — namely, the PCs set out to return the gods to the world. Maybe they want to return the Old Gods to Valdoria. Maybe they're servants of a New God (all New Gods aren't necessarily frauds) and wish to bring him into the world in more than just name. Whatever the specifics, a quest to return the gods is the stuff of epic and perfectly suited to a campaign in the Valdorian Age. The plot seeds below are slightly different than those above; rather than specific adventure ideas, they trace the course of an epic-style campaign.

Plot Seeds

A Brush With The Divine: First, the PCs need a hint the gods once existed and still exist. This can be a prophecy an old woman in the marketplace speaks to them as they pass by, or perhaps a mysterious stranger who visits them, and though he doesn't reveal his identity, he possesses knowledge and maybe even powers beyond the ken of mortals. If one of the PCs is a sorcerer of the Inheritor Of A Sorcerous Legacy variety, maybe his legacy is to return the gods to Il-Ryveras. Or maybe one of the PCs simply found a book that reveals some or all of the truth (like the one Yully has in the Blindman's Bookshop). However you chose to proceed, something needs to set the PCs on the path to investigating the possibility of returning the gods to the world.

We Need A Plan: They need a plan, so they don't wander around aimlessly. The plan doesn't have to be the correct one — at least not at first. It only has to give them a path to follow, and it shouldn't dead end. Even if it's a "false lead," it needs to point in a different direction. This can be: the PCs hear a story of a sorcerer-priest whisked out of the Material World

by servants of the Old Gods, and for some unknown reason he was given just the barest glimpse of the Divine Abode. The PCs discover a reference to a relic that used to prophesy about the future; it's been missing for years and the PCs decide to discover its current whereabouts. Maybe they discover a map that purports to show the location of a sacred site lost to mankind ages ago, then travel there with hopes of invoking the gods.

At this point, you also need to introduce adversaries for the PCs. Not all people want the gods to return, or maybe they just don't want the same gods to return as the PCs do. Also, supernatural entities like the Infernal Princes likely have no interest in seeing the Old Gods return to Il-Ryveras. At this stage in the game, the adversaries' real masters should be a secret.

The Quest: With plan in hand, the PCs begin their quest. The quest should be long and arduous — this is a big deal after all. More than just physically demanding, it should also cause the characters to question their purpose. Over the course of their quest they might learn that not all will be manna from heaven if the gods return. They might learn the world they know will change irrevocably, and while that might seem a good thing, they will be strangers in a strange land. Maybe they learn they'll have to sacrifice themselves or their loved ones to accomplish their goal. Maybe one of them betrays the cause. Maybe in their drive to accomplish their goal, they can feel their humanity — their compassion and mercy — slipping away; they've fought the dragon so long they've become the dragon, and in truth they have no other choice if they are to succeed. As stated previously, at its heart Swords And Sorcery fiction is about the triumph of human will, skill, and determination over adversity, typically supernatural adversity, and the crises of faith during the epic quest reflect that.



THE GM'S VAULT



This section contains additional and/or secret information about the Valdorian Age setting that's for the GM's eyes alone. *If you're playing in, or plan to play in, a campaign based on the Valdorian Age setting, do not read this section!!*

The GM's Vault is organized by chapter and page number. If the Vault doesn't comment on some part of the main text, it's usually safe to take what's written there as accurate (or as left for each GM's individual interpretation). As always, you're free to change anything in this book to suit your own preferences or campaign.

CHAPTER ONE

One important fact is missing from the history: Elweir was a minor city-state along the banks of the Serpentine for many, many years. It was only in 528 VA that the Tour of Alredd the Horseman brought Valdoria close enough to the Worm River for that waterway to become an important trade route. Before then, Valdoria was too distant to be a frequent trading partner and Elweir was considerably less wealthy.

Throughout the city's history and description, you can see the effects of this sudden influx of wealth in such things as the establishment of the Prince's Road — particularly the bridges built by Tolemos — and the founding of Gold's Reside only four hundred years ago. Further evidence is that Worm's Hole is one of most recently established neighborhoods, which is part of the reason it closely resembles a Valdorian frontier town.

Most Elweirians, including many among the nobility, believe Elweir has always been one of the wealthiest cities in Il-Ryveras.

PAGE 7 — THE CONCILIATOR'S VISIT

Valdorian history records the reason for the truce as: Oron was a peace-loving man who wished to spend his life in quiet contemplation of the gods, rather than at the head of a conquering army; the truce was his idea entirely. In the centuries since his reign, the Valdorians have come to see Oron as a saintly man.

Something never mentioned in the chronicles is that while trade between Valdoria and Abyzina made Elweir wealthy, it also enriched Valdoria and helped keep open diplomatic ties between the two realms. This was something many of Oron's more coin-minded advisors never ceased to tell the newly-crowned Emperor.

The real reason for the truce lies somewhere between those two facts. Elweir took credit for it simply because it increased the city's reputation, and because stories of how someone convinced the Emperor of Valdoria to spare the city made for good tales.

PAGE 7 — THE RISE OF THE BANDIT LORDS

The names of the Bandit Lords are indeed right out of a bard's story. The bards came up with the names first, and then the Bandit Lords adopted them later. Each successor takes the same name as if they were noble titles, giving some the impression the same Bandit Lords have terrorized the lands east of Elweir for thirty-three years. For more information on the Bandit Lords, see *The Bandit Lords* on page 155.

PAGE 8 — THE RANSOM DEMAND

The Bandit Lords have never possessed the strength of numbers and organization to put all of Elweir to the torch (though they could have caused severe damage). The Prince and his advisors overreacted to the situation.

PAGE 8 — THE TREATY WITH ROMNAL

The Royal Exchequer, Sandover Reed, shot the arrow that murdered the Prince. Since his power and influence as Exchequer was directly proportional to the amount of gold in the treasury, Lord Reed felt keenly the drain the Bandit Lords' ransom caused, and he had already made arrangements with the Duke of Romnal. But the Prince refused to sign the treaty with the Duke, so Reed gathered a cabal that included Capra Lustshine and Drake Saltbraid to assassinate him.

Everyone in the hunting party except Lord Speckmore and Prince Summerset knew of the assassination plot. Summerset chose to believe it was an accident — either because of fear for his life or simple naivete (perhaps a little bit of both) — and over the last three years, he has convinced himself this is true beyond a shadow of a doubt. Lord Speckmore, however, knows the truth and this has led to his physical decline — especially his newly developed nervous twitch.

PAGE 13 — THE SIX BRIDGES

The stories about the bridges are accurate — Tolemos built the ones along the Prince's Road without sorcery (although the lives of many workmen were lost in the task), and Largisse Foom created Foom's Bridge with elementals. However, the creator of the Colossus of the North (see below) did not create the Founding Stone Bridge. Instead the Elothians, now referred to as the Builders (when

referred to at all in the city), created it at the height of their empire when the location of Elweir served as one of their important river ports.

PAGE 14 — THE COLOSSUS OF THE NORTH

The Colossus of the North is far older than anyone suspects.

In the dark, dangerous, and now long-forgotten days after the death of Takofanes, the end of the Turakian Age, and the cataclysms that followed (see *The Turakian Age* for more information), a sorcerer named Lanarien the Silver-Shod led a group of refugees out of the city of Aarn in three ships. Protected by Lanarien's considerable magics, they survived the catastrophes as the world reshaped itself. The magics Lanarien wrought to protect these refugees were powerful almost beyond measure — so powerful they bent time and space around the three ships. Lanarien transported them across numberless millennia until the world calmed itself. What they found drove them to despair, for civilization was destroyed and any hope for peace they might have harbored now that Takofanes had fallen was dashed when they witnessed this new world.

Lanarien left the refugees on the coast of what is now Abyzinia, where they went on to intermarry with people living there. The despairing magician wandered the world, knowing he would never find a home, his powers now vastly weakened.

Motivated by a soul-shattering sorrow, Lanarien used his waning mystical might to erect the Colossus — and later the Colossus of the South — as a monument to his grief and a warning to the men who would come after him. Most people believe the Colossus is enwrapped in serpents because the river is called the Serpentine. In truth, the river takes its name from the serpents.

Concerning the Witch-Queen's knowledge of the Colossus's origins: several of her more scholarly predecessors speculated about the subject, their guesses coming close to the truth, and they recorded their thoughts in their journals, which she later read. But none know the true story in any detail; few other remnants (if any) of the Turakian Age exist now in the world.

PAGE 16 — CALENDAR

The Prodigal Moon truly is unlucky for sailors. Any sailor accepting a berth during the Thirteenth Moon suffers from Unluck 2d6 for the duration of his employment aboard the ship.

PAGE 17 — HOLIDAYS

There are many ways to work the holidays celebrated in Elweir into your campaign's adventures. Here are you a few ideas you can use:

New Year: This holiday serves as a good time for the PCs to spend an evening reminiscing about everything that went wrong during the previous year's adventures and remembering lost comrades — a sort of adventure to recap the past year in game time. If the PCs find the right tavern, it might be a good opportunity to learn a secret about one of their rivals when a celebrant describes some terrible event that happened to him involving the rival. Or the PCs might hear of

some strange happening that can serve as a hook for their next adventure.

Oron's March: Oron's March is one of the few times everyone knows the Prince will make his way through Elweir. Though he's highly guarded, if the PCs need to tell the Prince something, especially a secret they can't risk someone else hearing, Oron's March might be their best opportunity. Also during Oron's March many shops and other locations are empty of people, and the streets outside of the Prince's Roads are less guarded than usual.

The Revel: The Revel is a good time to kidnap someone and make sure no one notices he's gone for several days — long enough to get whatever information the PCs need from him and return him before he's missed. It's also an excellent time to rob some shop or the like.

Prince's Day: Prince's Day allows the PCs to get close to a Lord of the Fifty or the Prince when he's outside Gold's Reside — though the PCs have to penetrate the noble's disguise first (perhaps by bribing a palace servant to describe his costume to them...). Prince's Day is also one of the few times people can get into Gold's Reside without a document bearing a noble's signature, and if the PCs want to steal something from that neighborhood, this is a good time to try.

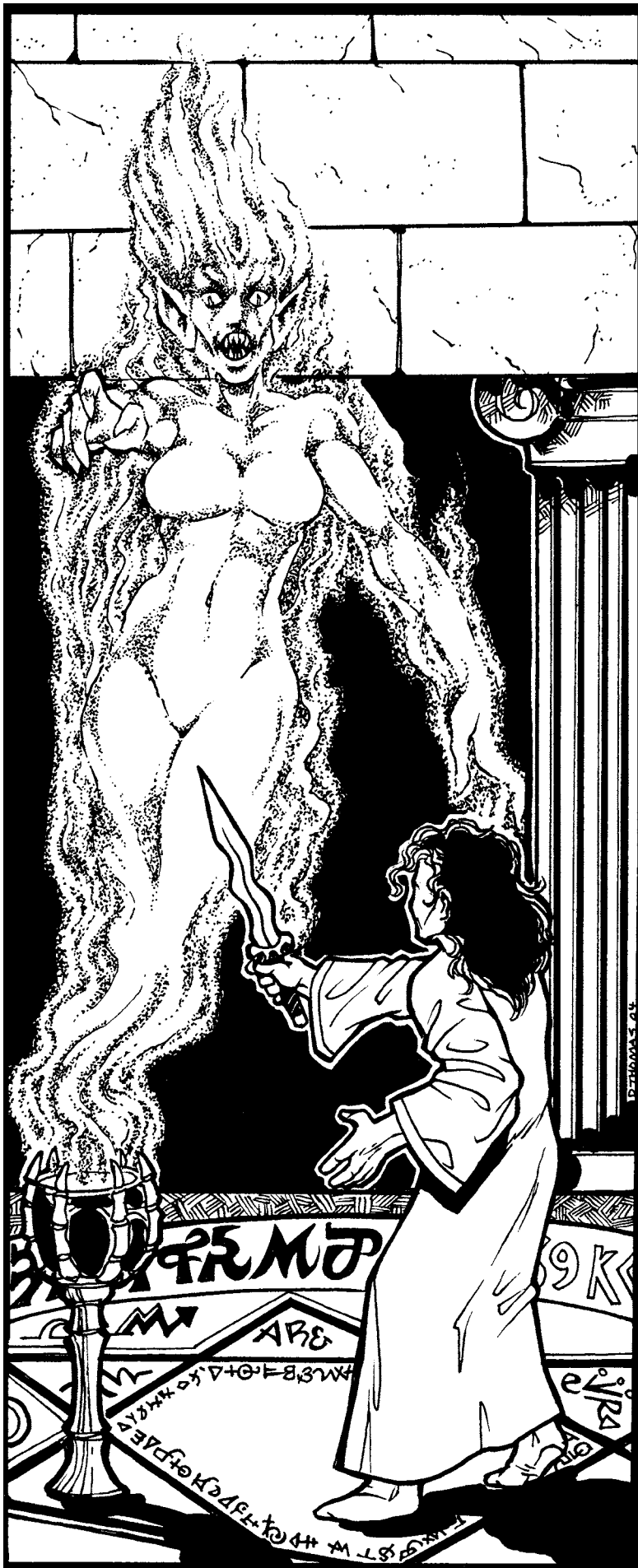
Rivers' Day: If the PCs can seize a toy boat holding the written wishes and desires of one of the celebrants, they can obtain some good dirt on a person in Elweir — any extortioner will tell you there's no better lever than knowing a man's heart's desire. Of course, getting caught stealing someone's boat is not a good idea and bound to lead to an angry mob attacking the PCs.

Godstime: Godstime is indeed sacred to the divine. Sorcerer-priests who serve the Old Gods receive a bonus of +2 to their *Sorcery* Skill Rolls during the week.

Historical Notes About The Holidays

Oron's March: Oron's March is the newest of the holidays; it replaced a more ancient custom. Formerly the day was called Kypris's Day. On that day the unmarried men in Elweir would march the streets, and an unmarried woman could pull a man out from the parade. The two then went off to spend the night together, their activities considered a secret known only to them and ranging from the affectionate to the lewd. A considerable number of marriages marked the next day, but the event was often a time for the daughters of the wealthy to have a night with a man less wealthy, and vice versa. Since parents had little control over their unmarried children on that day — tradition dictated only the Heart-Stirrer held sway over the actions of the young — the holiday fell into increasing disfavor until finally the Prince succumbed to the pressure of the Fifty and replaced it with Oron's March.

Rivers' Day: Rivers' Day was originally River's Day and only honored the Serpentine — and more importantly the divine spirit that used to inhabit that river and would make its wrath known by



flooding its banks and pulling down Elweirnian homes with a ferocious roar. Long ago, when the first residents of Elweir placed their tiny boats in the water, a little whirlpool would suck the boat down to the depths if the river accepted their offering, and it was considered bad luck for a boat to make it past the northern edge of the city. The only acceptable offerings were human body parts — fingers, ears, eyes, and so on. The community as a whole also sacrificed a few humans, who were tied to small barges and set adrift in the river. The Serpentine's divine spirit (a being similar in nature to the one who inhabits the Cynthian Plain) has not made its presence felt in nearly a thousand years — not since the period of calamity that followed Valdor's death — and that was the first time it had done so in centuries.

Plot Seeds

Prince's Day Is The Day Of The Prince's Death!: Just as Prince's Day begins and the nobility of Elweir depart Gold's Reside, the PCs overhear of a plot to assassinate the Prince in hopes of regaining Elweir's freedom from Valdoria. The PCs must spend the evening combing Lowtown's crowded streets, searching for the Prince so they can guard him from attack. But the real challenge is: amidst the chaos, how will the PCs make sure the Prince realizes they saved his life — perhaps by letting the assassins get near enough to threaten him? — so they receive their proper reward?

Everything Old Is New Again: On New Year, after a PC shares the story of that year's misadventure with his fellow drinkers, a strange patron shouts out a way the situation could have been worse and the PCs suddenly find themselves reliving the past event — but this time things are happening exactly as the unknown patron suggested. Will the PCs survive this even worse situation, and if so, who is this patron who has the ability to transport them into a different reality? Could he be a god hiding among mortals, perhaps Erebus playing a trick on the men? Or could this all be some nightmare brought on by too much drink?

The Return Of The Serpentine: During the Rivers' Day celebration, the toy boats begin disappearing, sucked down into the Serpentine in little whirlpools — but rather than accepting the offerings, the river spits them out in explosive plumes of muddy water. One man — a stranger to Elweir — steps forward, offering an explanation for the events. He tells anyone who will listen about the ancient sacrifices man once made to the Serpentine, and warns that unless the residents of Elweir return to this ancient custom, the river will destroy their city. The Prince and his cabinet are at a loss. The servants of the Old Gods deny this sacrilege and have whipped their followers into a frenzy. All of Elweir is about to boil over. In the midst of this will the PCs discover that the strange man who proclaimed the river's return is actually an elemental attempting to maneuver himself into the position of the servant of the one true god and all the power that entails?

PAGE 21 — PRINCE SUMMERSET

The problem with all the conjectures about Summerset's true nature is that he's a young man maturing into an adult. During the first couple of years of his reign, he was little more than a pawn for Lord Reed and his cronies, but as Summerset has grown older, he's tried to assume the authority of the Prince in more than name. In many ways, he's a smart, clever person who might one day make an excellent prince. But he's still a vain and venal young man — he just isn't an evil one as some, especially those who believe he murdered his father, like to think.

Summerset has no desire to bring Elweir into the Valdorian Empire, but at this point he isn't sure what to do about the situation. He plans to pretend satisfaction with the treaty until the Bandit Lords are eliminated, and then he figures to somehow free himself of his entanglements with the Duchy of Romnal — and that includes getting out from underneath Lord Reed's thumb. His current plan is to incite the provinces around Romnal to declare war on Romnal, and once the Duchy is occupied defending itself, Summerset will expel Sir Ravning and his men from the city. But until the threat of the Bandit Lords is ended, he must do everything he can to keep those same provinces from attacking Romnal. And all the while, he must not let Lord Reed get wind of his plans.

Concerning the gold he threw during the last Oron's March parade: the young Prince proved his understanding of Lowtown with that one. The bars were actually bronze, but by the time the people who caught the bars realized they weren't gold, the rumor had already spread and was believed.

PAGE 21 — THE PRINCE'S FAMILY

Strat and Hollandrah Packmyrtle have plans to assassinate the Prince before either he or any of his sisters get married. This, they hope, will make their own son the Prince. Strat Packmyrtle has delayed the marriage to Lord Speckmore's eldest granddaughter for a quite a while now — ever since the last Prince died. Having seen which way the wind is blowing in Elweir, he hopes to either marry his son to one of the Reeds or even one of Duke Lothar's daughters. However, getting out of the engagement is a sticky business, and he needs to devise a solution before killing Summerset. His current hope is to discredit the Speckmores somehow and get them cast out of the Fifty, and he's been searching for a way of getting in contact with the Silver-Crossed Palms. And if he could pin the murder of Summerset's father on Lord Speckmore, it would be a simple matter to cancel the engagement....

PAGE 21 — THE PRINCE'S CABINET

Sir Tyche Longlass: Sir Tyche is a black magician and the former apprentice of Lord Grimble. Though not as talented as his master, he also owes fewer favors to the supernatural, so he's more free with his magic. The main reason for replacing Lord Grimble is because Lord Grimble is a known sorcerer, and while he was the Royal Astrologer, he was under considerable scrutiny from Sir Ravning Coeur. On the other hand, Sir Tyche has presented himself to the ambassador as an effete dilettante and bumbling idiot from Romnal, and so far none of the Valdorians believe him capable of sorcery. Lord Grimble still serves as an unofficial advisor to the Prince, relaying messages either through Sir Tyche or during social visits with Lord Reed.

Sir Monshun Windlock: Sir Monshun is the Prince's spymaster, and the Royal Masonry serves as the Prince's spy ring in Elweir. Of the hundred masons the Royal Masonry employs, only thirty of them are master masons. The other seventy are spies and assassins who have enough knowledge to do a cursory job inspecting stoneworks and the like. As members of the Royal Masonry, they can travel anywhere in Elweir without arousing suspicion — even if no visible stoneworks are present, they can claim either they're investigating the possibility of building a new stonework, or that there are sewers they must examine. Only Prince Summerset, Lord Speckmore, Lord Reed, and Sir Tyche (through his relationship with Lord Grimble) know of Sir Monshun's true role in Elweir. Anyone and everyone else would pay dearly to know this information.

Lord Drake Saltbraid: Lord Saltbraid is for all effects and purposes Lord Reed's faithful minion.

Sir Yrvenus Hollow: Sir Yrvenus has one goal in life, and that's to increase his power in Elweir. Though he believes in the Old Gods, he mainly considers them an excellent means of achieving his goal. After several conversations with Sir Ravning, the Divine Advisor is less than convinced that throwing in with Romnal is the path to increasing his power. He senses that Sir Ravning's faith is little more than a pose to fit in with his countrymen, and he suspects Duke Lothar might be the same. Instead Sir Yrvenus has decided to throw in with Bitterbend, the priest in Uphill East who leads the Sacred Purges. He plans to keep encouraging the Sacred Purges until the Prince realizes the followers of the Old Gods are a force to be reckoned with, then use his control of these followers to force concessions from the Prince. Among other things, he wants the Prince to appoint him to a position that's more than just *de facto* leader of the priests in Elweir (the Most Holy is the title Sir Yrvenus currently favors) and to extract a yearly tribute to the Old Gods from the Royal Exchequer. Sir Yrvenus is not a sorcerer-priest, nor does he know of the existence of any in Elweir — but he'd love to have one serving him.

PAGE 23 — ALDERMEN

The main purpose the aldermen can serve in your campaign is to provide the PCs with a means of getting to see the Prince without fighting their way through the guardsmen outside Gold's Reside and smashing down the door to the throne room. If the PCs feel they *must* have an audience with the Prince, they should approach an alderman with a bribe of coin, explain the situation, and have him request an audience. Of course, if their story is absurd, the alderman reacts accordingly — but enough coin will convince him to shrug and declare the matter of no concern to him.

Elections for alderman are good times for PCs during which they can make a few coin trying to turn up dirt on a candidate, uncover plots by conspiracies to seize the position, protect those who plan to vote for an alderman, help an alderman win election through other means legitimate or otherwise... or maybe run for alderman themselves!

Plot Seeds

Darlywine Fay... For A Better Way: In the neighborhood where the PCs reside, it's time to elect a new alderman. A man named Darlywine Fay approaches them and asks them to serve as his bodyguards. He's running for alderman and these elections can get deadly — most of the established aldermen have connections with foreign spies and criminal groups in their neighborhoods, and neither of these groups appreciates change. The PCs must stop the city guard from harassing Elweir-nians who wish to vote for Fay as well as keep the candidate alive. But what will they do if they discover Fay has some dark secret? Will they take his coin and look the other way, or attempt to stop his rise to power?

Someone Snuffed Candlelorn!: Alderman Candlelorn of Lowtown is one of the most hated men in the neighborhood. One night the PCs find his body lying in the street... and then the city guard suddenly shows up and accuses them of murder! The PCs might hate Candlelorn as much as everyone else, but they didn't kill him. Candlelorn had connections not only with the city guard and its chief magistrate, but he was also an important member of the Silver-Crossed Palms. With both these groups searching for the PCs (or pressuring the Prince to execute them, if they've been caught), can they uncover the real murderer? Or will they have to leave Elweir in order to escape?

PAGE 23 — THE AMBASSADORS

The ambassadors have a very civil relationship and have had dinner together on many occasions, but only on neutral ground so neither sends the wrong signal back to his homeland.

Sir Onaiwu Baaku: Sir Onaiwu is much as described in the text. His only secret is the spy ring of Abyzinians he maintains in the city. It's existed for as long as Abyzinians have traded in Elweir; he's just most the recent handler for it. Sir Monshun knows the identities of most of Abyzinia's spies,

but Sir Onaiwu doesn't know the Royal Mason's true role in Elweir's government. As if the treaty with Romnal weren't already enough of a problem, Sir Onaiwu has recently had a revolt among the spies in his network. Captain Ushindi Olonga once served as Sir Onaiwu's most important spy in Elweir's sea captains' guild, but his recent involvement with the new Slave Market was a total shock to Sir Onaiwu. Furthermore, the two men have begun a war in the shadows, with Captain Olonga attempting to suborn the spies he knows about. The situation will soon come to a head... and as of right now, Sir Onaiwu is without a doubt losing the war.

Sir Ravning Coeur: Sir Ravning does not believe in the gods — his faith is merely an act to please his fellow countrymen — and is far more politically ruthless than most know. Furthermore, he's currently working against the wishes of his father, Duke Lothar. Duke Lothar has every intention of annexing Elweir, bringing it entirely into the Duchy of Romnal where it will have to obey all the laws of Valdoria; he's only waiting for the neighboring provinces in Valdoria to grow used to the idea. The Duke believes that after five or ten years have passed, his neighbors will consider Elweir a part of Romnal in all but name, at which point he can simply lay claim to the city without ruffling any feathers or provoking a war.

Sir Ravning (along with his older brother Snarl, who'll be Duke after Lothar dies) knows this will destroy the source of Elweir's wealth and adamantly opposes the idea. They also know their protests will fall on deaf ears — their father is a Valdorian through and through — so instead Ravning does what he can to keep Elweir free of Valdoria while his brother works at home to accomplish the same goal.

Sir Ravning can trust none of the nobility in the city — and especially not his followers among the Duke's Men who, while loyal to Ravning, are far more loyal to his father — so he finds himself working alone. These include everything from being the secret organizer of the Unwelcome Visitors (page 50) and slowing down construction of Lionwatch Castle, to secretly funding the Emperor's Liegemen (a group dedicated to stopping Romnal's "imperial" ambitions) in Worm's Hole, to becoming the close acquaintance of Sir Flandry Nor, the Count of Norland's spy in Elweir.

PAGE 24 — THE LAW

This section goes into considerable detail about bribes because they can play an important role in your campaign. One of the main problems with city campaigning is that PCs do not always interact well with authority.

In the course of their adventures, the PCs might have to break the law. The players know it's the right thing to do, but they lack any real evidence to prove it, and they become frustrated when the authorities don't listen to them. This can lead to conflict — sometimes bloody conflict — with the authorities and make staying in the city implausible. In Elweir, this isn't necessarily a problem — if the PCs break the law and get caught, they can

simply spend some coin to get out of the situation, and they can use the *Bribery Skill* to reduce the amount of coin they must spend. It's obviously beneficial to avoid capture altogether, but if the PCs can't, it's not the end of the world.

On the other hand, the PCs' enemies can use bribery against them, making the players grow frustrated with the corrupt authorities. Here's where the Duke's Men come into play. If you suspect your players are getting fed up with the lack of justice in Elweir, the Duke's Men can become a sort of court of last resort — a legitimate group with considerable influence in the city that wants to see justice done just as much as the PCs do. You can direct your PCs to them, and if their plight is stirring and righteous, the Duke's Men do everything in their power to aid them. You can also use the Duke's Men to add a wrinkle to being captured if you think your players are becoming too accustomed and jaded to bribing their way out of their crimes.

Further advantages to the way the legal system in Elweir is set up: there are plenty of opportunities for the PCs to hire themselves out as agents for a person who wants a criminal brought to justice. Imprisonment, which can bog down a campaign, is kept to a bare minimum. Being sold into slavery is always an option, and once the PC is delivered to the Slave Market, his comrades can rescue him.

PAGE 29 — CRIMINAL GROUPS

If you're running a campaign that involves the PCs as thieves in Elweir, you can use the explanation for criminal groups as their *raison d'être* — maybe the PCs are spies for some power in the city, or are a group of burglars dedicated to stealing a specific object or to the larger goal of ruining a wealthy family's fortunes. In other words, a criminal group is in many ways like an adventuring group.

Concerning the criminal groups described on page 29:

The Blind Street Pledge: The Blind Street Pledge is dedicated to stealing the eight golden coins set in the back of the Pearl Throne (see *The Prince's Palace*, page 41). The monetary reward is hardly worth the effort, but this deed should go down in legend. That's the hope of the four young — and inexperienced — thieves in the Blind Street Pledge, who want nothing more than to be thought of as the greatest thieves in Elweir. The Blind Street Pledge is well known in Lowtown because its members have spread word of its existence, paving the way for its legendary deed. All in all, the Blind Street Pledge is likely doomed to failure.

The Silver-Crossed Palms: The leader of the Silver-Crossed Palms is Lady Alabaster of the Fifty. The Silver-Crossed Palms have indeed been active for three hundred years, always led by one of the Alabasters, and Lady Alabaster keeps an archive of secrets in a series of hidden chambers and vaults below her palace. One of the valets in her family, Carlyn Banglesnare, is her lieutenant and acts as the intermediary between her and the lowlifes that

are her informers. There are few actual members of the Silver-Crossed Palms — most informers don't know who exactly they're working for (although some suspect). Svenair Alone is one of their chief enforcers, used to either protect the group's interests or apply physical force to get some piece of information. Alderman Candlelorn of Lowtown is another important member.

The favorite target of the Silver-Crossed Palms is *not* members of the Fifty, but other criminal groups. The Silver-Crossed Palms attempt to ferret out these groups' membership and goals, then extract coin by threatening to inform the city guard or the proposed victim — whomever the criminal group will perceive as the bigger threat. If there's one group in Elweir that serves the role of a traditional monolithic Thieves' Guild, it's the Silver-Crossed Palms, since it demands a cut of so many of the criminal endeavors going on in the city — and there's nothing a thief hates more than having to pay a portion of his ill-gotten profits to these mysterious extortioners.

For the last three years, Lady Alabaster has dedicated herself to discovering who truly killed Prince Summerset's father. The most recent information of interest she has obtained is that Sir Raving is working at odds to his father the Duke, but she isn't sure how extensive his efforts are, nor what to do with this piece of information yet.

The Starveling Guild: This guild does exist and is one of the most effective spy rings in Elweir, selling the information its beggars gather to the highest bidder. The Beggar King is their leader; he collects the information from the members and then finds a buyer for it. Although members of the Starveling Guild do exchange advice about how to best convince someone to part with coin and the best locations for begging in Elweir, there's no organized training program or the like.

Other Criminal Groups

Some other criminal groups in Elweir have done a better job keeping their existence a secret.

The Rat Chasers: The Rat Chasers, a small group of burglars, is trying to extend the Underfoot Path beneath the manor house of one of the sea captains in Gibberish. They hope to rob the man blind by coming up into his manor from underground. They further hope no one realizes how they entered his home, so after the burglary they can extend the tunnel under other manor houses in the area and rob those captains, too.

The Ratkeep (*The Reveling Rat*, page 48) and Mantily Bloom (*The Sweet Tooth*, page 53) are both members. The excavation has gone slowly, mainly because they hit an ancient ruin and now have begun losing members. The Rat Chasers have suspended the digging until they can agree on a plan. The current ones under consideration: send a group of hired toughs to investigate the ruins and discover who (or what) is killing their members; dig around the ruins; give up on the scheme.

The Black Gold Bandits: This group is bound and determined to steal the statue of Aides from the

Temple of the Seven in Gold's Reside and discover once and for all how much coin black gold will fetch from a usurer. They have seven members, one an acolyte at the temple who desires to leave the priesthood. Such a blasphemous theft is likely to start riots of the faithful (leading to the largest Sacred Purge Elweir has ever seen) and enrage Duke Lothar.

The Cutpurse Union: Many of the cutpurses in Elweir "belong" to this loosely organized group. When cutpurses go about their thieving they mostly find bits and occasionally coin in the pouches they steal or cut, but sometimes they come across more interesting goods — letters and notes, strange signet rings, pieces of exotic jewelry, vials of elixir, and so on. The Cutpurse Union exists to find a proper use for these things. A cutpurse can pass word along to his fellows, asking for information about whatever oddity he found, and then word comes back to him about the best way to sell the oddity for the highest amount of coin. Sometimes this takes the form of information about the oddity's true nature or purpose; other times it's a bid to buy the object. Having a contact in the Cutpurse Union is a good way to find the strangest things... and sometimes it's the only way to retrieve an important possession stolen while a poor soul was walking through Hawker's Square or some other crowded place.

The Burning Pyres: While many men and gangs hire themselves out as killers, these are just morally bankrupt souls lacking any regard for life and any worries about being executed, combined with a willingness to murder a man in cold blood for a handful of coin. The Burning Pyres is a group of true assassins — two men and a woman who are experts in killing and whose services don't come cheap. The three are Filario Redwater, a former apprentice of Lord Grimble's who lacked the talent for black magic but not for brewing poisons; Kilarin the Lurk, a man of Three Fingers marked by a hunchback and skilled at knifework; and Zintara Dole, a woman whose beauty is only surpassed by her disregard for life. Under these three is a small group of apprentices and other sundry hirelings. It is said that no man, regardless of station, is safe from the Burning Pyres. The group takes its name from the small pile of burning sticks it leaves near each victim.

The cost of hiring the Burning Pyres is measured in ounces of gold, not coin, and the exact amount depends both on the victim's status in the city and how much latitude the Burning Pyres have when they perform the assassination. They are experts in all forms of death from brutal torture ending in a slit throat to quick-working poisons. They all reside in the Canals, and any meetings with the group take place at Fishmonger's Perch with one of the fishmongers, Tink Kitemark, acting as the intermediary with hirelings hidden among the crowd spying on the meeting.

PAGE 30 — INFAMOUS CRIMINALS

The Quiet Smoke: The Quiet Smoke is a supernatural servant of Getab Yren (see page 190).

Sylarin Farseer: See page 188.

Al'Raoud: Al'Raoud is, indeed, a daring thief and bandit, and along with the *Jazerrin*, his band of lesser thieves (the name loosely translates as "the Brave Souls"), he has become the terror of Tharestan's nobility and the darling of the commoners. However, the man living in Elweir is not al'Raoud. The impostor is Farqua, one of al'Raoud's servants, sent to Elweir both to confuse people seeking al'Raoud's and to take care of the thief's safehouse in case things go wrong in Tharestan.

Svenair Alone: See pages 30, 147.

PAGE 30 — RELIGION IN ELWEIR

In the minds of the inhabitants of Il-Ryveras, the disappearance of the gods was a sudden and dramatic departure — one minute they were there, the next they were gone. But this isn't true. The gods departed the world slowly, the powers of their mortal servants fading with the passing of centuries until finally they were gone entirely.

A large part of the reason for the gods' departure is the decline of magic in the world (relative to the preceding Turakian Age, anyway). The lesser level of "mystic energy" bars the gods from taking as active a role in the affairs of mortals. But there's more to it. *The Valdorian Age* assumes the gods grew disgusted with mankind's wickedness and this, combined with declining magic, made it not worth their while to expend the effort necessary to remain active in the world.

The lack of tangible proof of the gods' existence is an important aspect of the Valdorian Age setting that you should keep in mind while running your game. (The main exception is the sorcerer-priests, but they tend to keep their existence a secret and have something less than true faith in the gods after so much time spent haggling with divine servants.) In many Fantasy roleplaying settings, the gods are either good or evil, they grant their faithful servants powers, and these powers go a long way toward proving that (a) the gods exist and (b) priests are true servants of the gods. So if a priest of a good god casts spells, he can't be all bad — in other words, the god must to some extent approve of the priest's actions, because he continues to grant his servant powers. In this sort of setting it's a bit of stretch for a character not to believe in the gods. In the Valdorian Age, there's no reason to believe in the gods other than faith. This can add an interesting wrinkle to a PC's development. For example, he might either lose or gain faith (and not for selfish reasons, like the god's priest agrees to heal his wounds or cure him of some ailment).

In a setting where the gods take an active role in the world, it verges into the ludicrous to ignore their edicts — they wield great power in the world and anyone ignoring them is likely to suffer their wrath. In the Valdorian Age, who cares if a person ignores the edicts of the gods? What's a priest going to do — give the person a stern talking-to?

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in Elweir there's no easy way to determine if a priest is simply a selfish, powermongering bastard using the gods to further his own ends — and there are plenty of priests like that in the world — or a morally upright faithful servant of the gods who cares for his fellow man (there aren't many of these in the cynical world of Il-Ryveras). In other words, a PC can never trust a priest.

Plot Seeds

A New God To Call Our Own: Desperate for coin, the PCs decide to set up one of their own New Gods. They choose the most charismatic PC to be the god's prophet and send him out to start teaching the ways of their god. Not only must they make sure those men and women of Lowtown who stop to listen pay a bit or two for the privilege, they need to keep the city guard from rousting the prophet, stop the gangs in the area from getting any ideas about him, and help him attract larger and larger crowds by fine-tuning his stories of this god. And when a Sacred Purge comes into Lowtown and heads directly for their prophet, will they get there in time to save him from a beating? Sythen the Long-Suffering became a god after he was killed during a Sacred Purge, but the PC probably doesn't want to meet the same fate....

A Long-Suffering Vision: Walking down one of Lowtown's muddy streets, the PCs pass a prophet of the Long-Suffering. They all ignore the man's words about the evils of the world and the suffering of its inhabitants... but then, all of sudden, one of the PCs is struck by a vision of a man being torn limb from limb by an angry mob. He feels a soul-deep sorrow and realizes all the suffering he's caused in life is wrong. Did the PC truly receive a vision from Sythen the Long-Suffering, and have the scales fall from his eyes? Or is this some plot by an enemy to soften the PC up before striking in earnest?

"I've Seen The Light, Hallelujah!": The leaseholder for the PCs' favorite tavern comes in one night filled with divine inspiration. He spent the day listening to the prophet of a new god named Haldressa, the Herald of Man's Return. His prophet claims Haldressa wants mankind to return to its land of origin in Ocean-spast, where a paradise awaits the wayward men and women who once left Haldressa's realm out of youthful foolishness. This world of Elweir is so full of suffering and woe because it's not man's true home. The prophet of Haldressa extols his followers to sell all their goods so he can purchase a ship and they can all set sail for this land of milk and honey. The leaseholder has decided to sell the lease on the tavern and give the funds to the prophet. Will the PCs place a bid for the lease to their favorite tavern, hoping to get it cheap? Or will they investigate these strange claims in hopes of saving their favorite tavern from falling into the hands of someone who will ruin its charm? And if they do investigate, what will they discover? Is this prophet of Haldressa just another swindler looking to make some coin, or is he in earnest? And what's with the map of a safe journey through the Western Ocean he claims to have? Surely someone would pay a high price for such a thing....

PAGE 32 — THE KING IN SAPPHIRE ROBES

The New Gods are not all new to the world. In fact one of the gods described in this section, The King in Sapphire Robes, is an elder evil from a time before man walked the earth. A priest of the monstrous gods of Ureth-Kalai, the Grave One is a sorcerer from that mysterious land, come to Elweir in search of an artifact recorded of in the legends of his ancient people — the Putrid Heart. So far he has two suspicions about where this artifact might lie: in the Fortress of the Builders buried deep below the city; or in *Ly'zren Pittos*, the ruins in Cavren's Demise. The King's Boys are more than just a gang exploiting the Grave One's presence — they've become his loyal minions, faithful followers of the King in Sapphire Robes. For more about Ureth-Kalai, see pages 80, 162.

PAGE 35 — GETAB YREN'S HOME

Getab Yren is a necromancer. He's not from Ureth-Kalai — in fact, he's not even human. See page 190.

PAGE 36 — LITTLE ROMNAL

The Valdorians fortified their homes and set up the guards because spies were breaking into their rooms and rifling through documents.

PAGE 36 — OLD MAN WALLOWTORN'S

The story is pretty much accurate. Both Wallowtorn and the souls of the children he murdered haunt the building. There's one very old story concerning Old Man Wallowtorn's knives, the same with which he butchered the children. They're supposedly made of solid gold that gleams red from all the blood they've shed.

PAGE 36 — THE SINKING TOWER

Largisse Foom long ago set an earth elemental to guard his tower... and then the sorcerer met his demise. That elemental, Gronsh, has lived trapped in the tower for many years and is responsible for its rapid descent into the earth. Gronsh has grown strange with the passing of centuries. He's turned the inside of the tower into a mazy labyrinth of small chambers, short halls, and vertical passages. His consciousness occupies the whole of the place, and he has begun to take on physical form — a humanoid creature made of stone, with four arms, greyish skin, and the head of a ram. Gronsh has pulled all the metal and stone of the place into its walls, so little of value remains in the tower except Foom's library, which has been scattered throughout the tower.

PAGE 38 — FARAJI MANSA, GIBBERISH'S ALDERMAN

It's an open secret among those in political circles that Faraji Mansa is an agent for Sir Onaiwu — just as every alderman for the Gibberish has been a spy for Abyzinia for the last hundred or two years. What Sir Onaiwu doesn't know is that Sir Monshun has turned Faraji. The alderman now works as a spy for both sides.

PAGE 38 — AISSA T'NUMBRA'S SHOP

Aissa is actually the Witch-Queen's aunt — she claims to be her sister out of simple vanity. Her husband was Zaid T'numbra, who lost the war for succession. Aissa was exiled because of her husband's attempt to claim the crown. Sir Onaiwu has orders to keep an eye on her, but feels (correctly) that she's not a threat to the Witch-Queen. Aissa's perfectly content with her new life and has no desire to return to Abyzinia.

PAGE 38 — BLINDMAN'S BOOK SHOP

Yully is human, but the cause of his blindness is supernatural. Hidden under his bed is a tome that when opened robs the reader of his sight, leaving him with no pupils and no irises. The nameless tome is reputed to describe the Divine Abode of the Old Gods with illustrations, maps, and even instructions on how to reach it. Only a priest of the gods, protected by his divine powers, can read it — which is to say, no one in this day and age. However, a clever sorcerer-priest might think to summon a divine servant and have it read the book to him.

PAGE 38 — THE COLORFUL SMOKE

The leaseholder for the Colorful Smoke is a spy working for Sir Onaiwu, the ambassador from Abyzinia. He often questions people for Sir Onaiwu while they lie in a stupor on the divans.

PAGE 38 — THE GUILD HALL AND CLINK-CLINK SQUARE

Many interesting things are going on in Clink-Clink Square.

The Abyzinian Night: Portleblack Simmer was a pirate of the Maggot Isles. The treasure he found wasn't found at all — instead, he stole it from his captain and jumped overboard when the ship was in sight of the coast. Washing up not too far away from Elweir, he made his way to the city and fenced the treasure — or at least part of it. The treasure he stole wasn't all that impressive in and of itself; it was only a case of silver cutlery taken from an Abyzinian sea captain. What Simmer found hidden in a secret compartment under the cutlery was far more interesting — a small set of silver wind chimes that somehow play music even when there's no wind moving them. The music works some magic that evokes in the listener a vision of a different world, one that existed millennia ago when Drindria ruled half of Sarth. The visions follow a beautiful woman of the *Drindrish* as she goes about her day in a city grand beyond anything in modern Il-Ryveras. Simmer has become addicted to the visions, and sometimes late at night a faint, haunting music can be heard coming from Simmer's room. At all other times Simmer keeps the chimes muffled in black velvet and hidden in a secret compartment (-5 to Concealment rolls to find) in the corner above his room's door.

The Calm Sea: Unlike his former master, Chata only spies for Sir Onaiwu.

PAGE 39 — THE HOLY ONE'S WINE SHOP

Mikus Apostle saw *something* when he received his visitation from the Sea-Spider. He was working a merchant's ship sailing for Tharestan when a storm came rumbling out of the north. During the storm, Mikus was blown from the decks and into the ocean. The ship sailed on, leaving him behind. Then he found himself on the shore of Abyzinia, and in the distance was a strange figure like a spider coasting over the waves. He cannot recall what happened between the time when he was fell overboard and washed up on the shore, but he believes Forlakka saved him. The name Forlakka describes a sound he heard coming from the Abyzinian savannah behind him. In truth it's mutilated Abyzinian for "are you all right?" — the question asked of him by the Abyzinians who found him as he stared out to sea.

PAGE 39 — MANSBLOOD SQUARE

Mansblood Square is a place where the dead congregate. Necromancers performing magic here receive a +2 to their *Necromancy* Skill Rolls. From here, Getab Yren called up the Quiet Smoke and set it to its task of gathering souls so he could question them about Elweir and the city's secret workings. The place exudes evil and suffering, which is one of the reasons Lord Saltbraid has difficulty finding a profitable use for it.

PAGE 42 — PALACES OF THE FIFTY

Many of the Fifty have strange secrets.

Alabaster: Lady Alabaster leads the Silver-Crossed Palms, as discussed previously. As for her husbands: she has had several of them murdered because either they grew tedious or they came too close to discovering her secret, but some of them died of natural causes. She's looking for a new husband. She prefers commoners because they aren't a threat to her position as matriarch of the Alabaster family — a noble husband would likely maneuver to take over the position, whereas the common men she marries are content to live in luxury.

Silverstreet: Lord Silverstreet has no connection to the Silver-Crossed Palms (although he would dearly love to sink his hooks into the organization). He is however the former Jac Plunder, the first man to hold that name. Ten years ago Lord Silverstreet bequeathed his title of Jac Plunder to his lieutenant and disappeared from Cavren's Demise. He was unhappy with the Bandit Lords' decision to found a kingdom in earnest, and so rather than dissent and likely die at hands of the other five, he left. With him he took his two wives (one of whom now pretends to be his oldest daughter, Fawn Silverstreet), his four children... and his share of the ransom paid to the Bandit Lords, the source of his seemingly limitless wealth.

Blackrose: For many years the patriarch of the Blackroses, Amlin Blackrose, kept a mistress in Gibberish, an Abyzinian woman named Asola. He always promised her a place in Gold's Reside, which of course was a lie. The woman grew older, then began to noticeably age, and finally



Lord Blackrose found a new mistress. But Asola was not content to be cast off. She organized some of her fellow prostitutes into a group called the Wilted Blossoms. She had over the years developed a copious knowledge of the Blackrose's business dealings and holdings. She had no interest in extortion — she wanted Lord Blackrose cast out of the Fifty and forced to live like a commoner. In the end, though, Lord Blackrose finally figured out who was burning his most profitable leases. He hired a magistrate from Gold's Reside, Jilsen Chiselwit, to kill Asola. Six months ago Chiselwit murdered her, but the remainder of the Wilted Blossoms are still out there, hungry for revenge and a little justice in an unjust world....

Crabgold: The giant's owner, Captain Owyn Highwater, claimed the giant was from Borellia. Khorians generally tell that giants are thirty feet or so tall. This giant was only nine feet tall, but had large tusks protruding from his mouth and a bony ridge on his forehead. Captain Highwater bought him in one of the coastal kingdoms of Khor, where he'd been captured in the Wolfwood. He speaks a language no one knows, though he can also say a few words in Khorian.

Minktooth: There's a power struggle going on among the prominent Abyzinians currently residing in the city, mainly between Sir Onaiwu and his former spy, Captain Ushindi Olonga (see his entry below for more details). The Minktooths are about to be caught in the middle. For years the leaseholder at the Colorful Smoke used the Minktooths as a primary

source of information about the doings of the Fifty, but lately the three siblings have spent a lot of time in the Foreign Quarter as guests of Captain Olonga. Although Sir Onaiwu doesn't realize this yet, Lord Davver Minktooth is one of the two "mystery" partners in the new Slave Market, and while degenerate and decadent, the young Lord is far more cunning than anyone believes.

PAGE 43 — THE TEMPLE OF THE SEVEN (GOLD'S RESIDE)

The statues of the gods in this temple are just as fantastic as the stories say, since the temple is quite wealthy. As patriarchs and Princes have neared the end of their days, they suddenly began to worry about the fate of their souls. Hoping to please Aides, they made large donations to the temple. Any group successfully stealing a statue from the temple need never need worry about coin again (unless its members are the greatest wastrels the world has ever known — which is always possible). Finding a buyer for the statues might prove difficult, though.

Black gold is a bit of an overstatement, although for whatever reason the gold used to make the statue of Aides does have an unusual blackish sheen to it.

PAGE 45 — THE UNDERFOOT PATH

In the location descriptions for Lowtown, any building explicitly stated to be made of stone holds an entrance to the Underfoot Path.

PAGE 47 — THE CROSSROADS

Ranteren Everdusk is a sorcerer-priest who refused his last task and now fears for the fate of his soul. He worries that the Divine Advisor, a man he knows hungers for power, will discover his true abilities and force him to use his sorcery. For more details see his character sheet on page 192.

PAGE 47 — DRUNKARD'S REST

Some of the taverns along this street have secrets.

The Beaten Mug: Weaselwhiskers doesn't mix water with his ale. Instead he suffers under a curse. Several years ago a mysterious man, dressed suspiciously like Erebos, came into the Beaten Mug. Unhappy with the quality of ale, he accused Weaselwhiskers of weakening the drink. Weaselwhiskers denied it, and the man cursed him. Back then, Weaselwhiskers did indeed mix water with his ale, but he has since stopped in an attempt to get out from under the curse. But his newfound honesty is too late: whatever ale he serves tastes terrible. Whether the mysterious patron was Erebos, a sorcerer-priest, or someone — or something — else is left for you to decide. Weaselwhiskers would dearly love to be free of the curse and is open to suggestions....

The Buxom Balladeer: The boys working the tavern are orphans the Bard took in off the street. Her own sons disappeared a decade ago on some mad quest for treasure. They had a map that showed the location of an ancient city in the Desert's Teeth and set off after it, but have never returned. The Bard misses her sons and takes the orphans in as surrogates. She never talks about what happened to her sons, but maybe if the PCs remind her of them, she'd share the story. Maybe she even kept a copy of the map her sons had....

The Copper Coins: Any PC foolish enough to follow Silent Syl's advice should receive some penalties to whatever course of action he follows... -5 or so is appropriate.

Erebos's Temple: Originally from Valdoria, Holy Jac was an acolyte and knows a great deal about the priesthood because of his time in the service of the Old Gods. He had a sudden crisis of faith, stole an armful of relics from a temple in Romnal, and departed in the middle of the night for Elweir. He still has a couple of the relics... mostly silver candle holders and other valuable but mundane goods. One, however, is a small platinum statuette of Enodia said to have once spoken portents of the future. Holy Jac has an unnatural affection for the statuette and refuses to sell it for any reason.

The Fallow Field: Web Fallow, like Web's *brother* Ashram Fallow, was born and raised in Elweir. His father was from Lonetree. Web truly hates Elweir, and in his mind, Lonetree has become a paradisaical land.

The Reveling Rat: The Ratkeep still has his tongue and can even speak when he chooses; he just doesn't have anything to say to his patrons. The Ratkeep is the main organizer of the Rat Chasers (see above), and the Reveling Rat holds an entrance

to the Underfoot Path. The trapdoor to the cellar is behind the bar hidden under a moth-eaten rug. The opening — a rough hole in the wall about two feet high — is behind some empty casks.

PAGE 49 — BUILDER'S CAMP

As stated previously Sir Ravning Coeur is behind the Unwelcome Visitors. His sole contact with the group is Eregon Nale, a man originally from the lands of the River Lords. The stolen goods make their way up the Serpentine to Three Fingers. Though there are plenty of buyers in Elweir, Sir Ravning wants the goods moved out of the city. Of all the actions he has taken contrary to his father's goals, the Unwelcome Visitors is easily the most damning... and if your PCs want to upset Romnal's plans for the city, uncovering Sir Ravning's involvement with the criminal group would be a coup. It would also be a valuable piece of information with which to extort some coin from the Valdorian. Of course, Valdorians don't pay extortion gladly....

PAGE 50 — THE EASTERN TRAIL

All of the men working the Eastern Trail are in the pay of the Bandit Lords. They take coin to look the other way when members of those bands come into the city to pick up large cargoes of supplies. See page 156 for details. Vyr Willow and his wife are also connected to the Bandit Lords, and the Nomad's Spear provides a secret lodging when the Bandit Lords come into the city in person. The Willows's hopes about Romnal are merely an attempt to allay suspicions.

PAGE 50 — THE MARINE'S WENCH

Dotty Rosewater has CV 4, STR 15, Brawling Tricks 13-, and +4 Targeting Skill Levels in HTH Combat. The first of Dotty's blows is an NND 3d6 (armor on the chest is the defense). The second is 5d6 Normal Damage bought with the *Trigger Advantage* (similar to Follow-Through Attack on page 105) made to the Head.

PAGE 51 — PLAYER'S SQUARE

Here's some information pertaining to Player's Square locations.

Master Toothgrim And His Goblins: Master Toothgrim is the former apprentice of a black magician, Murago Suln, who inhabited a lonely tower deep in the Nylsen Forest. Suln attempted experiments in binding summoned demons to human beings, and Master Toothgrim was his chief "procurer" for obtaining subjects... usually by abducting them from the lands of Three Fingers. Murago succeeded, and the end result is Master Toothgrim's "goblins," transformed into their current form by the sorcerous mutilation of their souls. Suln was a fool to believe he could bind demons into mortal form and command them — eventually the goblins came to dominate Master Toothgrim. Working with the apprentice they murdered Suln and then set off to terrorize the world.

The elixirs Master Toothgrim sells are magic of a sort. They provide the drinker with the illusion of health (the effect is equivalent to

Mental Illusions 8d6). They also quickly addict the drinker (the effect: Major Transform 2d6 (normal person to person with the Disadvantage, *Dependence (must drink elixir at least once a day or suffer Weakness [Uncommon/Extremely Difficult To Obtain] [Addiction])*).

The goblins' purple and green mottled flesh is not paint, although their flaking skin gives that impression (Master Toothgrim makes a great show of going to the Player in Need to purchase fresh supplies of grease paint). They possess an evil curiosity about the world and its inhabitants, and this is their prime motivation. Using their elixirs, they're slowly but surely spreading their influence through Snake's Den. They hope to addict a member of the Fifty to their elixirs, then relocate to Gold's Reside for a time. Master Toothgrim has Black Magic 11- and KS: Black Magic 11-, but no other sorcerous powers.

The Mute: Rawly Goodhide has the Disadvantage, *Enraged: when some fool starts singing in his tavern (Berserk), go 14-, recover 11-*.

PAGE 52 — FURLAND BOTHER, UPHILL EAST'S CHIEF MAGISTRATE

Furland Bother doesn't really know the name of each family that lives in his neighborhood — he just likes to brag that he does.

PAGE 52 — UPHILL EAST SEWERS

Over the centuries criminals have "altered" some of these sewer grates, so that the bars can be pulled free of the street from below. This lets knowledgeable criminals take the Underfoot Path into the neighborhood and hopefully avoid the guardsmen.

PAGE 53 — THE SWEET TOOTH

Mantly Bloom belongs to the Rat Chasers. Originally a prostitute working on Whore Street, she "saved" (meaning stole from her clients) enough coin to buy her way out of Lowtown decades ago — one of the reasons she allows children from that neighborhood to come into her shop — but she still likes to keep a finger in criminal dealings. Her family doesn't know of her involvement with the Rat Chasers. The cellar of her shop has a well-hidden entrance to the Underfoot Path.

PAGE 54 — THE TEMPLE OF THE SEVEN (UPHILL EAST)

Reslin Bitterbend has no powers other than a PRE 18, COM 15, and the unusually well-developed Skills *Persuasion 16-* and *Oratory 17-*. He truly believes what he preaches; his Sacred Purges are *not* simply a bid for more power in the city. He believes the Divine Advisor feels as deeply as he does about the matter, and in his fire-and-brimstone "innocence," doesn't realize he's a pawn in Sir Yrvenus Hallow's bid to increase his (Hallow's) power in the city.

PAGE 57 — UNTHER AUX, WORM'S HOLE'S ALDERMAN

Unther Aux is not an agent for Valdoria. A part of his plan for Worm's Hole involves helping Valdorians get leases from the Prince, thereby limiting the influence of native Elweirnians and increasing that of native Valdorians. He often tells river captains to encourage their Valdorian acquaintances to relocate to Elweir, where Aux will make sure they get a good and profitable lease.

PAGE 57 — THE MOONRISE INN

The Moonrise is a meeting place for the Emperor's Liegemen, a group dedicated to stopping Romnal's ambitions. Their leader is Sir Rolf Banlirre, a noble from the Duchy of Elan. Their primary goal at the moment is to unearth evidence of Duke Lothar's true ambitions so they can then incite the other provinces in the Frontier to unite against him. Sir Rolf's real goal, known only to him, is to keep his Duke informed about the movements of the Duke's soldiers, both along the trail to Romnal and their progress upriver the Serpentine.

The Emperor's Liegemen do *not* know Sir Ravning Coeur secretly funds them (he works through an agent). They would likely refuse his coin if they knew and consider his actions an attempt to place a spy in their group (which is exactly what Sir Ravning would claim to his father if his involvement were discovered). The group also has the sympathies of many river captains, all of whom are only trying to ingratiate themselves with the Duke of Elan because that Duchy is the location of Veur Town.

PAGE 57 — THE RIVER CAPTAINS' GUILD HALL

The Imperial Treasury keeps a minimum of 20 pounds of gold here. Stealing that gold would make a fine starting adventure for a group of PCs with a taste for criminal endeavors, since its theft would stir up a hornet's nest among the river captains and bring down the wrath of the Valdorians — which would, in turn, bring down the wrath of the Prince — and get the PCs immediately involved in the political machinations of the city. Whoever stole it would also become a likely target for the Silver-Crossed Palms.

The letters of marque do involve a secret code that uses the three-volume codex, *The History Of Valdoria*, a boring and dry catalogue of the Emperors' deeds with a focus on changes to the legal code enacted during their respective reigns. The code involves the spaces between the letters in the name of the holder of the letter of marque. These spaces correspond to a volume, page, and sentence number. That sentence can be found, one word per line, in the letter with all proper names except the Emperor's omitted. The Emperor's name is always replaced with the current one. There are many versions of the history in circulation, and the treasury agents all have the same one, which comes directly from the imperial treasury in Revanna (which makes it slightly suspicious to anyone seriously investigating the code, if he happens to stumble upon it).

PAGE 58 — SANCE WHITESTONE

In recent months, the Divine Advisor has mentioned the Sacred Purges to Whitestone on the few occasions the two men have met. Although Yrvenus Hollow has not explicitly encouraged Whitestone to lead a Purge, his questions and off-hand remarks obviously point in that direction.

PAGE 59 — THE FOREIGN QUARTER'S PROMINENT RESIDENTS

Here's some information about the residents described in Chapter One, as well as some less well-known residents who are just as important to the goings-on in the city.

Existing Residents

Captain Ushindi Olonga: Captain Olonga left his homeland because he supported Razi Simbaktu in that sorcerer's bid for the crown of Abyzinia nearly two decades ago. Though not a prominent supporter, Captain Olonga fled for fear of losing his life — custom dictates that supporters of the losing contender(s) be executed or exiled. He came to Elweir, a common destination for losers in wars of succession, established himself as a resident, and became a member of the Abyzinian spy ring. Over the years he convinced a series of ambassadors that he harbored no ill-will toward the Witch-Queen and was content with his life in Elweir, but this was just a ruse. He's spent a great deal of time looking for a way to return to Abyzinia... and now he thinks he's found one.

It's common knowledge the Witch-Queen nears the end of her rule, and already sorcerers are preparing to vie for the crown. Captain Olonga has fallen in with one of these, a woman named Maizah D'langri. His current tasks are to suborn the ambassador's spy ring and to make inroads for Maizah with wealthy Elweirians. Maizah will use these resources to fund her bid to seize the crown, partly by hiring mercenaries in Elweir and employing the city as a staging point for attacks. The best thing that can happen is for the Prince of Elweir to support Maizah, although this is not likely. Maizah has visited Elweir several times over the last few months and always stays in secret as Captain Olonga's guest. Sir Onaiwu has yet to figure out what's going on, but it's only a matter of time.

Sir Fleming Esprit: Sir Fleming has indeed made overtures to Sir Raving, expressing his willingness to help with anything he can and intimating he would be happy to lead Romnal's armies against Sacre.

Other Residents

Sir Flandry Nor: Prince Summerset has kept Sir Flandry Nor's presence in Elweir a secret from Lord Reed. The Count of Norland's brother, Sir Flandry is a spy for his province. His main purpose is to assess how well Romnal's acquisition of Elweir is going, because the Count is considering proposing an alliance with Romnal. The Prince hopes to use Sir Flandry to incite Norland to turn against Romnal when the threat of the Bandit Lords has ended, but his plans have gone awry. Sir Flandry

has fallen in with Sir Raving Coeur, and the two have become conspirators to make sure Raving's brother's plans go as intended. Sir Flandry's task is to make sure the Count signs no alliance with Romnal until Raving's brother Snarl is the Duke. Sir Flandry Nor lives under the assumed name of Flandry Linarre, claims to come from the Middlemarch, and refuses to answer questions about why he lives in the Foreign Quarter.

Sir Eisen Athael: Forgotten in all the hubbub over Romnal is poor Sir Eisen Athael, ambassador from Valdoria. At the request of Prince Summerset, Sir Eisen moved to the Foreign Quarter — in other words, he was exiled from Elweir, and now the Prince won't even allow the man to enter Gold's Reside. Whenever Sir Eisen requests an audience with the Prince, Lord Reed or Lord Saltbraid shows up at Sir Eisen's manor to discuss whatever's on the ambassador's mind and utter the same reassuring platitudes. Sir Eisen has sent countless messages to the Emperor requesting orders regarding what to do. The few responses he's received have ordered him to discover concrete evidence of Romnal's intent... which Sir Eisen has failed to do time and time again. Sir Eisen is an honest and plain-spoken man, and the current political situation in Elweir leaves him completely out of his depth. He could truly use some cunning and ruthless advisors, like perhaps the PCs....

PAGE 59 — THE SLAVE MARKET

The third partner in the Slave Market is Prince Summerset. Lord Minktooth is the formulator of the plan to open the Slave Market. Because he wanted to place it in the Foreign Quarter, he needed the Prince's approval, and when he presented the plan, the Prince agreed on the condition that he saw a part of the profits and Lord Minktooth kept both of their involvement a secret (since it would reflect badly on him with Romnal if it were known the Prince or one of his nobility were involved). Lord Minktooth approached Captain Olonga, a man Minktooth knew from his time in Gibberish. Captain Olonga agreed, believing it would further the plans of his employer, Maizah D'langri. However, because the Prince wants no one to suspect his involvement, he keeps Captain Olonga at a healthy distance.

PAGE 61 — WELLDEEP

If a person were to examine the moss-covered stones inside the strangely deep well that gives this village its name, he might notice hand- and foot-holds in the rocks. And if he were to use them to climb down the well, he might notice the large rock near its bottom that swings back smoothly with only a light push.

Inside is a warren of caves and tunnels that lead in and out of chambers made of wine-colored stone that's unnaturally slick to the touch. Living here, as they have for countless ages, are the Kurki-Asragh, a toad-like race of evil creatures that have interbred with the folk of Welldeep. On moonless nights, the Kurki-Asragh emerge from the well and together with the surface dwellers celebrate dark

rites to an ancient god — the Dweller in the Deep, who's also worshipped in far-off Ureth-Kalai. During this time the Kurki-Asragh honor the men and women of the village by taking them to bed. The magic of the Kurki-Asragh is fading, but they still possess enough power to make sure the Bandit Lords avoid the area. Strangers visiting the village soon feel an inchoate urge to leave. It's a subtle thing; people affected subconsciously come up with many excuses for why they want to journey on. Only a few men ever resist the effect... and anyone staying overnight in the village is thrown down the well as a sacrifice to the Kurki-Asragh.

What treasures lie in that warren of tunnels, no man knows — but the Putrid Heart, the object the Grave One quests for, is one of them. Whenever drought or blight destroys the village's crops, the Kurki-Asragh deliver a finely-worked piece of gold finery to the village leader, who sells it in Elweir for food. The pieces are strangely shaped, with swirls and runnels, and often fitted with exotic gemstones. They seem meant for humans to wear, but if whether this means the Kurki-Asragh were once human themselves, or they stole the pieces from humans, is up to you.

PAGE 61 — OTHER LOCATIONS

Here's some information about the locations described in this section.

Tavern Keep: Jarly Lurchpole's ancestor was the Prince's bastard, whom the Prince never acknowledged. He did make a claim on the throne after his father died, and everyone knew he was the Prince's bastard, but no one took his claim seriously. After a while, the Fifty tired of the man, had him beaten within an inch of his life, and expelled from the city. He then traveled upriver and founded the Tavern Keep.

The keep was built shortly after the fall of Elothia and was part of the capital of a small kingdom that lasted for two hundred years until the Cynthian Riders destroyed it. The survivors traveled to the west and disappeared into history. Under the keep is a series of vaults holding remnants from the Elothian empire. The Lurchpoles long ago sold anything made of metal, but the vaults still hold maps and tomes written in the ancient tongue of Elothia. When Jarly gets deep in his cove, he drags the maps out to show patrons.

Ly'zren Pittos: The ruins modern Elweirians call *Ly'zren Pittos* is only an outlying suburb of a larger city of the same name. Originally built by the Elothians, the city fell into the swamp when the divine spirits of the land rebelled against the human empire. See page 158 for more details. The Bandit Lords' men have settled the ruins over the last few decades. Anyone seeking to plumb the ruins' hidden depths (which are extensive) has to sneak by them (and then sneak out again, if they expect to keep any treasure they find).

The Bandit Lords

Inhabiting the dank swamps of Cavren's Demise, the Bandit Lords have become the bogey-men of Elweir and its inhabitants.

HISTORY

Cavren's Demise has long been a haven for cutthroats and desperate men, but these had always been independent of one another — no larger bands than ten or twenty ever terrorized the Eastern Trail. They often fought among themselves, and an inhabitant of Cavren's Demise was as much a threat to his neighbors as he was to honest merchants and travelers.

The first of the Bandit Lords to arise was Lord Rape, whose true name was Vikort Ware. Originally a lord from Three Fingers, he was a tyrannical ruler who had a reputation for putting villages to the torch. He eventually lost his land because, at least according to how he sees it, he left one too many survivors. Together with his most loyal warriors, Lord Ware fled to Elweir, where the Prince would have nothing to do with such a nefarious and distasteful man. In the end Lord Ware and his men found lowly employment as guards for a caravan heading for the Desert's Teeth.

Along the trail Lord Ware got into an argument with his employer over the amount of his pay — Lord Ware had demanded higher pay, figuring the merchant would pay whatever amount he asked now that the caravan was too far from the city to turn back. Lord Ware was wrong. Out of spite, he and his men killed the merchants in the caravan, stole their coin and trade goods, and made for Cavren's Demise.

Once in the swamps, he decided to carve out a new kingdom for himself. This was in 971 VA, and it was Lord Ware's ambitions that forced the men in the swamp to band together or join his group. After eight years of fighting and killing, all the men had divided themselves among the six leaders who would become the Bandit Lords. Realizing anymore fighting among the men was pointless, Lord Ware suggested a truce. The other five agreed, and that was when the Bandit Lords turned their attention outward.

A little while later, they adopted the names the bards had given them, taking them as titles of a sort. The first time all six bands worked together was in 1000 VA during the Parade of Burning Boats; before then they acted separately — only occasionally would two or three groups band together to attack a caravan, plunder a village, or pillage whatever else presented itself. The Parade of Burning Boats was Lord Rape's idea. It would lead to his death later on, but it also galvanized the Bandit Lords, making them the cohesive group they are now.

Lord Rape died when the Bandit Lords ambushed Prince Mehki's army, but the surviving Bandit Lords followed through on his original plan, which was to extract the ransom (of course, Lord Rape called it tribute, but at the time the other five still thought of themselves as criminals and not

lords). At the time of the ransom, the total number of men following the Bandit Lords was a little over three thousand, but once the gold came flowing in, they started gaining a considerable number of followers — all the scum of Sarth came from Elweir and downriver the Serpentine to join them. Between their burgeoning ranks and the gold in their coffers, the Bandit Lords began to think of themselves as lords in more than just name. The coming of Romnal's soldiers — and more importantly, the end of the yearly ransom payment — is the first test this young “kingdom” has faced.

THE BANDIT LORDS TODAY

The bandits in Cavren's Demise visit Elweir all the time. Traveling in groups of ten or twenty at the most, they come to drink and purchase supplies before returning to the swamp. They don't brag about being followers of the Bandit Lords — if they did, they'd find themselves faced with an angry mob or the city guard — but if a person tries hard enough, he can find a group of them at a tavern in Lowtown or the Gibberish drinking ale on most nights. Even the lords come to Elweir on occasion, though they're far more furtive about their trips.

For several decades there was a goodly sum of gold coming into the swamps. While the lords squandered much of the wealth, they didn't waste all of it. They used it to arm their men, purchase horses, and build fortifications and homes. The bands live in small communities, and while the buildings are crude constructions, they're far better than the lean-tos and huts of sticks the inhabitants of Cavren's Demise used to live in. Many of these communities are located in the ruins of *Ly'zren Pittos* at those few places where the stones of the ancient city emerge from the muck and scum-covered water. Over the decades, these communities have become small towns where men keep homes, have wives, and raise children.

The Duke's soldiers stationed along the Serpentine have sent spies into the swamps, and the fortifications have impressed them. They feel it would be a hopeless task to rout the bandits from the place, so they've focused their efforts on guarding the river. They estimate there are approximately ten thousand in the swamps, although four thousand of those are women and children, divided evenly amongst the followings of the six Bandit Lords. Duke Lothar lies about this number to Prince Summerset, telling him there are almost twenty thousand souls in the swamps, all of whom are deadly killers.

The Bandit Lords have begun leading their men into the Nylsen Forest and raiding the barges on the Serpentine once they've passed beyond the last of the Duke's forts. The soldiers now patrol the land between the swamp and the forest, and this is where the majority of skirmishes between the two groups take place.

THE CURRENT LORDS

Only one of the original Bandit Lords remains; the other five are all the second man or woman to hold the title. The six work together in a loose confederation, but they often act alone and without consulting the others. Their followers are not soldiers, and for a lord to get all thousand of his men together in one place is a nigh-impossible task. Usually the bandits travel in groups of fifty to a hundred; if a lord travels with them, there's about twice that number.

The lords have divvied up the southern portion of the swamp between them, with each ruling a part of it. All six of them are brutal and vicious — the only thing their subjects respect more than strength is a capacity for imaginative cruelty. On numerous occasions all of them have defended themselves from killers, whether assassins intent on seizing their position, followers driven into a murderous rage for some trivial reason, or members of their bands attempting to collect on the bounty Prince Summerset has placed on their heads (six ounces of gold per Bandit Lord, double that if taken alive).

Lord Rape: The current Lord Rape is the former one's lieutenant. He took the title for himself immediately after the ambush of Mehki's army, and most were so shocked by his claim that they were too late to challenge it. He started the tradition of handing down the names. He's a large man; the right side of his head is a scarred mass of waxy skin from an assassination attempt. He's more likely to beat a man than speak to him, and he's not known for his small talk.

Lady Slaughter: Lady Slaughter is the last of the original Bandit Lords. She is *not* the original Lord Rape's daughter — the bards just say that because it rhymes with slaughter — but she was his lover for a time. A thin, wiry woman in her late fifties with iron grey hair and one eye, her body is a patchwork of scars from a lifetime of sword and knife fights. The older she gets, the less cautious she becomes, and she's been trying to convince her fellow lords to gather the men and put all the Duke's forts to the torch. She knows that one band alone, even with all thousand members gathered, could not successfully lay siege to a fort (they're killers and cutthroats, not soldiers) and would eventually end up dead if they tried, but she feels all six thousand would succeed.

Jac Plunder: The original Jac Plunder “retired” some ten years ago (see page 150), bequeathing the name to his lieutenant. Jac Plunder is a daring bandit and excellent horseman. Originally from the Cynthian Plains and exiled for murder, he still dresses in the style of the Cynthian Riders. He has a “sweet tooth” for women, men, and anything else that moves.

Pillaging Pitt: The original Pillaging Pitt died while attacking one of the Duke's forts. The current one is an unremarkable member of his band who took the opportunity when it presented itself — he was the first to know of his leader's death. Since then he has relied on pure bravado and his right-hand man,

Gar Longstrap, to keep his followers in line... but it's only a matter of time before Longstrap kills Pitt and takes the title for himself. Pillaging Pitt wears an eye patch, but has both eyes.

Hanging Hyr: The second Hanging Hyr prefers to have men drawn-and-quartered than hung from the highest object by their neck — the last man he hung was the original Hyr. A short, slender man from Valdoria, Hanging Hyr has a handsome face and charming smile that belie the savage cruelty in his heart. Among the cutthroat followers of the Bandit Lords, Hyr is the most feared of the six.

Cat A'Killer: Most Bandit Lords kill those who defy them. Cat A'Killer takes their tongues first, only killing them if they defy her a second time... and most of her followers consider this far too merciful. She makes the displays public, and always rips the tongue out with her own bare hands, otherwise she fears her followers would consider her soft and weak (and she's right). She's the younger sister of the original Cat A'Killer, although sisterly affection didn't save the original from having her throat cut. Unlike her fellows, Cat believes the Duke's men will eventually chase them from the swamp, and she's preparing to cut and run.

CHAPTER TWO

In the world of Il-Ryveras there are broad swaths of land unexplored by men for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. The lands of the Known World lies on the seas and main rivers; civilized lands are often separated by dangerous wildernesses that only the bravest — or the most foolish — men dare to cross. As is typical in Swords And Sorcery settings, civilization is on the decline in the Valdorian Age, and even great empires like Valdoria and Abyzinia find themselves increasingly isolated as kingdom after kingdom falls into degeneracy or war and disappears from the face of the world.

The unexplored lands can hold everything from lonely towers that serve as the homes of sorcerers, to strange civilizations that haven't had contact with the outside world for ages and ages (if ever). There's plenty of room in the world for you to add your own lost cities and kingdoms.

The Ancient Empires

Two empires play a prominent role in the history of the lands of Sarth: Drindria, the empire Valdor toppled; and Elothia, an empire that disappeared mysteriously from the face of the earth. The years given in the discussion below are in Abyzinian Reckoning; the current year (1023 VA) is 8127 AR.

DRINDRIA

Even in Il-Ryveras it is said: "The victors write the history books," and what the Valdorians believe about this ancient empire isn't entirely true. Nor is it entirely false.

What would later be called Drindria started thirty thousand years ago on the island still named after the empire as a far outpost established by elven refugees from Elvenhome (*The Turakian Age*, page 51) after the Undying Lord Takofanes came to rule the known world. The *Drindrish* were one of the few communities to survive the end of the Turakian Age. For millennia they struggled to protect their small community from the cataclysmic upheaval that shook the world, and with their magic, courage, and sheer determination they succeeded. When the world had finally settled, they stood in their towers of rose and orange stone and watched the sun set on a new world. One of their number prophesied then they would also stand there to watch the last sunset, and so the towers came to be called the Towers of the First and Last Sunset.

Fifteen thousand years had passed, and even for the long-lived elves that was a long while. In their struggle to survive, they grew cold and harsh — as cold and harsh as the Heavenspyre Mountains they now called home. They were not evil then — that would come later — but they had lost the patience their race had been renowned for in the Age before. They no longer sought to understand the world and its inhabitants. They had survived fifteen millennia of a world gone mad. There was no sense in trying to understand it, for who can

THE EMPIRE OF THE THREE SERPENTS

Page 6 of *VIPER* describes the three immortal serpents, Beda, Nama, and Xoruba, who first awakened to sentience in the early days of the Valdorian Age. The lands where they rule are not depicted on the map of Il-Ryveras on page 65; they're on other continents, in the area Valdorians call Oceanspast, near where Atlantis and Lemuria will one day exist.

comprehend madness? Only survival mattered.

A century passed in peace; then another. But eventually conflict came to the elves, who now called themselves the *Drindrish*. The word in their language — a degenerate form of the tongue of their ancestors, which had once had words so long it might take a day to speak a single sentence perfectly and required too much patience for this new race of elves — meant the Survivors.

Men had also survived the end of the Tura-kian Age. In their crudely-shaped boats, they had rowed across the Strait of Tears, seeking to sack and plunder the city of the *Drindrish*. The *Drindrish* routed them with little trouble, but after questioning the prisoners, they realized mankind had already spread like a plague across the land. Even after fifteen thousand years of turmoil, mankind still spread.

The *Drindrish* knew two things: if allowed to continue to spread, mankind would be a threat to their existence; and the archives of the race recorded that man was not always so primitive as those who had attacked them. The *Drindrish* determined both to end the threat and return civilization to mankind.

They sent out from their island homeland a conquering army. Man was armed with weapons of flint and bone, and wore untanned hides. The *Drindrish* still possessed strong magics, for this was in the time before magic had fully subsided. They had weapons and armor of the finest steel and war machines that could shake the earth. Nothing stood in their way, and they conquered mankind with ease. Only brief centuries later, a blink of the eye for a *Drindrish*, they had spread to the Oceanshore Mountains, and there they found dragons. They remembered the old tongue and the old customs, made their pacts with dragons, and added the dragon-riders to their army. It was also in these days they discovered other empires: Elothia, who commanded the spirits of the earth to attack its enemies; and Abyzinia, whose nobility cavorted with demons. These kingdoms were far more advanced than the tribes of men who inhabited what would later become Valdoria.

The *Drindrish* fought the Elothians on the banks of the Worm River, in those days called the Wyrn River for the dragons that haunted the skies above it. Their army came to a halt in 656 AR when the Elothians agreed to a truce.

The *Drindrish* then turned their eyes to civilizing the barbarous men they had conquered. They started out with the best of intentions, but after a millennia or two, they treated the men like chattel and used them so that they could live a life of leisure.

They fought small wars with the Abyzinians and Elothians — neither was truly a match for the *Drindrish*, but the wars provided the *Drindrish* with a measure of amusement and a way to idle away the centuries. They intrigued in the courts of these young empires, manipulating events simply to see what would happen. They played kingmaker, and in their palaces they amused their fellows with the stories of what

they had accomplished, what chaos they had sown among the foolish humans who attempted to emulate them in every way. When Elothia fell because of its pride, the *Drindrish* played games with the poor humans left sifting through the rubble, driving them to make war on each other. Thus the *Drindrish* spent the millennia. With the passing years they became first cold-hearted, mischievous, and cruel — and then evil.

But magic had steadily been fading from the world the world all this time. Then Valdor rose up against the *Drindrish*, who for so long had relied on magic....

What the histories of Valdoria don't say is that Valdor had help among the *Drindrish*. All of them were hard-hearted and cruel, but not all of them reveled in the evil society they had become. It was these *Drindrish*, who regretted the course their race had taken, who helped Valdor and the other slaves escape the Heavenspyre Mountains and return to the mainland. These same *Drindrish* continued to aid Valdor throughout that hero's war against the tyrants while pleading their case to the rest of their people — they wished to abandon the civilization they had created and find a new way, one more in keeping with the race they had been so very long ago.

Valdor and his army won victory after victory against the *Drindrish*, and their leaders began to wonder if they could stop this rageful hero who seemed intent on killing every *Drindrish* he could find. It became more and more obvious their most of their magic had gone, and the *Drindrish* were few in number.

Finally the regretful *Drindrish* convinced the rest of their people to leave Sarth to men. The survivors of the war with Valdor set sail to the west in their golden barges to explore the world and see if there was a home for the *Drindrish* elsewhere in Il-Ryveras — someplace where they could start again, and perhaps this time follow a different course.

ELOTHIA

After Abyzinia, Elothia was the second empire of man to arise in the early days of the Valdorian Age. Its land of origin was the Cynthian Plains — in those early centuries, before they attempted to emulate the *Drindrish*, the Elothians resembled the modern-day Cynthian Riders. Fierce horsemen made up their army, but unlike the Cynthian Riders, a powerful sorcery accompanied the horsemen as they galloped off the plains and conquered all they surveyed until they reached the Worm River and met their match in the *Drindrish*.

The sorcery of the Elothians called on the divine spirits of the land to aid them in their battles. All of the major geographic features of Sarth possessed such spirits, but in those days they were wild and wrathful deities who demanded blood, both of beast and man. Cynthia, protector of the Elothians, was the greatest of these spirits, and she helped her followers make alliances with the other spirits. To face the armies of Elothia was like fighting against the world itself.

The Elothian Empire stood for five thousand years, but it only took the Elothians a handful of centuries to conquer an area from the Blue Waters to just south of modern-day Amyklai. They could not defeat the *Drindrish*. They feared to sail over the Blue Waters, for the spirits of the sea were not theirs to command, and what spirits Pelosa held they did not know — Cynthia would be little help to them there. In the end, they had four and a half millennia to turn inwards, degenerate, and corrupt.

They fought bloody civil wars for no other reason than to fight. They sought to emulate the inhuman *Drindrish*, and their culture turned byzantine. Even their arms and armor began to reflect this rot. Once a warrior needed only a simple sword, a lance, and a shield of hide over woven sticks. Their armor, now full suits of plate, was fluted and studded with spiraling horns. Their weapons became baroque.

As went their armor, so went their architecture. Again they tried to copy the *Drindrish*, but where that folk understood the elegance of simple grandeur and natural beauty, the spires, domes, and palaces of Elothia looked as if they were built by a tortured madman. They were indeed breathtaking, for one could not look at them and not feel a sense of vertiginous nausea. The towers twisted into the sky like screws meant to pierce and torture the clouds. The domes looked like pustulate boils created by some foulness in the ground. The palaces groped across the earth like cancerous growths. The colors were stomach-churning and unnatural — blocks of marble stained with swirls of puce and dark magenta, green soapstone waxy to the touch and shot through with streaks of black like a man with an infection, granite the color of a corpse.

Of all of these terrible marvels, the Elothians were exceedingly proud, for was it not proof of their great power? They turned their sorcery, so deeply rooted in nature, to the creation of their unnatural edifices — what other people, human or inhuman, could make that claim?

Then came the Elothians' greatest atrocity: the city of *Ly'zren Pittos*, ruled by the Lord Cavren. It sat atop a plain bluff of granite, unyielding and unmoving for all the years of the Valdorian Age. Called the Watcher of Blue Waters, it was steadfast in its guardianship of the land, preserving the coast against a sea that tried to encroach on the land with wave after wave. But those waves only broke into foam on the Watcher.

A sorcerer of great power, Lord Cavren drilled a well deep into the earth — an artifice of occult geometries sunk deep into the substance of the Watcher. Then he commanded the divine spirit of the place to serve him.

A complicated series of truces and pacts existed between the divine spirits and the Elothians: blood for power; worship for might. The divine servants acted at the behest of the Elothians, not because the Elothians asked or commanded it, but because the spirits were bound by pacts forged long ago.

Lord Cavren sought to change that, and in changing it, he broke the truces and pacts. His actions tore them to pieces and cast them to the

winds. He killed the Watcher of Blue Waters on that day — crumbled it into dust and let the sea take the coast the Watcher had guarded for so long. *Ly'zren Pittos* sank in the swamp that would come to be called Cavren's Demise.

On that same day he destroyed his city and lost his own life, Lord Cavren also killed Elothia. The pacts had bound the divine spirits... but no longer. They rose up against the men who had twisted their power. They swallowed the cities they hated so much and washed them away down the Crawl and the Serpentine. Only Cynthia gave her people a chance to survive, but she bound them to her in new pacts and promises. In the end, men were left to once again pick up the pieces of a shattered civilization.

Valdoria

PAGE 66 — THE SMOLDERING SEA

The Graecorian explanation for the Smoldering Sea is incorrect. The *Drindrish* opened rents to the Scorched Lands to provide the Smoldering Sea's unnatural heat. The magic is fading and will soon die out completely. While Valdoria will survive the climatic changes, the Graecorian way of life is in jeopardy, because their seaside lands will become too cold for the grapes in their vineyards and olive trees in their orchards.

PAGE 67 — THE FRONTIER

Here are some notes about the provinces making up Valdoria's frontier.

The County Of Sincerre: The Fortraln Five are a threat, all they lack is a charismatic leader.

The Duchy Of Elan: Duke Gimli's fears are true — Romnal has formed an unofficial alliance with Baleur. Though nothing is formalized yet, but Duke Lothar has promised Veur Town to Baron Haldri of Baleur.

The County Of Reswick: Count Valdemar is correct — if it comes to war, Duke Gimli plans to occupy Reswick to "protect his border."

The Duchy Of Romnal: Duke Lothar's true plan is discussed above on page 146.

PAGE 70 — THE MIDDLEMARCH

The Middlemarch is less peaceful than outsiders think, as described below. Any sort of war or extended conflict in the region would mean bad times for all of Valdoria, since the Middlemarch serves as the main source of food for much of the Empire.

The Counties Of Adelard And Tiergon: These two Counties are on the verge of going to war. Though their rulers have kept the situation quiet, a dispute over a town located on the coast between them has festered for nearly a decade. The new Count of Adelard, unlike his patient father, has had enough of the Count of Tiergon's bluster and has prepared his men for war. Unless some third party resolves the situation, war will almost certainly break out in less than six months.

The County Of Wensel: The Count truly believes his descent from Valdor (which is true) entitles him to usurp the throne. He believes himself a true Valdorian, and he's beginning to feel more and more he has a duty to his Empire to take the throne from Alric the Unmoved.

The Duchy Of Piedlyn: The Duchy has fallen under the influence of the Gods' Regents, a cult of sorcerer-priests within the priesthood of the Old Gods in Valdoria. The cult arises anew every century or so to challenge the Emperor's Divine Advisor for leadership of the priesthood in Valdoria. In previous centuries, the cult has quickly and quietly been put down, but it has never been totally expunged — like some sort of weed, its remnants grow again until it makes another bid for power. In the past, however, the priesthood had the full support of the Emperor and (more importantly) his Imperial Guard. So far the cult has kept its influence over the Duke of Piedlyn and his family a secret, but sooner or later it will come out and it's hard to guess what Emperor Alric's response will be. The leader of the cult — a sorcerer-priest very close to the Duke and his family — is Garregor Rossipute, a strangely charismatic man with piercing eyes, a commanding voice, and a long, tangled beard.

PAGE 70 — THE HEARTLAND

None of the Dukes of the Heartland are happy with Alric the Unmoved. But all of them believe his son, Alric the Younger, will be a far better Emperor, so they're content to wait for the elder Alric to die a natural death. These Duchies have been neighbors for millennia, and any disputes between them are so old as to be a part of everyday life and nothing worth going to war over.

PAGE 71 — DRINDRIA

The soldiers' reports from when they accompanied Yorick the Mourned on his doomed expedition are all true.

PAGE 71 — THE WATCHERS

The Marshals maintain an extensive spy network on the mainland, especially in the Heartland, and they feel their task is to guard Valdoria from any and all threats (although, originally, their Valdor-given duty was just to stand watch against the return of the *Drindrish*). Like the Dukes of the Heartland, they are content to allow Emperor Alric to die a natural death. They have placed several hand-picked people near Alric the Younger to ensure he understands the duties and responsibilities of being Emperor. The Marshals have decided they can no longer risk another Emperor like Alric the Unmoved — it's time the Emperors returned to the custom of the Tour.

The Cynthian Plains

PAGE 72 — HISTORY

The Cynthian Riders are the direct descendants of the Elothians. Their claim of being the rightful rulers is a bit of a stretch, but not wrong. The capital of Elothia — that empire's "Heartland" and home for the majority of Elothia's nobility — was the Cynthian Plains. Unlike the other divine spirits, Cynthia gave the men in her domain a choice: either tear down your cities and live as nomads or suffer my wrath. Many of the Elothians did so, including many nobles. The Cynthians have remained on the plains because Cynthia is slowly going the way of the other divine spirits in Sarth, and spends much of her time quiescent.

PAGE 73 — THE LAND

Of all the spirits described here, only Cynthia remains active, and even her spirit is succumbing to lethargy.

Old Widow Ice "died" due to the actions of the *Gronard*, a race of dwarves that can trace its lineage back to the Turakian Age. The hillmen and dwarves lived in peace during the early years of the Valdorian Age until immediately after the fall of Elothia — the dwarves taught them the arts of metalsmithing, the hillmen didn't steal the knowledge — but two thousand years ago that changed. The hillmen betrayed the dwarves, but only the dwarves remember that: the hillmen have long forgotten the events of those days.

Led by an outsider who desired the wealth he felt certain the dwarves had, a large tribe of hillmen turned on their peaceful neighbors and massacred them. Though the other tribes of hillmen banded together and joined with the dwarves to drive the murderers out of the Cold Peaks, the numerically small (and now even smaller) dwarves realized how precarious their position was. They retreated into their underground strongholds and left the world behind.

In another thousand years the dwarves (along with the rest of the world) discovered that precious metals like gold were becoming more and more rare. In search of these metals they dug increasingly extensive mines. Eventually they dug too much and Old Widow Ice, her body shot through with holes, died. With the death of the divine spirit and the degeneration of their metalworking arts, the dwarves began to change for the worse. They've turned greedy and spiteful. Though they're still bound by their word when they give it, they've become tricky and ignore the spirit of a pledge, only obeying the letter. They haven't entirely lost their crafting-skills, but some things have become impossible for them to make. They hoard what little gold, silver, and platinum they have like misers. Even their appearance has changed — their noses have become larger and are often marked by warts and boils. Their limbs have grown wizened and bandy, their backs stooped. Despite these changes they're still the best metalsmiths in Il-Ryveras. In recent decades, occasionally bands of them have emerged from underground to steal what little the hillmen have.

PAGE 74 — SOCIETY

The priests can call upon Cynthia and her various aspects to perform spells. Treat them like elementalists (other elementalists recognize that the creatures they summon are not elementals, but something different entirely). Cynthia does speak to her priests, but most of the time when a priest exiles a man, he's acting on his own — sometimes for good reasons, sometimes for selfish ones. Even on the Cynthian Plains, you can never trust a priest.

PAGE 74 — RUMORS AND STORIES

The Face of Cynthia exists and is pretty much how the rumor describes it. The priests on the plains often gather here and perform sacrifices to the goddess.

Elothian cities still stand on the plains in the foothills of the World's End Mountains where Cynthia holds no power. The cities have long stood abandoned, and who knows what lurks within their empty towers and tomblike palaces? It's likely, however, that the armies of Long-Winged Death — the malign spirit of the mountains — congregate here and do battle with the souls of the dead sent to the mountain.

Graecoria

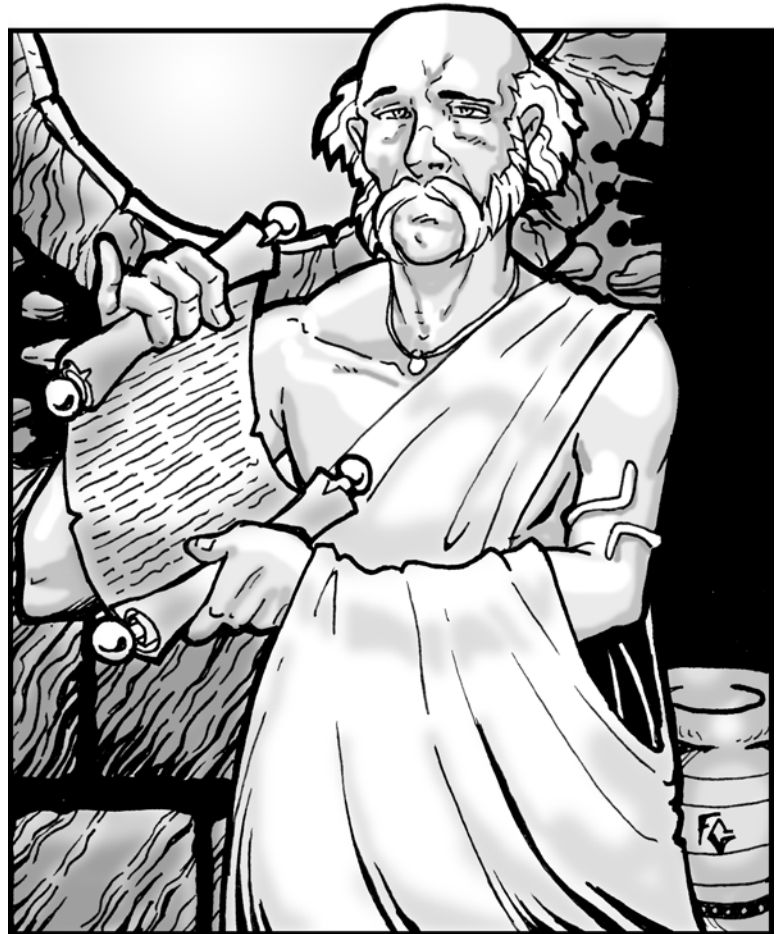
PAGE 77 — HISTORY

Graecoria was little more than a series of seven forts the Elothians maintained to protect the eastern coast of the Smoldering Sea from the *Drindrish*. When Elothia fell, the forts were destroyed, but many of their inhabitants survived. These founded communities that would later grow into the city-states of Graecoria.

PAGE 77 — RUMORS AND STORIES

Arkimedes is lying about the scrolls — the blending of Graecorian science and sorcery is his idea entirely. He only wanted to lend the idea the gravitas of an origin in antiquity. That said, it's a valid idea and his golem will probably work... if he's allowed to complete it. The Tyrant of Mysenni has every intention of using the fifty-foot-tall colossus of bronze and brass to bring the other city-states under his rule.

Although doomed to be limited in this day and age, Arkimedes's attempts to combine science and sorcery prefigure the wonders the Lemurians will achieve during the Atlantean Age.



Amyklai

PAGE 78 — THE LAND

Beast Speech is a Talent found possessed by the barbarians of the Crumble. People with the Talent teach polar bears to pull sledges and protect their "charges."

PAGE 79 — RUMORS AND STORIES

In its peoples' own tongue, the Island of the Snow Princesses is called Athurashurel. It's one of the few lands of elves to survive the end of the Turakian Age intact, culture and all. Though they knew of the *Drindrish*, they wished to keep themselves separate from that group of elves turned strange. For whatever reason, perhaps because the *Drindrish* didn't like the reminder of who they once had been, the *Drindrish* respected their wishes.

The story told of the Snow Princesses in lands outside the Crumble comes from a saga of one of the barbarians' ancient heroes, Kelvi the Bold. He spent a year with the Snow Princesses in his youth, and in the story he seduced their queen. Many barbarians, seeking to emulate their hero, search for the island but never find it. And that's where the confusion comes from. When foreigners ask if this story is true, of course the barbarians say they spent a year with the most beautiful women in the world. Who wouldn't?

Elsewhere On Sarth

PAGE 79 — THE BLOWING WASTES

With the caravans from Elweir gone, Olanifer will soon be gone, its people either scattered to the mountains or joining the desert nomads. In fact, it might be gone when the PCs arrive....

As for the Tribes of the Wind, the rationale behind their customs about water should be obvious. Their customs concerning not riding animals is simply a way to cull the weak from the tribes before they become a burden. And concerning those gemstones....

The nomads aren't human. They have bestial faces with slits for nostrils and protuberant tusks. Their skin is pale white, almost albino, and they wear their robes as much to hide their appearance from men as to keep out of the sun. The only sign of their inhuman nature an observer can see is their eyes, which are strangely colored — pea- or lime-green, vibrant blue, yellow-orange — but human in shape and size.

The race's old name is the Orrosh, and their kingdom once stretched from the Desert's Teeth to the Eastern Ocean. The men of the Wastes were their subjects, and this is the source of the ancient treaty with Olanifer. A prophet with great powers over the winds rose up against the corrupt rulers of the kingdom. Proclaiming that cities were the source of all decadence, he gathered a large band of followers and went to war with the cities. Those who succeeded him eventually won the war.

The ruined cities of the Orrosh still stand out there in the wastes, and these remnants of their ancient civilization are the source of the gemstones they sell in Olanifer. The stones are so cheap because the Orrosh have little use for them — they think the merchants are fools for paying so much for something a man cannot drink or eat.

PAGE 80 — URETH-KALAI

Thûn is long dead and long gone from the world, but its terrible knowledge of sorcery and its monstrous gods live on after it. It is said evil never dies, and in mysterious Ureth-Kalai, the evil that was Thûn has found a new life.

Thûn was an island kingdom during the Turakian Age (see *The Turakian Age*, pages 121-123) where ancient evil was worshipped. The sorcerer-priests of Thûn tended to the House Everlasting, the prison-temple of their greatest god, S'thlaghha the King in Sapphire Robes. They worshipped the Twin Gods — N'ggog-Eyl, the Lord of the Scarlet Infinities, and Ûm'vaveht, the Chaos Irrestible — chained together and bound as one. They abased themselves before the symbols of Yûlg'gwtha, the Encompassing Effulgence, buried in chthonic depths where he can only struggle against the crushing weight of all the world atop him. They propitiated Shothu-H'gyth, Dweller in the Deep, bound deep in the dark waters she called her own, her own tentacles entwining her and crushing her in their strangling grip, for though the weakest of these awful gods, even she was far too mighty to be

bound by any cage other than one formed of her own being.

All these gods Thûn once worshipped in ages lost to man; all these gods Ureth-Kalai now worships. But all the sorcerer-priests of Ureth-Kalai have is knowledge taken from the calendar-books of the *k'ngraa*. The sorcerer-priests of Thûn knew of the beings' prisons and could worship there and gain dark insights from the Chained Gods. They possessed the artifacts and relics, the keys to understanding the prisons of the gods and obtaining power from their gods. The sorcerer-priests of Ureth-Kalai have none of these things.

The sorcerer-priests of Ureth-Kalai have journeyed out into the world seeking these things. They sail their black-hulled ships into ports and search the cities there. They journey into mountains and seek out ancient ruins in hopes of finding signs of Thûn's passing. They send their sorcerer-priests like the Grave One to infiltrate other societies and search for the relics lost to the worshippers of the Chained Gods.

And one day they shall have collected these artifacts and relics, and they shall have located the ancient prisons of their gods, and they shall free them, for so it is foretold in the calendar-books of the *k'ngraa*.

Abyzinia

PAGE 81 — HISTORY

The Abyzinians do “worship” the Infernal Princes, but the vast majority of this worship is intended to avert harm from the worshipper. In other words, an Abyzinian does not ask for boons from the Infernal Princes, he asks them to turn their eyes away from him and leave him alone. They have always had a black magician as their ruler so he could intercede with the Infernal Princes on Abyzinia's behalf.

L'naren is Lanarien the Silver-Shod described on page 143.

Ilalign Maleinia is a Silyssen, described in more detail as part of Getab Yren's character sheet on page 190. He currently resides in Zothedris with his brethren.

PAGE 83 — THE LAND

The People of the Night are the descendants of goblins. Lake Tah'nees is a natural lake directly above the deep-wrought prison of the Undying Lord, Takofanes, whose “death” brought about the end of the Turakian Age. The foul energies seeping up from below have polluted the lake with their malignancies and perverted the People of the Night. Any necromancer performing sorcery on the shores of the lake receives a +5 to his *Necromancy* Skill Roll. But if he rolls a Critical Failure, the spirit of Takofanes possesses him and leaves in his mind some task of great evil to perform. The necromancer must devote his entire life to performing the task, and is only free of the geas once he succeeds. Takofanes is one of the Never Fallen described on page 134.

Naraat

Ironically enough, King Gorlinny unintentionally made a brilliant move. If Romnal takes over Elweir in truth, imposing Valdorian law on the city, Naraat is perfectly positioned to become a trading center between Abyzinia and Valdoria and reap the same profits Elweir now does. While it wouldn't have the river trade, it would have the profitable sea trade. If Romnal takes over Elweir. And if King Havisham were a smarter man.

What King Havisham really needs are advisors who know Elweir like the back of their hand, who have contacts with the sea captains, and who possess the cunning to make sure Naraat positions itself to swoop in if Elweir falls under Romnal's thumb. In short: what he needs is a group of canny PCs who are willing to roll up their sleeves, *ensure* Romnal takes over Elweir, and *ensure* Naraat is there to profit. And if King Havisham ends up dead one night, and Naraat finds itself ruled by a council of intrepid adventurers who knew a good opportunity when they saw it... well, in the world of Il-Ryveras, that's the stuff legends are made of.

Khor

PAGE 86 — HISTORY

Vylessa did influence those Khorians immediately around her and drove them to the heights of blood-madness. But she didn't have to influence all the Khorians. For all their good qualities, Khorians are bloodthirsty and rageful, and Vylessa brought that out in her people. Vylessa was a black magician who was fleeing Valdoria when she was abducted.

PAGE 88 — RUMORS AND STORIES

All the stories listed here are basically true except the one about the giants' womenfolk and the ruse they put on for human visitors to their land. After all, they're thirty feet tall and don't need to resort to tricks to keep a man in their halls — brute strength works fine. Not all giants have the same feelings about the men who occasionally land on their shore. Some view them as nothing more than fish or seals — something to eat. Others enjoy hearing the stories of the lands of the "little people."

Elsewhere On Pelosa

PAGE 89 — THE CITY OF THE APES

The apes aren't degenerate humans, they're highly evolved apes. They are the former servants of the Orlyssans, who were stricken down by a terrible plague set upon them by the Sorcerer-King of Abyzinia. The reason for the plague — which is only found in the royal archives that only the ruler has access to — is unclear. They were a fierce race and skilled in sorcery, but had never been interested in expanding beyond the borders of their city. Most rulers of Abyzinia feel that long-dead Sorcerer-King performed a favor for the Infernal Princes. The Orlyssans look as the statues are described. Whether any have survived — perhaps in some mutated form, perhaps still hungry for revenge on Abyzinia in particular and mankind in general — is left to you.

PAGE 90 — ZOTHEDRIS

In addition to its exotic perfumes, Zothedris is also known among skilled poisoners for its especially deadly poisons. It is most famous for the Seven Kisses of Pleasure — seven preparations that deliver varying intensities of bliss to the imbiber, before causing him pain just as great as the bliss (and some argue all the greater, because of the intense pleasure that immediately proceeded the pain). The final Kiss — the one that delivers the greatest bliss and greatest pain — eventually kills the imbiber. The other six are nonlethal (in most cases) and make for excellent implements of torture.

The *X'hul* are figureheads — they were long ago supplanted by the serpentine race of sorcerous shapechangers called the Silyssen. See Getab Yren on page 190 for more details. The X'hul tend to pick out Zothedrans they find attractive or who might possess useful information. They make good use of the subject before sacrificing him to whatever supernatural beings they serve. Even before the Silyssen supplanted them, the X'hul took Zothedrans in a similar manner and initiated them into the ruling caste. Custom dictates that this initiate is reborn into the X'hul, and the people are to forget his old life, which is why they never show any concern about the matter. They're uncomfortable speaking about the custom since talking about it is taboo, but if interrogated with violence or the like, they tell the story.

CHAPTER THREE



This section discusses the rationale behind the rules in *The Valdorian Age*, providing a glimpse behind the curtain and some information about the impact these rules will likely have on your game. Additionally, it provides options you can implement to further customize the rules or use in lieu of what's presented in Character Creation. You can, and should, change anything and everything you like to better suit your style of play.

CHARACTERISTICS AND POINTS

As noted in the main text, Valdorian Age characters begin with 8s in their Primary Characteristics rather than 10s.

WHY 8s?

The purpose of 8s is not to force players to spend a chunk of their starting Character Points, 25 points worth to be exact, to raise all their Primary Characteristics to 10. It's to create a wider spread of Characteristic values while at the same time providing characters plenty of points to spend on Skills, combat abilities, and sorcery. Characters in a Swords And Sorcery setting might not be the perfect physical specimens seen in Epic or High Fantasy games, but they're certainly just as good at killing their enemies and often possess a wide variety of Skills. Furthermore, magic in Swords And Sorcery isn't necessarily weaker than magic in other Fantasy genres. It has less impact on the setting as a whole and it's less commonly used because practitioners are more rare and, most importantly, wielding it comes with more risks.

Your players, especially if familiar with the *HERO System*, might initially try to raise all their Characteristics to 10. It's only natural — not used to seeing 8s, they simply try to recreate the starting character sheet they're used to. If you notice them doing this regularly, you might want to remind them they can spend those points on other things.

Rules Option: If you're uncomfortable with 8s in Primary Characteristics, but want to maintain the grittier feel of the Valdorian Age, start characters with 10s but lower the starting Character Points to 125, 50 Base Points + 75 points from Disadvantages.

SKILLS

Here are a few more notes on Skills.

NORMAL SKILL MAXIMA

These are some the effects of Normal Skill Maxima you should consider before disregarding this rule.

■ First and foremost, the Normal Skill Maxima rule makes it difficult for a sorcerer to raise his *Sorcery* Skill so high he never has to worry about failure. Because much of the flavor and balance of sorcery depends on Favor Points, which in turn depend on failure, removing Normal Skill Maxima makes sorcerers much more powerful and much less interesting.

■ Second, the Normal Skill Maxima rule encourages the use of Penalty Skill Levels. Penalty Skill Levels enable a character to succeed in impossible circumstances, yet the chance of failure is still present each and every time he attempts the task, whereas normal Skill Levels raise a Skill Roll so high that in many circumstances he's unlikely to fail. The ever-present chance of failure lends an appropriate grittiness to a Swords And Sorcery setting, while proper use of Penalty Skill Levels allows for the genre's more cinematic aspects.

■ Third, and also related to Penalty Skill Levels, the Normal Skill Maxima rule encourages more variety between characters with the same Skills. For instance, two characters might be excellent lock-picks, but one can have Penalty Skill Levels to offset penalties due to injury (representing his ability to pick a lock with his teeth or toes) while the other has Penalty Skill Levels to offset time penalties (representing his ability to work calmly, coolly, and speedily under pressure).

■ Fourth, the Normal Skill Maxima rule encourages characters to buy a wide variety of Skills — many characters in Swords And Sorcery are Jacks-of-all-trades to some extent, having learned many different Skills over the course of their travels.

Rules Option: When a character spends Experience Points to raise a Characteristic, and thereby increases a Skill Roll above 13- leaving 2 points unspent because they aren't enough to increase the Skill Roll to 14- (as in the example involving Sylarin on page 99), you can allow the character to have the 2 points back to spend elsewhere. This streamlines bookkeeping.

PENALTY SKILL LEVELS

As an optional rule, you can allow characters to purchase *generic PSLs*. Each PSL costs 8 points, and can negate any type of Skill Roll penalty. (They don't apply to OCV or DCV penalties.) You should probably limit characters to no more than three to five of these PSLs; they're powerful enough even in small amounts. If you allow them too many levels, no matter how difficult the task or circumstances, the PC has no trouble succeeding. And you can always rule that generic PSLs don't apply to certain penalties.

FIGHTING TRICKS

Because many things hinge on the *Fighting Tricks* Skill, you should be careful which NPCs you give it to. Minions should *never* have the *Fighting Trick* Skill, nor should antagonists who aren't highly-trained warriors and the like even if they can comport themselves admirably in a fight.

In other words, there's a difference between possessing superb skill with a weapon (represented via *Fighting Tricks*) and just being good at hitting something with a weapon (best represented with *Combat Skill Levels* or the like). Notice that in the *Package Deals* on pages 96-98, only one of the warriors has any ability with *Fighting Tricks* Skill as a default — the others simply have *Combat Skill Levels* to represent their training.

Just as you wouldn't give any NPC with knowledge of sorcery the *Sorcery* Skill, you shouldn't give any NPC with knowledge of fighting the *Fighting Trick* Skill. *Fighting Tricks* is only for true weapon-masters.

Fighting Tricks, Martial Arts, And Talents

The main reason for including specialized *Fighting Tricks* that require descriptions to define *and* *Martial Arts* is that the *Martial Art* maneuvers do not require a successful Skill Roll. *The Valdorian Age* makes a clear distinction between *Fighting Tricks*, *Martial Arts*, and *Talents*.

Talents are the easiest to describe: they're innate qualities a character possesses — not something he learned, but something he can do because of quirk of nature, physical ability, fate, or fortune.

Fighting Tricks are difficult to use. A character cannot perform them automatically — he can fail to perform the trick properly, not just fail to hit

his target. Furthermore, *Fighting Tricks* might be impossible when facing an opponent with equal or greater skill with the chosen weapons.

Martial Arts go along part and parcel with being a master of a weapon and are simply specialized uses of a weapon or fighting style that comes from being highly trained. A character who has paid for *Martial Maneuvers* can always use them without the need for a Skill Roll, though of course he might not hit his target. But he has to have that high degree of training — represented by the *Fighting Tricks* Skill — before he can purchase them.

For example, a highly-trained archer who's paid Character Points for *Distance Shot* can always use it without having to make a Skill Roll (although he might not hit his target). But when he tries to use *Rapid Archery* to fire more than one arrow in a Phase, he has to succeed with a Skill Roll before he can make an *Attack Roll*. He might drop his arrows as he draws them from the quiver, or fail to nock the shafts correctly — just two possible explanations for a failed Skill Roll.

As a rule of thumb, the abilities defined with *Fighting Tricks* are cinematic — while fun, they're not very "realistic" — whereas *Martial Art* maneuvers define abilities that aren't outside the realm of "realism." Talents can go either way.

Fighting Stunts And Skill Versus Skill Contests

The reason for making *Fighting Stunts* subject to *Skill Versus Skill Contests* is that many *Tricks* are built using *Powers*, which means the appropriate defense may be difficult or obscure. For example, a *Drain* defined as a crippling blow has no defense other than *Power Defense* or *Evasive*, which most characters shouldn't purchase just to defend against a handful of *Fighting Stunts*. It makes sense that a highly-skilled character should have at least a chance to resist the effects of an enemy's *Stunt*. By subjecting the *Fighting Stunt* to a *Skill Versus Skill Contest*, any character with the *Skill* has a sort of defense against a *Fighting Stunt*, no matter what *Power* it's built with.

A secondary consideration is that *SPD* is relatively low in a *Valdorian Age* campaign. A *Skill Versus Skill Contest* allows a master of his weapon a sort of passive defense against *Tricks* even if he's low-*SPD*. Thus, he doesn't have to *Block* or *Dodge* every time some odd or unusual attack comes his way, which bogs down combats.

TALENTS

Talents also deserve a little discussion.

DEADLY BLOW

The various forms of Deadly Blow generally aren't allowed because they make combat too deadly. First, most opponents the PCs fight are humans, who don't have large amounts of BODY (unlike some supernatural creatures, against whom Deadly Blow is allowed). To make matters worse, Defenses are limited in a Valdorian Age campaign. Adding the additional dice of Killing Attack on top of the weapon's own, as well as damage potentially derived from Combat Skill Levels, Placed Shots, and Martial Arts, lets a PC inflict too much BODY on an opponent. Additionally, Healing is not easy in the Valdorian Age, so increased damage has repercussions beyond the single combat.

Rules Option: Not all disallowed forms of Deadly Blows are as inappropriate as others. You could allow Sneak Attack as-is, or rework Expert Archer and Swordmaster into Fighting Stunts. The other forms make only limited sense in most cases, so you should think long and hard before letting PCs buy them.

NEW TALENTS

The new Talents described in the main text are all based on Luck. Rather than allowing PCs to buy Luck "generically," consider making them buy these Talents (or similar ones of your own devising) along with others like Divine Favor and Combat Luck.

Rules Option: Rather than having the PCs buy these Talents separately, you can allow them to buy Luck and use that Power *once per game session* (or adventure, or day, or story arc...) to replicate any one of these Talents. For instance, a PC with Luck 2d6 can, after rolling a critical failure, choose to use his Luck the same way as Master Of His Fate allows. After using his Luck this way, he can't use it again during that same game session.

COMBAT

There are some special aspects of Valdorian Age combat of which you should be aware.

MINIONS AND ANTAGONISTS

There are two reason for the Minion/Antagonist distinction. First, Swords And Sorcery PCs *should* be able to face off against four or five lesser foes without having to worry overmuch about dying because of one or two lucky Critical Hits or Hit Location rolls. Second, not allowing Minions to take advantage of Critical Hits and Hit Locations speeds up combat.

Rules Option: A further benefit you can derive from making a distinction between Minions and Antagonists is that you can allow PCs, especially warriors, to purchase Talents and Fighting Stunts with the Limitation *Only Versus Minions* (-½). This allows them to build Stunts that might be too powerful in fights against Antagonists, but which are perfectly acceptable for use against Minions.

An example of this is an HKA with Area Of Effect that allows a warrior to sweep his sword in a circle so he cuts through Minions in adjacent hexes. This is much too far-fetched when facing off against one or more Antagonists, but perfectly within the parameters of Swords And Sorcery when a steel-thewed barbarian is surrounded by guards, serpent-men, or the like. Other examples include a Limited form of Teleportation that represents a wily thief who has absolutely no problem eluding the city guard whenever he wants and can disappear into the city streets without leaving a trace; or a Limited form of Stretching for a pickpocket who can steal a hapless man's pouch without ever seeming to get particularly close to him.

HEALING

In the absence of the curative magic typical to High Fantasy games, healing can become problematic — it takes considerable time for characters to Recover BODY. One way of dealing with this that's also suitable to the serialized nature of much Swords And Sorcery fiction, is to allow plenty of time to pass between adventures. A second way is to allow sorcerers (as well as apprentices and hedge magician) to purchase the *Brew Healing Potion* Talent (page 168). A final way is to encourage your players to buy the *Rapid Healing* Talent (page 109).

MAGIC

Magic in *Swords And Sorcery* fiction isn't necessarily weaker than that performed in other types of Fantasy. It is rarer (and so has less impact on society as a whole). It is typically harder to use (which prevents a sorcerer from becoming a walking magical artillery piece — his spells are best used out of combat). Finally, a sorcerer suffers far graver consequences both for failure and for pursuing his art at all.

The magic system presented in *The Valdorian Age* has two premises. First, PC sorcerers should have at least some usefulness in combat, but mostly cast their spells outside of combat. Second, a sorcerer PC must suffer the consequences of magic.

In a typical High Fantasy game, magic resembles technology. It follows its own rules of physics, and the practitioner usually suffers no more consequences from casting a spell than he would from turning on a flashlight or firing a pistol. The result of his magic might have consequences in society — using magic to kill someone likely incurs the same penalties as using a sword to do the same thing — but the fundamental act of spellcasting isn't really any different from any other pursuit.

In *Swords And Sorcery*, this is not the case. Magic has consequences because of its very nature — it's not normal, but supernatural, and not an art mankind was ever intended to pursue.

THE SORCERY SKILL

The *Sorcery Skill* is based on EGO for two reasons. First, and most importantly, sorcery is more a matter of willpower than knowledge or quick thinking. The sorcerer compels the summoned being to come into the world and serve him — he doesn't out-reason it. He exerts his will to defy natural law — he doesn't out-think natural law or rack his brains for some special loophole. Second, this forces gamers to spend points on both EGO and INT (because of the *Sorcery Skill* and the *Knowledge Skill*), keeping them from dumping everything into powerful spells.

WHY SO MANY PENALTIES?

There are many penalties applied to sorcery in the Valdorian Age, and at first it might seem a daunting task to perform magic (as well it should). But before you change anything, remember that a sorcerer rarely fails to accomplish his magic. Only on a Critical Failure does he fail to do anything at all; otherwise a failed Skill Roll only means he must spend Favor Points. The magic still works — it's just that the casting has consequences later on.

THE SUMMON

In some ways you may find it useful to think of the sorcerer's Summon as a sort of Variable Power Pool — except the sorcerer, himself, does not gain the power. Instead, he can Summon a being with the power he wants, and then strike a bargain with that being to perform the task he wishes to accomplish. Chapter Five has examples of supernatural beings, but the types of beings and the powers they have are limited only by your and your players' imaginations.

Working Off Debt

Below are some ideas about tasks a sorcerer can perform to work off negative Favor Points. Not all of these need to lead to deeper plots — the ways of the supernatural are mysterious indeed — but having a PC perform a task is an excellent way to introduce a hook for the next adventure.

Minor Tasks

While minor tasks are trivial, it's the height of GMing skill — and sure to draw appreciative groans from your players — to have a minor task performed several sessions ago come back to haunt your PCs. Planning ahead for this sort of thing is difficult; it's often easier to "retrofit" the accomplished task to the current happenings in the campaign.

—The sorcerer must introduce one of his friends to a stranger.

—The sorcerer must bump into a man wearing a red robe while walking down an empty street.

—The sorcerer must give four bits to a beggar muttering about his lost foot at the Crossroads.

—The sorcerer must scratch a sigil into an Abyzinian *argele* and throw it on the ground, then walk away.

—The sorcerer must ask a specific individual to buy him an ale.

—The sorcerer must stand perfectly still for two minutes at a specific spot in Hawker's Square.

—The sorcerer must purchase an inexpensive trinket from a shop on his way to wherever he's going. (Alternately he must sell an inexpensive trinket to a shop.)

—The sorcerer must give a rose to a young woman and offer no explanation for the deed.

Intermediate Tasks

—The sorcerer must dig a small hole — just large enough for someone to catch his foot and trip — in the dirt road right in front of a tavern before the moon is at its height.

—The sorcerer must knock on the window of a stranger's home three times during the middle of the night.

—The sorcerer must start an argument with a guardsman at the exact time specified by the supernatural creature.

—The sorcerer must knock over a statue of a god in a small shrine.

—The sorcerer must steal a man's meal.

—The sorcerer must go to an inn and tell the innkeeper a story told to the sorcerer by the supernatural being calling in the favor.

Major Tasks

- The sorcerer must inform the city guard of a crime one of his friends, either an important Contact or a PC, committed.
- The sorcerer must protect Reslin Bitterbend of Uphill East from an assassination attempt.
- The sorcerer must trick a child into entering Old Man Wallowtorn's.
- The sorcerer must convince a bereaved widow that her recently departed husband is suffering in the Nether Realms for cheating on her.
- The sorcerer must sell an orphaned boy into slavery.
- The sorcerer must prevent a body from being given to the river.
- The sorcerer must steal a family heirloom from an old widow.
- The sorcerer must stand watch over a dying man and make sure he bleeds to death.

Life Threatening Tasks

- The sorcerer must retrieve the divine book from Yully at the Blindman's Bookshop and deliver it to Sir Yrvenus Hollow.
- The sorcerer must poison a village's only well and cannot tell anyone in the village of his deed.
- The sorcerer must hunt down another sorcerer who failed at a task and kill him.
- The sorcerer must journey to an Elothian city in the foothills of the Nightlurk Mountains and retrieve an artifact there.
- The sorcerer must put the village of Welldeep to the torch.
- The sorcerer must journey deep below Elweir to the lost city of the Builders and there turn a crank that will awaken Black-Scaled Serpent, the divine spirit of the Serpentine.
- The sorcerer must somehow convince the Silver-Crossed Palms to stop extorting coin from a corrupt leaseholder.
- The sorcerer must trick a specific non-sorcerer into accepting a token from him and becoming a scapegoat.
- The sorcerer must steal the bones of old Lord Alabaster from the Ossuary in Gold's Reside.

Sorcerous Talents

Below are optional Talents you can allow sorcerer PCs to purchase if you want healing to be easier in your campaign. Also described is the *Alchemy* Talent which expands on Brew Healing Potion and allows sorcerers to make different sorts of potions.

Rules Option: You can allow sorcerers (and other characters too) to purchase Mental and/or Power Defense as Talents called *Strong-Willed*. You should limit these defenses to no more than 10 points in each for 150-point characters.

BREW HEALING POTION

Through use of exotic materials, the sorcerer can infuse an elixir with a portion of his power and help those who imbibe the elixir heal their wounds. The potion leaves the drinker feeling listless and despondent while it works its magic, but he heals incredibly quickly. A sorcerer can have INT/5 potions brewed at a time.

Brew Healing Potion Cost: 5 Character Points (*bought as Simplified Healing 4d6, Delayed Effect (may have available a number of potions equal to character's INT/5; +¼); OAF Fragile (-1¼), Concentration (0 DCV throughout brewing; -1), Extra Time (6 Hours to brew; -3½), Gradual Effect (1 Hour, roll 1d6 of Healing per 15 minutes; -1¼), Requires An Alchemy Roll (to brew; -½), Side Effect (character automatically suffers Suppress END 2d6 for as long as he Regenerates BODY; -½), 4 Charges (-1)*)

ALCHEMY

At your discretion, the sorcerer may purchase this Talent to represent other potions he can brew up; each type of potion represents a new Talent that must be purchased separately. The *Weak Potion* version of some of the potions listed on pages 6-19 of *The Fantasy Hero Grimoire* (specifically: *Potion Of Eloquence*, *Incendiary Oil*, *Potion Of Love*, *Potion Of Owl's Eyes*, *Potion Of Stamina*, *Potion Of Elemental Resistance*, *Potion Of Underwater Comfort*, and *Dust Of Obsurement*) are appropriate with the addition of a *Side Effect* Limitation. Most Side Effects are Drains that automatically take effect when the potion wears off; the total value of the Limitation should be -½. If you allow this, you should require the character to purchase the *Alchemy* Skill as an INT-Based *Power* Skill. A character can have a total of INT/5 potions prepared at a time. For other rules see pages 281-282 of *Fantasy Hero*.

THE NATURE OF MAGIC

The magic system in *The Valdorian Age* lets players take full advantage of the flexibility the *HERO System* provides, but you should make sure the spells a player comes up with for his character's Multipower fit the tone for the type of magic he's casting (as well as the general Swords And Sorcery tone of the setting). How a spell functions ensures that each type of magic remains distinct from the others.

DEFINING SPECIAL EFFECTS

All spells require an explanation of their special effect, and you need to be sure that explanation goes something like: "This sorcerer summons a being and then the being does..." A sorcerer doesn't cast the spell to create a result — he summons a being to perform a deed.

You also need to describe what happens when a spell occurs — this *really* helps convey the proper "feel" for the magic system. Does the summoned creature have a snide comment for the sorcerer? Maybe before he disappears, in an ominous voice he warns the sorcerer that one of his supernatural fellows will come soon to collect on a debt. Maybe he complains that the sorcerer has called him away from an important task. Maybe he glares, leers, sneers, or otherwise expresses his disgust with the task. Whatever the case: be sure to occasionally drop a descriptive phrase or two when a sorcerer casts a spell to add some color to the event.

A sorcerer who casts a spell isn't reciting some magical formulae he's memorized and spoken a hundred times before. Instead he's using his force of will to summon a being, independent and with its own personality, to perform a task, and that means it might not like the task it must perform. Consider it this way: a person might have ordered the same drink at the same bar a hundred different times, but the bartender didn't always greet him, make the drink, and deliver it the same way. The person ended up with the same drink a hundred different times, but the service varied from one time to the next. The same is true with sorcery in *The Valdorian Age*.

Here are some general guidelines for what the special effects of each type of magic can be like:

Black Magic: Black Magic should always be evil. For physical effects the demon appears and glares with a baleful light in its eyes, laughs evilly, snickers malignly, wipes the gore from its horns, or otherwise does something that makes onlookers squirm. For instance, if the spell is an RKA, then the demon that appears has two-foot long talons, and if it kills the target, it eats the heart before disappearing. Mental effects depend on manipulating a person's base nature to achieve the desired result — if a sorcerer wants the target to fall to his knees and worship him, he should inflict a terrible fear or perverse longing for approval in the target, not fill him with love.

Divine Magic: The magic should always fall within the purview of the gods. While this encompasses a great deal, you should make sure it doesn't impinge on the other areas of magic. For instance, direct effects to the environment should be reserved for elementalism. The sorcerer-priest can have a spell defined as a Force Wall, but he calls on a hulking servant of Anyu to interpose himself between the sorcerer and his enemy rather than having the earth rise up to defend him.

Elementalism: Elementalism is always going to have a direct effect on the environment; it's the "flashiest" and most overtly "powerful" of the four types in the minds of most sorcerers. Elementalists are going to have a hard time justifying the use of Mental Powers and other subtle Powers.

Necromancy: Like Black Magic, much of the flavor for physical effects created via necromancy comes from describing the ghostly figures, tormented and suffering because of their death, who actually perform the action. Mental effects should always derive from fear and hopelessness, with the dead instilling a terrible knowledge in the target. Other effects depend on the necromancer drawing upon the knowledge or strange perceptions the dead possess to accomplish an effect.

INAPPROPRIATE POWERS

A handful of Powers commonly used in most *Fantasy Hero* games are conspicuous by their absence in the example spells listed in Chapter Three. While the Valdorian Age magic system provides a great deal of flexibility for creating spells, these Powers don't fit comfortably with the tone of Swords And Sorcery. Others require some Limitations to make them suitable.

Adjustment Powers: Healing is discussed separately below, but as for the remaining Adjustment Power: Drain and Suppress work just fine as they are, but any Power that provides a benefit to a character (e.g., Aid or Transfer), whether the sorcerer or another person, should have a Side Effect. Sorcery is a double-edged sword — gifts from the supernatural always come with a price. If STR goes up, perhaps INT or DEX go down. For a Transfer, maybe the character not only gains the Character Points Transferred, but also suffers from one of the victim's Disadvantages until the points fade.

Force Field And Armor: None of the example spells provide Defenses like Force Field and Armor. These aren't unbalancing — the END the sorcerer spends to maintain these spells quickly drains his Reserve dry — so much as the special effects necessary to describe them stretch setting plausibility. "A swarm of minuscule demons flit and fly around the black magician's body, warding off attacks" is an example of one such special effect — it's way too much like the typical High Fantasy magic seen in so many other games, not like something you'd read about in a Swords And Sorcery story. A Force Wall defined as a large demon interposing itself between sorcerer and foe is a little better, but still possibly too much for some GMs and players. You need to decide for yourself whether you want to allow these spells.

Healing: It's recommended you don't allow sorcerers to have Healing. The idea of supernatural beings, who are so inhuman and alien to the natural world, having the ability to knit together humans' wounds at miraculous speeds seems a bit of stretch. Healing spells also have a tendency to turn sorcerers into walking hospitals rather than mortals who traffick with otherworldly powers. If you do allow a sorcerer to purchase Healing — maybe the target benefits from a zap of preternatural vitality or the like — make sure it has some debilitating Side Effect that makes a character think twice before his player says, "Hey, throw some healing my way, buddy." It's far more in keeping with Swords And Sorcery fiction to allow a sorcerer to purchase the *Brew Healing Potion* or *Rapid Healing Talents* if you want your PCs to quickly heal lost BODY.

ATTACK ROLLS

Some wise-acre — whether it's a player with a sorcerer PC, or a player whose character just got hit with some spell — will eventually point out that for attack spells, the sorcerer makes the Attack Roll with his OCV even though the special effect is that a conjured creature does the attacking. Generally you shouldn't worry about this; it's just a convention of the rules. If you must, think of this as the sorcerer properly positioning and instructing the creature via the summoning ritual. Sticklers for absolute "realism" can use the OCVs of the sample supernatural creatures in Chapter Five instead.

Enchanted Items

Magic items are a rare thing in Swords And Sorcery fiction and should be just as rare in your campaign. They generally fall into one of three categories: plot devices; wondrous objects that have little effect on combat; and soul-sucking swords.

Characters in your campaign should never come to rely on magical items in combat. Swords And Sorcery fiction is about the triumph of human will, skill, and heroic determination over the supernatural, not a character's reliance on his magic spear and helmet to beat the bad guys. Even in a seminal work like Michael Moorcock's *Elric* saga, the central conflict is Elric's desire to understand his humanity versus his reliance on Stormbringer, an unnatural blade he attempts time and time again to repudiate. Elric wishes to understand compassion and other human qualities, and later in his adventures he wishes to retire and enjoy a life possessed of these qualities... but both his supernatural blade and the supernatural entities of his world impede his quest to find a measure of peace. Stormbringer is a secondary character/plot device moreso than a magic sword that lets Elric kill anything he wants to.

No doubt about it: collecting magic toys is a fun aspect of Fantasy roleplaying. But Swords And Sorcery isn't the place for this. For a similar but different sort of entertainment, a player in *The Valdorian Age* should focus on building fun Fighting Stunts for his character to use.

PLOT DEVICES

A plot device should always have a proper name and a specific purpose — often a campaign-altering one. Examples include a horn that calls the gods to return to Il-Ryveras, or a talisman that defends the wearer against a specific legendary beast or supernatural creature. The PCs should have to quest to retrieve the object, then continue the quest to find its proper use, and finish the quest by putting it to use. The plot device should provide few, if any, direct benefits to its holder — maybe a +1 or +2 to DCV or the *Sorcery* Skill.

WONDROUS OBJECTS

These are often used to provide an ancient empire with a magical allure. They're not so much useful as simply wondrous to behold. They do perform some magic — providing a vision of the past, playing eerie music, producing a rainbow of colors that shines unnaturally, creating a strangely colored smoke — but nothing with any real combat or game effect. While in many High Fantasy games these objects seem pretty throw-away because magic items are ubiquitous, in a Valdorian Age game they should be rare, and when the PCs encounter one, they should be surprised and impressed. The wondrous object is the rare reminder that while magic is fading from the world, it still exists... and a poignant reminder that once magic was once much more common.

SOUL-SUCKING SWORDS (AND OTHER ARTIFACTS OF GREAT POWER)

In the Valdorian Age, a sorcerer creates this sort of item by binding a supernatural creature into a physical object. The supernatural creature imbues the object with its magic. The creature has not lost its will or its personality, though it might have lost the ability to communicate except via empathic thoughts conveyed to its owner/holder.

In game terms, you usually build artifacts as Followers using rules for Automatons (or even Computers). However, unlike most Followers, this one won't necessarily always obey the character who owns/uses it, nor always have his best interests at heart. As with the *Sorcery* Multipower, it's the bound creature performing the magic — the owner of the artifact is only bidding the creature to perform. Controlling the item is often just like convincing a Summoned creature to perform a task: if the task is one the item doesn't want to perform, the owner/wielder must succeed in an EGO Roll Contest against the Summoned creature's.

THE END OF THE VALDORIAN AGE



In the days of Emperor Alric the Unmoved, ruler of the Valdorian Empire, most believed the world would soon end, but the coming centuries proved these doomsayers wrong: history took a different course. Instead of sliding into oblivion, the two great and ancient empires, Valdoria and Abyzinia, experienced a renaissance, ending the decline of the previous centuries.

In the year of Valdoria's freedom one thousand, thirty-nine, Alric the Unmoved died at his board, a pheasant bone lodged crosswise in his throat. His son and heir, also named Alric, assumed the mantle of Emperor. Neither slothful like his father, nor peace-loving like Oron the Conciliator, this new emperor resumed the tradition of the Tour. Newly crowned, Alric set out from Revanna to travel the length and breadth of the empire and receive oaths of fealty from his liegemen... and to gather the second, third, and younger sons of those liegemen as Alric's predecessors had done in olden days. From these sons, their retainers, and the free-men who wished to fight, Emperor Alric formed his army, and by the time he reached the edge of the Middlemarch, it was tens of thousands strong.

Four years before, the Frontier had broken out in open warfare, the Duchies of Elan and Romnal fighting battles that grew more savage with each passing year. The Duke of Elan had struck first, throwing a great many plans into disarray, and though he made steady progress toward Lionpride Castle, the Barony of Baleur's entry into the civil war ruined Elan's plans. But now the new Emperor had come, and his first task was to put his house in order. The heads of many nobles rolled in those bloody days and many more fled for their lives. The families of Coeur and Lanard were expunged from the imperial record. If any survived, they did so elsewhere under false pretenses.

Emperor Alric did not stop at bringing peace to the Frontier; the purpose of the Tour was to add territory to the Empire and bring civilization to the savage and the Old Gods to the faithless. He quickly advanced to Elweir, where he took Prince Summerset's pledge of fealty. He declared the City-State of Elweir, made the Prince its Lord Mayor, and Elweir once again had a lord instead of a Prince.

In the year of Valdoria's freedom one thousand, forty-one, Elweir learned that to breathe the air of freedom truly did mean to breathe the air of poverty. As the decades passed, the infamous city became just one more city in the Empire.

From Elweir, Emperor Alric's army marched into the lands the Bandit Lords controlled and drove them before him. He crucified those he cap-

tured, leaving the crosses to mark the passage of his army, and when he had finished his march, the Bandit Lords were dead and the Empire stretched from the Nylsen Forest in the north to the coast of Blue Waters in the south. Its new western border was the Desert's Teeth. The Emperor formed new provinces for the nobles in his army to rule. For the first time in three centuries, Valdoria expanded its borders, and for this Alric came to be known as the Emperor Returned.

Alric had a vision of the future, and his accomplishments did not end with simply expanding the empire this one time. His most important feat was to instill the same martial spirit in his son and his son's son. The Emperor Returned ensured future generations of Emperors would hold the tradition of the Tour as a sacred duty, never again neglecting it. In so doing, Alric prevented the Valdorian Empire from slipping into indolence, from quietly breaking apart and falling away. Instead, the empire would end in war.

In Abyzinia, to the north of Valdoria across the Gulf of Blue Waters, a renaissance of a different sort was under way. The Witch-Queen Zenobia lost her soul to dark powers in 1032 VA and Abyzinia fell into civil war. The war lasted three generations as pretender after pretender rose up only to be cast down by his rivals. Finally Ericho Qas, a man who claimed dubious blood-ties to the royal family of Abyzinia, ascended to the throne and took the title Sorcerer-King. In the end, the civil war served only to strengthen Abyzinia — like a leeching that pulled the bad blood from the kingdom, it brought to an end the quiet assassinations and backroom conspiring that had marked Abyzinian nobility since the nation's founding.

Unlike Valdoria, it was primarily mercantile pursuits that sparked Abyzinia's revival. Ironically, it was Valdoria's rediscovered martial spirit that enriched the Abyzinian coffers, for an army needs food and materiel, and Abyzinia provided both. They traded through intermediaries, usually the sea captains of Elweir journeying to Abyzinian ports. This new wealth eventually flowed into other areas of society, including Abyzinia's army, and the kingdom at last put to rest many of its nagging problems: the escaped slaves who lurked in the jungle were put down; a genocidal campaign was waged against the People of the Night; the pirates were driven from their ports in the Maggot Isles; and Abyzinia slowly expanded to the north, bringing the tribes that lived on the Endless Savannah into the kingdom through diplomacy or by the sword.

But something else strengthened Abyzinia: the nature of magic was changing. Magic reached



its nadir soon after these events, but afterward the world's innate arcane force began to regain strength. Abyzinia, where tradition dictated a sorcerer must rule, was poised to benefit. This rising magic proved the demise of both Abyzinia and Valdoria.

2318 VA marked both the birth of Ulrich, heir to the Valdorian Empire, who would later be known as Valdor Reborn, and the beginning of the end for both Valdoria and Abyzinia. Thirty years later, during Ulrich's Tour, Valdoria went to war with Abyzinia. Two issues of contention had always marked the relationship between the nations: slaves and sorcery. Every Valdorian knew his history — thousands of years past his ancestors had been the slaves of a sorcerous race called the *Drindrish*. It was only because of the first Valdor, the hero-founder of the empire, that the Valdorians ever knew freedom. Both slavery and sorcery were illegal in Valdoria — and more than just illegal, they were despised taboos, against the natural order, and every Valdorian had a deeply rooted hatred of both. On the other hand, slaves and sorcery served as the basis for Abyzinian culture.

Ulrich the Valdor Reborn set off on his Tour of the empire. He gathered the sons of his liegeman on the northern coast of Valdoria, across the Gulf of Blue Waters from Abyzinia, and set the shipwrights to construct sea-faring ships. He proclaimed his intention to conquer Abyzinia, which he called the heirs to the *Drindrish's* evil legacy and an affront to any true Valdorian. When his ships were at last ready, he set sail.

Ulrich would never return to Revanna, never sit on the throne in Valdor's Seat. The war he began lasted two centuries, and many Emperors lost their lives fighting it. Ostensibly, Valdoria was the victor, for at least at the war's end there was still a realm called by that name, although its borders were much reduced. Many of the provinces that made up the empire declared their independence while their Emperor was embroiled in a far-off war.

Though the Valdorian emperors accomplished Ulrich the Valdor Reborn's goal of bringing the gift of freedom to the slaves of Abyzinia and ending the sorcerous rule of that kingdom's Witch-Queens and Sorcerer-Kings, in truth it only paved the way for the rise of two different sorcerous realms: the Kingdom of Lemuria and the Dominion of Atlantis.

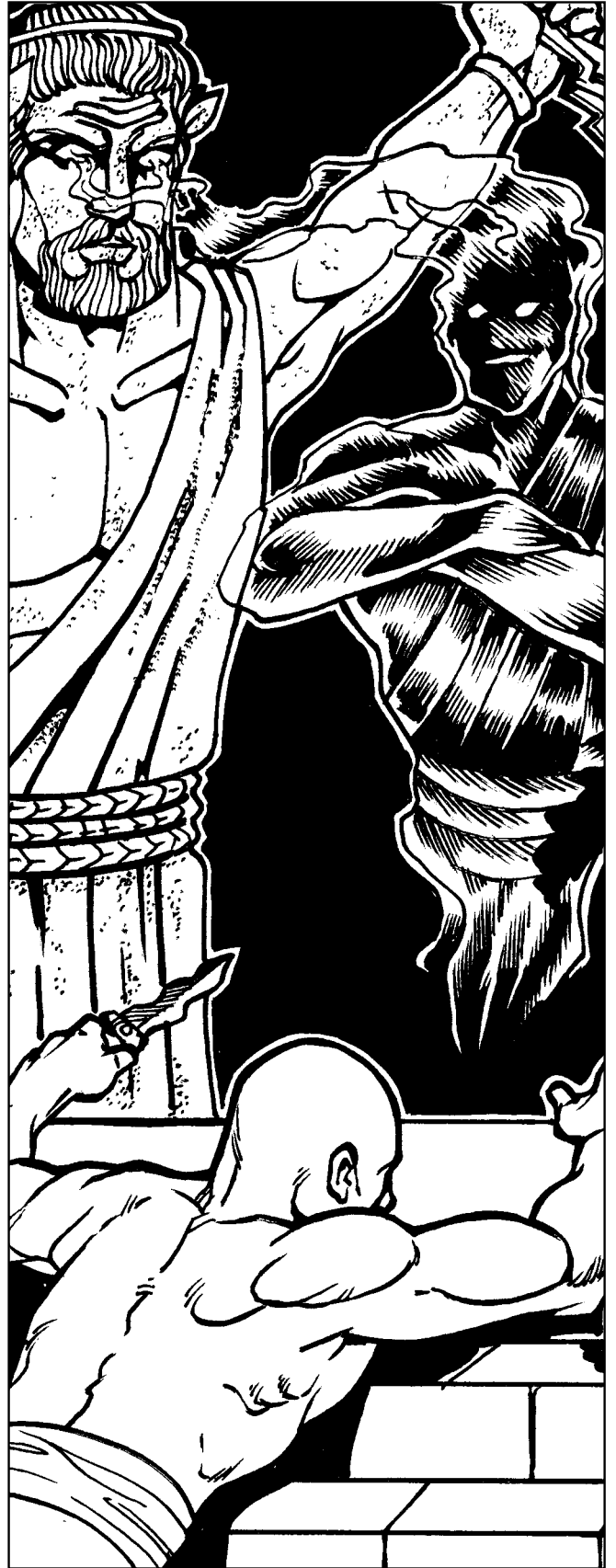
On the opposite side of the world, in the lands Valdoria and Abyzinia called Oceanspast and untouched by their bloody war, the increasing magic made its impact truly known. Here, the Lemurians had discovered the mystical engines that powered their war machines; and most importantly, the Atlantean Vondarrien returned the gods to the world of man.

Millennia ago the gods had turned their backs on mankind for reasons only they themselves knew, for how is a mortal to know the mind of the divine? But Vondarrien changed that. Once again the gods took an interest in mankind and its world — and because of Vondarrien's great deed, the Dominion of Atlantis rose to dizzying heights of power exceeding even those achieved by the realms of the Turakian Age.

In time, both Atlanteans and Lemurians would arrive on the shores of the former empires of Valdoria and Abyzinia. There they found small provinces engaged in incessant border skirmishes and petty squabbles that made conquering them all the easier.

And as for Elweir... it had become a minor portage of which a Atlantean captain recorded in his log: "Sailed upriver the Serpentine today. Near the shore was a small village of ramshackle homes amidst the ruins of a larger city. Crude men and lewd women live there. They call the place Alweer. The merchants seemed friendly and we traded wine for furs. Later that night they snuck aboard our ship and tried to murder us. We killed the ones we caught and considered setting fire to their homes, but chose to show the poor families of those miserable souls mercy instead."

chapter five:



THE NATURAL AND ANTAGONISTS

NPCS

THE SUPERNATURAL



This section includes character sheets for the supernatural beings sorcerers summon into the world. The character sheets are set up as templates, with a basic character sheet for a 200-point creature of one of the four types, plus power sets you can add to the template to create some of the myriad denizens of the otherworld. When you and your players create your own beings, you can either use the templates and come up with a new power set, or you can create an entirely new being (subject, of course, to your approval of any the players create).

MONSTERS IN SWORDS AND SORCERY

There are monsters aplenty in Swords And Sorcery fiction, and both *The HERO System Bestiary* and *Monsters, Minions, And Marauders* will serve you in a good stead when looking for monsters for your PCs to encounter and likely slay. In particular, the Guardian Ape and Giant Snake, on pages 40 and 116 of the *Bestiary*, respectively, appear frequently in Swords And Sorcery stories. Strange, inhuman races from ancient days are another genre staple.

Monsters

In Swords And Sorcery stories, monsters are unique, or present in only small numbers. (Which doesn't mean you can't re-use a character sheet for a monster; it just mean you should change what the locals call it, or its appearance, and/or alter its abilities slightly.) They're often the results of sorcerous experiments.

Monsters are often the last of a species sliding into extinction as the world's magic declines or because humanity has hunted them into oblivion. In short, they're anachronisms from out of time, somehow surviving into the present (at least, surviving until they meet the PCs...).

Giant animals (such as the serpent and ape mentioned above), often more intelligent and ferocious than their mundane kin, commonly serve the role of monsters in Swords And Sorcery fiction. Because of S&S's roots in the pulp fiction magazines of the early twentieth century, carnivorous apes with nearly the intelligence of men are especially common.

Inhuman Races

Publicly-known nations of inhuman races that have a large and well-known influence on the world are rare in the source material. The past might be full of such lands, but they have faded into history or have become withdrawn and degenerate. Hidden lands and lost worlds ruled by inhuman creatures abound — and typically in such places humans, if present at all, are slaves or the like — but these are far from civilization, exotic, and removed from the events of the modern day.

Inhuman races often hide themselves among men, either conspiring to rule man's kingdoms or with some other evil agenda. But these races are ancient and secret, and few people truly believe they exist. Their members are rare and they often work alone or in small cabals.

"SLAYING" THE SUPERNATURAL

When a supernatural creature is reduced to 0 BODY, it dissipates, returning to the otherworldly realms from whence it came. In effect, the opponent has chopped, whittled, slashed, and cut away the substance from which the creature formed his body and returned it to the aether, consigning the creature itself back to its world of origin.

MORTAL WEAKNESS

In Swords And Sorcery fiction, a protagonist with no recourse to sorcery or sorcerous objects often finds a way to defeat a supernatural creature. Some of these creatures are either immune to mortal weapons, or so powerful such weapons have no effect. Giving such creatures a weakness (an appropriate Disadvantage) provides heroes with a way to destroy a monster or banish a supernatural creature back to its otherworldly home (since once a supernatural creature is at 0 BODY its form dissipates and it returns to its home realm).

Supernatural beings embodied in the world form their substance from the aether. Coupled with their otherworldly nature, this binds them by ancient laws and cosmic axioms, giving them odd weaknesses to even the most mundane of goods. When mortal man faces the supernatural, it's these susceptibilities he most often exploits to defeat the creature.

Every supernatural creature must have a Disadvantage that increases the BODY done to it (at least in some circumstances) or causes some mundane object or substance to do BODY to it. Mundane goods can run the gamut from a noose tied around the creature's neck, to salt poured on its tongue, to cold iron, but they're ordinary things mortals can make and acquire without the aid of sorcery or the supernatural. Alternately, a supernatural creature must be bound to a place, such that physically forcing it to leave the location causes it BODY damage (*i.e.*, it's Susceptible to leaving the area — if it stays away too long, it dies).

In game terms, typically you can represent this weakness with Dependence, Susceptibility, and/or Vulnerability. A creature might have more than one weakness, but it must have at least one. On the templates below and the power sets listed thereafter, the amounts of the Disadvantage might not match; it's more important to have a fun Disadvantage than keep the points exactly accurate.

DEMONS

Inhabiting the Nether Realms, demons are the servants of the Infernal Princes. Black magicians call them into the world to do their bidding, and the demons never cease attempting to twist a black magician's command so they can commit evil, increase the wickedness in an already wicked world, and make mortals suffer.

200-POINT DEMON TEMPLATE

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
10	STR	2	11-	Lift 100 kg; 2d6 [2]
12	DEX	12	11-	OCV: 4/DCV: 4
10	CON	4	11-	
10	BODY	4	11-	
18	INT	10	13-	PER Roll 13-
18	EGO	20	13-	ECV: 6
20	PRE	12	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
6	COM	-1	10-	
5	PD	3		Total: 5 PD (5 rPD)
5	ED	3		Total: 5 ED (5 rED)
2	SPD	0		Phases: 6, 12
5	REC	2		
30	END	5		
28	STUN	8		Total Characteristics Cost: 84

Movement: Running: 6"/12"

Cost	Powers	END
50	<i>Infernal Form:</i> Life Support: Total (including Longevity: Immortality)	0
3	<i>Infernal Mind:</i> Mental Defense (7 points total)	0
5	<i>Infernal Form:</i> Damage Resistance (5 PD/5 ED)	0
55	<i>Demonic Powers:</i> Apply one of the Types Of Demon packages	
	Skills	
3	KS: Nether Realms 13-	

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 116

Total Cost: 200

75+ Disadvantages

20	Distinctive Features: Aura Of Infernal Evil (Concealable With Effort; Causes Fear)
10	Enraged: if thwarted or tricked (Uncommon), go 11-, recover 14-
25	Psychological Limitation: Utterly Evil (Very Common, Total)
20	20 points' worth of Susceptibility, Vulnerability, or Dependence
50	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 200

TYPES OF DEMONS

Tender To The Furnaces: These bat-winged demons stoke the furnaces where souls burn until reduced to ash — only to rise up once the flames cool to burn again. Sorcerers use them mainly as bodyguards or as messengers because of their ability to fly.

Cost Power

-6	-3 EGO
-3	-3 INT
9	+3 DEX
20	<i>Fires Of The Nether Realms:</i> Multipower, 30-point reserve, all slots Increased Endurance Cost (x2; -½)
2u	1) <i>Flame Blast I:</i> RKA 2d6; Increased Endurance Cost (x2; -½)
2u	2) <i>Flame Blast II:</i> RKA 1d6, Variable Advantage (+½ worth of Advantages; +1); Increased Endurance Cost (x2; -½)
12	<i>Bat-Like Wings:</i> Flight 6" (6" total)
10	<i>Fiery Nimbus:</i> Missile Deflection (arrows and sling stones)
9	<i>Thick-Scarred Hide:</i> Armor (3 PD/3 ED)

Total Cost: 55 points

Disadvantage

25	Susceptibility: when submerged in water, takes 1d6 damage per Segment (Common)
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Total Disadvantage Points: 25 points

The Sword Madling: A servant of the Duke of Murder, the Sword Madling can turn a man's blade against his friends or himself (Turn A Man's Blade), cause a man's blade to refuse to fight, forcing him to struggle with it and expend his strength just getting it to move toward the foe (Sword's Rebellion), and leap from one blade to the next, disappearing and reappearing instantly (Dance Among The Blades). From out of this demon's skin protrude many rusty and blunt blades that break and crumble away as it moves.

Cost Power

45	<i>Sword Madness:</i> Multipower, 45-point reserve
3u	1) <i>Turn A Man's Blade:</i> RKA 2d6, Indirect (always comes from someone's sword; +½); OIF (blades of opportunity; -½)
1u	2) <i>Dance Among The Blades:</i> Teleportation 10"; Only From One Blade To Another (-½)
2u	3) <i>Sword's Rebellion:</i> Suppress HKA 6d6; Only Swords And Blades (-½)
4	<i>Sword-Friend:</i> Armor (4 PD/0 ED); Only Versus Limited Type Of Attack (swords and blades; -½)

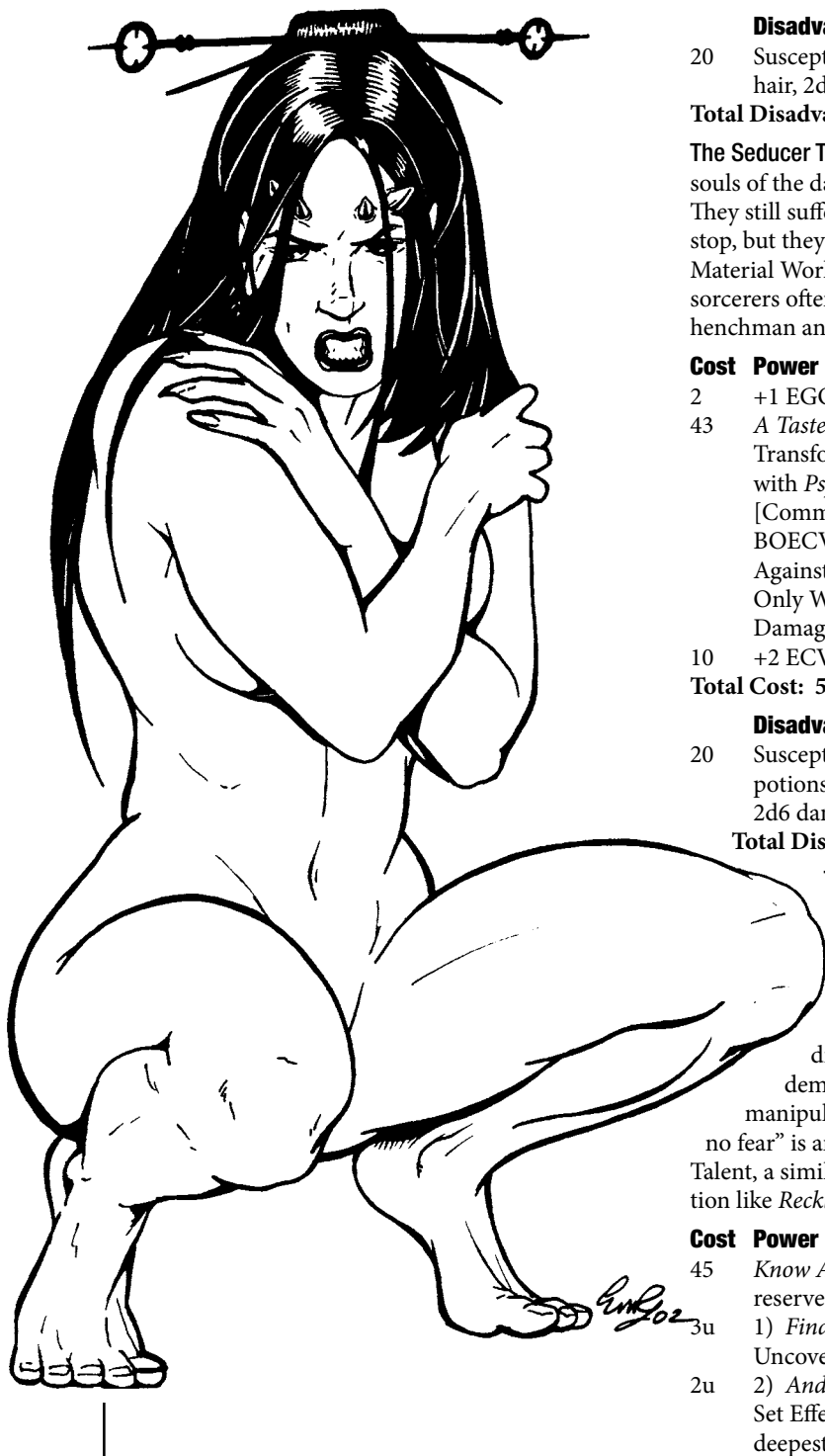
Total Cost: 55 points

Disadvantage

20	Vulnerability: 2 x BODY from Shield "Bashes" (Common)
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Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points

The Infernal Brute: A hulking demon as tall as it is wide, the Infernal Brute passes eternity breaking souls on the racks of the Infernal Princes. It has muscles atop muscles, which seem to squirm of their own accord under its purplish-black hide, and is entirely disgusting to look at. But it also has a strange weakness: it suffers pain if bound with the hair of a child. An opponent need only keep the strands around the brute's wrist, neck, or ankles, which requires a successful Grab; the strands need not be tied. However, the odds are if the damage doesn't Stun the demon, it will quickly break free.



Cost Power

- 30 *Infernally Strong:* Increase STR to 30 (this increases the demon's base PD to 4, so change the points spend on PD to 2 and increase its STUN to 29)
- 5 -5 INT
- 10 -5 EGO
- 5 +10 END
- 10 +10 STUN
- 18 *Thick Hide:* Armor (12 PD/0 ED)
- 5 +1 with HTH Combat
- 2 +1 OCV with Punch

Total Cost: 55 points

Disadvantage

- 20 Susceptibility: when "bound" with a child's hair, 2d6 damage per Phase (Uncommon)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points

The Seducer To Torment: This demon infects the souls of the damned with a perverse desire for pain. They still suffer and they still want the suffering to stop, but they only keep begging for more. In the Material World, the demon can do the same, and sorcerers often call on this demon to pervert their henchman and hirelings with that same desire.

Cost Power

- 2 +1 EGO
- 43 *A Taste For Pain:* Ego Attack 2d6 plus Major Transform 1d6 (normal person to person with *Psychological Limitation: Loves Pain* [Common; Strong]; heals back normally), BOECV (Mental Defense applies; +1), Works Against EGO Not BODY (+¼); Linked (-¼), Only Works If Ego Attack Inflicts STUN Damage (-¼)
- 10 +2 ECV

Total Cost: 55 points

Disadvantage

- 20 Susceptibility: to soothing balms, healing potions, and other general wellness elixirs, 2d6 damage per Phase (Uncommon)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points

Thief Of Men's Fears: This demon can root through a man's heart and find his deepest fear... then make that fear a reality, at least in the mind of his target. It can also take on the shape of that fear and inspire great dread in its target. Sorcerers use this demon to learn of a man's fear, so they can manipulate the victim. A mortal "who knows no fear" is any character who has the *Fearless* Talent, a similar ability, or a *Psychological Limitation* like *Reckless*, *Heedless Of Danger*, and so on.

Cost Power

- 45 *Know A Man's Fear:* Multipower, 45-point reserve
- 3u 1) *Find The Fear...*: Telepathy 8d6; Only To Uncover Man's Deepest Fear (-½)
- 2u 2) *And Exploit It:* Mental Illusions 9d6; Set Effect (only to create illusions of target's deepest fear; -1)

- 3u 3) *Take The Shape Of Fear*: +45 PRE; Only After Successfully Using Telepathy (-½), Only To Cause Fear In Target Of Telepathy (-¼)
 2 Mental Defense (+2 points)

Total Cost: 55 points

Disadvantage

- 10 Vulnerability: 2 x STUN from attacks from mortal “who know no fear” (Uncommon)
 10 Vulnerability: 2 x BODY from attacks from mortal “who know no fear” (Uncommon)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points

The Changeling: In the Nether Realms the demon lords call on this demon to take the shape of a soul’s loved one, then torture the loved one before the damned soul’s eyes. Sorcerers, however, use this demon as an infiltrator and spy.

Cost Power

- 44 *Assume Someone Else’s Shape*: Shape Shift (Sight, Hearing, Smell/Taste, and Touch Groups, any humanoid shape), Imitation, Instant Change
 11 Acting 15-

Total Cost: 55 points

Disadvantage

- 20 Susceptibility: to seeing its reflection in mirror, takes 1d6 damage per Phase (Common)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points

The Wielder Of The Lash: This leathery-skinned demon has two arms like slithering whips that are braided from its own flayed hide. In the Nether Realms it passes eternity flaying the soul stuff from the dead, and sorcerers often call upon these demons to flay the flesh from their prisoners. The Wielder Of The Lash takes damage when its own arms are wrapped around its neck. A character can do this with a successful Grab and successful Brawling Tricks Roll.

Cost Power

- 32 *Lashing Arms Of Flayed Hide*: Multipower, 32-point reserve
 2u 1) *Whip Slash*: RKA 2d6; Limited Range (5”; -¼)
 1u 2) *Whip Reach*: Stretching 5”; Always Direct (-¼), No Noncombat Stretching (-¼), Cannot Do Damage (-½)
 2u 3) *Whip Grasp*: +30 STR; Only To Grab And/Or Squeeze (-½)
 9 *Thick Leathery Hide*: Armor (6 PD/0 ED)
 9 +3 with Lashing Arms Of Flayed Hide

Total Cost: 55 points.

Disadvantages

- 20 Susceptibility: when bound with his own arms, takes 1d6 damage per Phase (Common)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points

The Lurker In Darkness: The Lurker In Darkness is rarely seen — a victim only sees two hands with long, slender finger that have five joints emerging from the darkness to grab him around the neck. Sorcerers use these demons as spies and kidnappers. The Lurker In Darkness takes damage from moonlight or sunlight reflected off pure silver (not silvery metals).

Cost Power

- 30 *Lurk In Shadows*: Invisibility to Sight Group, No Fringe, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Only Works In Darkness Or Shadows (-½)
 20 *Strangling Hands*: Hand-To-Hand Attack +3d6, NND (defense is hard covering on neck or not needing to breathe; +1); Hand-To-Hand Attack (-½)
 5 Stealth 13-

Disadvantages

- 20 Susceptibility: to moonlight or sunlight reflected off silver, takes 1d6 damage per Phase (Common)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points

DIVINE SERVANTS

These are the former servants of the gods. They go about their tasks performing as the gods would have them perform, for that is their nature and they cannot be anything less than loyal to the gods (even if the gods be long gone). But they bristle at the commands of mortals. Just as a highly-placed palace servant would not let a workman or other lowly help issue him commands, neither do the divine servants view their service to sorcerer-priests with anything less than contempt.

200-POINT DIVINE SERVANT TEMPLATE

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
10	STR	2	11-	Lift 100 kg; 2d6 [2]
12	DEX	12	11-	OCV: 4/DCV: 4
10	CON	4	11-	
10	BODY	4	11-	
15	INT	7	12-	PER Roll 12-
18	EGO	20	13-	ECV: 6
20	PRE	12	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
14	COM	3	12-	
5	PD	3		Total: 5 PD (5 rPD)
5	ED	3		Total: 5 ED (5 rED)
2	SPD	0		Phases: 6, 12
5	REC	2		
28	END	4		
28	STUN	8		Total Characteristics Cost: 84

Movement: Running: 6"/12"

Cost	Powers	END
50	<i>Divine Form</i> : Life Support: Total (including Longevity: Immortality)	0
3	<i>Divine Mind</i> : Mental Defense (7 points total)	0
5	<i>Divine Form</i> : Damage Resistance (5 PD/5 ED)	0
55	<i>Divine Powers</i> : Apply one of the Types Of Divine Servant packages	

Skills

3 KS: The Divine Abode 12-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 116

Total Cost: 200

75+ Disadvantages

20	Distinctive Features: Aura Of Divine Origins (Concealable With Effort; Causes Fear)
10	Enraged: when commanded or patronized (Uncommon), go 11-, recover 14-
25	Psychological Limitation: Utterly Arrogant (Very Common, Total)
20	20 points' worth of Susceptibility, Vulnerability, or Dependence
50	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 200

TYPES OF DIVINE SERVANTS

Servant Of The Final Lord: This servant of Aides guards the borders of the god's realm in the Nether Realms, seeking to ward off both demons who try to tempt the souls of the faithful away from their god's protection, and the souls of the damned who wish to escape from eternal torment. He appears as a tall, well-muscled man with jet black skin and an incredibly handsome face. He radiates a palpable authority. For a mortal to damage him via his Susceptibility, the mortal must truly spurn him or truly feel his powers are worthless.

Cost Power

20	+10 PRE
1	+2 COM
26	<i>Ward The Dead And Demons</i> : Multipower, 45-point reserve, all slots Requires A PRE Roll (-¾)
3u	1) <i>Ward The Demonic</i> : Suppress Demonic Powers 3d6, all Powers wielded by demons simultaneously (+2); Requires A PRE Roll (-¾)
3u	2) <i>Ward The Dead</i> : Suppress Souls Of The Dead Powers 3d6, all Powers wielded by souls of the dead simultaneously (+2); Requires A PRE Roll (-¾)
2u	3) <i>Dismiss the Dead And Demons</i> : Drain BODY 4½6; Only Versus Souls Of The Dead And Demons (-½), Requires A PRE Roll (-¾)

Total Cost: 55 points

Disadvantage

20 Susceptibility: when humans deny his power or abilities, or spurn him, takes 1d6 damage per Phase (Common)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points

Servant Of The Man-Slayer: His body covered with plates so thin and elegantly fitted they seem like a snake's scales, this servant of Anyu can inspire a frenzy in the warriors around him that heightens their strength, speed, endurance, and ability to endure damage. Yet these benefits are only for those wielding weapons and struggling in combat — more peaceful souls gain no benefits from the presence of the servant of the Man-Slayer.

Cost Power

43	<i>Inspire Warriors</i> : Succor STR, DEX, END, and STUN 4d6, four Characteristics simultaneously (+1), Area Of Effect (5" Radius; +1), Selective Target (+¼); Only Those Armed With Weapons And Fighting (-½)
12	<i>Metal Body</i> : Armor (4 PD/4 ED)

Total Cost: 55 points.

Disadvantage

20	Vulnerability: 1½ x STUN from Sheathed Weapons (Common)
20	Vulnerability: 1½ x BODY from Sheathed Weapons (Common)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points.

Servant Of The Dark-Of-The-Moon: Appearing as a woman with wings of inky night stretching from her back, this servant of Enodia can cloak herself in darkness and fly. Sorcerer-priests often use this type of servant as a messenger and spy. The servant is susceptible to having a fire (or other light sources) passed through her ephemeral black wings.

Cost Power

- 30 *Unseen In The Dark:* Invisibility to Sight Group, No Fringe, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Only Works In Darkness Or Shadows (-½)
 25 *On Wings Of Night:* Flight 10", Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)

Total Cost: 55 points

Disadvantage

- 20 Susceptibility: when fire is passed through her wings, takes 1d6 damage per Phase (Common)

Total Disadvantage Points:

Servant Of The Far-Rover: Inconspicuous in a long coat and broad-brimmed hat, this servant of Erebos serves sorcerers as an agent, usually given tasks to discover information. (This also shows that all those points don't have to be spent on Powers. A sorcerer can Summon a being with useful Skills. Although it's less expensive to simply hire a human agent, sometimes a sorcerer doesn't want to trust a mortal with a task.)

Cost Power

- 8 *Easy Walker:* Running +4" (10" total)
 7 Acting 14-
 7 Bribery 14-
 5 Concealment 13-
 7 Conversation 14-
 7 Persuasion 14-
 7 Seduction 14-
 7 Streetwise 14-

Total Cost: 55 points

Disadvantage

- 20 Susceptibility: to having ankles bound, takes 1d6 damage per Phase (Common)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points

Servant Of The Heart-Stirrer: A Servant Of The Heart-Stirrer can unearth a person's deepest love. She can then use that knowledge against the target; sorcerer-priests often employ these servants to learn how best to manipulate an intended victim.

Cost Power

- 45 *Know A Man's Love:* Multipower, 45-point reserve
 3u 1) *Find The Love...:* Telepathy 8d6; Only To Uncover Target's Deepest Love (-½)
 2u 2) *And Exploit It:* Mental Illusions 9d6; Set Effect (only to depict target's deepest love; -1)
 3u 3) *Take The Shape Of That Love:* +45 PRE; Only After Successfully Using Telepathy (-½), Only To Stir Feelings Of Love And/Or Devotion In Target Of Telepathy (-¼)
 2 Mental Defense (+2 points)

Total Cost: 55 points

Disadvantage

- 20 Susceptibility: when covered with slime, muck, or other disagreeable substance, takes 1d6 damage per Phase (Common)

Total Disadvantage Points:

Servant Of Terror-Of-The-Deep: This servant of Poteidan is large and heavily muscled. His fingers end in sharp talons, and sorcerer-priests typically use him as an enforcer.

Cost Power

- 30 Increase to STR 30 (this increases the demon's base PD to 4, so change the points spend on PD to 2 and increase its STUN to 29)
 11 +11 STUN
 12 *Talons:* HKA 1d6 (2d6 with STR); Reduced Penetration (-¼)
 2 +1 OCV with Talons

Total Cost: 55 points

Disadvantage

- 20 Susceptibility: when kept suspended in the air, takes 1d6 damage per Segment (Uncommon)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points

Servant Of The Sky-Father: A servant of Pythos speaks with a voice like thunder, and few can resist his commands... and those who do must face his wrath. Unused to betrayal, he is totally unprepared for someone to betray him and stab him the back.

Cost Power

- 4 +2 EGO
 40 *Command Mortals:* Multipower, 40-point reserve
 4u 1) *Speak In A Voice Like Thunder:* Mind Control 8d6
 4u 2) *Punish The Disobedient:* Ego Attack 4d6
 3 +1 with Command Mortals

Total Cost: 55 points.

Disadvantage

- 20 Vulnerability: 2 x BODY from attacks from behind (Common)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points.

ELEMENTALS

Taking their substance from the elemental materials of the world, elementals look only vaguely humanoid, with lumpen bodies and crude limbs. Elementals rarely bother to form a head; when they speak a cavity opens somewhere on their body and issues a howling voice, a crackling laugh, a hollow groan, or a gurgling scream. They want only to be free to rage across the world and tear down man's creations, and will always perform a task in the way that causes the maximum amount of destruction while still obeying their orders. Their weaknesses typically come from disrupting their bodies with substances of other elements.

200-POINT ELEMENTAL TEMPLATE

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15	STR	7	12-	Lift 200 kg; 3d6 [2]
12	DEX	12	11-	OCV: 4/DCV: 4
15	CON	14	12-	
15	BODY	14	12-	
6	INT	-2	10-	PER Roll 10-
15	EGO	14	12-	ECV: 5
20	PRE	12	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
8	COM	0	11-	
6	PD	3		Total: 6 PD (6 rPD)
6	ED	3		Total: 6 ED (6 rED)
2	SPD	0		Phases: 6, 12
7	REC	2		
38	END	4		
37	STUN	6		Total Characteristics Cost: 89

Movement: Running: 6"/12"
Swimming: 2"/4"

Cost	Powers	END
50	<i>Elemental Form:</i> Life Support: Total (including Longevity: Immortality)	0
3	<i>Elemental Mind:</i> Mental Defense (7 points total)	0
6	<i>Elemental Form:</i> Damage Resistance (6 PD/6 ED)	0
50	<i>Elemental Powers:</i> Apply one of the Types Of Elementals packages	

Skills

2 KS: Elemental Plane Of Origin 11-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 111
Total Cost: 200

75+ Disadvantages

20	Distinctive Features: Aura Of Elemental Rage (Concealable With Effort; Causes Fear)
10	Enraged: if bound or limited (Uncommon), go 11-, recover 14-
25	Psychological Limitation: Utterly Alien (Very Common, Total)
20	20 points' worth of Susceptibility, Vulnerability, or Dependence
50	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 200

TYPES OF ELEMENTALS

Roaring Spirit Of The Wind: This elemental appears as a tangible whirlwind and has control over the winds. It takes increased damage from weapons of stone, like a flint axe.

Cost Power

3	+1 DEX
15	<i>Powers Over Wind:</i> Elemental Control, 30-point powers
15	1) <i>Suck The Wind From A Man's Lungs:</i> Energy Blast 3d6, NND (defense is Life Support [Self-Contained Breathing]; +1)
15	2) <i>Flight:</i> Flight 15"
2	+1 with Flight

Total cost: 50 points

Disadvantages

10	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN from stone weapons (Uncommon)
10	Vulnerability: 2 x BODY from stone weapons (Uncommon)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points.

Invisible Spirit Of The Air: Elementalists use this air elemental to spy on their enemies. The Fringe for its invisibility is the quiet, seemingly distant sight and sound of a strong wind blowing even on days when no wind moves the air. The spirit is susceptible to having a tarp or other large piece of fabric thrown over it.

Cost Power

3	+1 DEX
15	<i>Powers Over Wind:</i> Elemental Control, 30-point powers
15	1) <i>Invisibility:</i> Invisibility to Sight, Hearing, and Smell/Taste Groups
15	2) <i>Flight:</i> Flight 15"
2	+1 with Flight

Total cost: 50 points

Disadvantages

20	Susceptibility: from having a tarp thrown over it, takes 1d6 damage per Phase (Common)
----	--

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points.

The Earth Mover: This hulking elemental can push its substance into its fists and increase their size. It can also command the earth to move aside and create tunnels. When held in water, the elemental's substance drifts away and dissolves into useless mud.

Cost Power

15	<i>Powers Over Earth:</i> Elemental Control, 30-point powers
10	1) <i>Fists Of Stone:</i> Hand-To-Hand Attack +4d6, Area Of Effect (One Hex; +½); Hand-To-Hand Attack (-½)
25	2) <i>Disappear Into The Earth:</i> Tunneling 6" through 6 DEF, Fill In

Total cost: 50 points.

Disadvantages

20	Susceptibility: when held in water, takes 1d6 damage per Phase (Common)
----	---

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points

Stone-Crusher: Made of rock, this elemental can crumble stone, and elementalists typically use it to destroy buildings. Its weakness is being buried — but it doesn't need to be entombed. Just holding it in a pit while someone shovels dirt atop it suffices.

Cost Power

- 15 *Powers Over Earth:* Elemental Control, 30-point powers
 10 1) *Crumble Stone:* Drain BODY 3d6; Only Works Against Objects Made Of Stone (-½)
 15 2) *Body Of Stone:* Force Field (10 PD/10 ED), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½)
 10 3) *Move Through Stone:* Tunneling 6" through DEF 6 materials; Only Through Stone (-½)

Total cost: 50 points.

Disadvantages

- 20 Susceptibility: when buried, takes 1d6 damage per Segment (Uncommon)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points

The Leaping Fire: This fire elemental looks like a pillar of flame that never stops moving. It can leap from one combustible to another, its flames dancing across the distance with lightning quickness. It loses its substance when held in a large fire, like a bonfire but not a torch, as like returns to like and the primal consciousness animating the fire is driven back to the Scorched Lands.

Cost Power

- 4 -4 STR
 15 *Fiery Powers:* Elemental Control, 30-point powers
 27 1) *Engulf In Flames:* HKA 1d6, Damage Shield (does damage in HTH Combat; +¾), Continuous (+1), Penetrating (+½), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); No STR Bonus (-½)
 12 2) *Leaping Flames:* Leaping +30" (32" total); Only From One Combustible To Another (-¼)

Total cost: 50 points

Disadvantages

- 20 Susceptibility: to being held in a large fire, takes 1d6 damage per Phase (Common)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points

The Drowning Spirit: This elemental takes the form of an amorphous shape of water, held together and moving of its own accord against the laws of nature. It flows quickly across the ground, and can engulf a mortal's head in a globe of water. The globe stays around the victim's head until he submerges his head in a larger body of water, which causes the unnatural globe of water to rejoin the natural world. The Drain works in this order every time: first it Drains END, then STUN, and then BODY (similar to drowning). As with ending the Engulf In Water, the Drowning Spirit finds its body washed away if it is submerged in a larger body of water (any pool of water larger than 1 Hex).

Cost Power

- 2 -1 CON
 15 *Water Powers:* Elemental Control, 30-point powers
 22 1) *Engulf In Water:* Drain END, STUN, or BODY 1d6, any one of those three Characteristics one at a time (+¼), NND (defense is Life Support [Self-Contained Breathing or being able to breath in water]; +½), Continuous (ends if victim submerged in water; +1), Range (+½), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½)
 15 2) *Flow Along The Ground:* Running +10" (16" total), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½)

Total cost: 55 points.

Disadvantages

- 20 Susceptibility: to being submerged in larger body of water, takes 1d6 damage per Phase (Common)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points.



SOULS OF THE DEAD

The souls of the dead exist on the Desolate Plain, intangible to the living but in a way coexisting with them. When the necromancer calls a soul off the Desolate Plain, it takes a shadowy substance of murk and swirling haze, the features it had in life almost recognizable to those who knew the spirit. Though something less than wholly present in the world, the soul does have substance, and a warrior can see wisps of the spirit's form torn away as his sword cuts and hacks through the spirit.

200-POINT SOULS OF THE DEAD TEMPLATE

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
8	STR	0	11-	Lift 75 kg; 1½d6 [1]
8	DEX	0	11-	OCV: 3/DCV: 3
8	CON	0	11-	
8	BODY	0	11-	
8	INT	0	11-	PER Roll 11-
15	EGO	14	12-	ECV: 5
20	PRE	12	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
8	COM	0	11-	
4	PD	2		Total: 4 PD (3 rPD)
4	ED	2		Total: 4 ED (3 rED)
2	SPD	2		Phases: 6, 12
4	REC	0		
16	END	0		
22	STUN	6		Total Characteristics Cost: 38

Movement: Running: 0"/0"
Flight: 4"/8"
Swimming: 0"/0"

Cost	Powers	END
50	<i>Spirit Form</i> : Life Support: Total (including Longevity: Immortality)	0
3	<i>Unnatural Mind</i> : Mental Defense (6 points total)	0
3	<i>Spirit Form</i> : Damage Resistance (3 PD/3 ED)	0
60	<i>Insubstantial</i> : Physical and Energy Damage Reduction, 50%, Resistant	0
8	<i>Flight</i> : Flight 4" (4" total)	1
-12	<i>Drifts, Doesn't Walk</i> : Running -6" (0" total)	
-2	<i>Drifts, Doesn't Swim</i> : Swimming -2" (0" total)	
50	<i>Spirit Powers</i> : Apply one of the Types Of Souls Of The Dead packages	
	Skills	
2	AK: The Desolate Plain 11-	

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 162
Total Cost: 200

75+	Disadvantages
25	Distinctive Features: Ghost (Not Concealable; Causes Fear)
25	Psychological Limitation: Spiteful Of The Living (Very Common, Total)
20	20 points' worth of Susceptibility, Vulnerability, or Dependence
50	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 200

TYPES OF SOULS OF THE DEAD

Will-O'-The-Wisp: Looking like a man with a ghostly blue nimbus limning his body, the Will-O'-The-Wisp can compel a target to follow him. In life this spirit was tricked into committing some crime or fooled into going to his death, and now he can trick others into following him. Necromancers often use this spirit when they want to lead someone into a trap or get a person alone for some nefarious reason. Because of the way he died, the Will-O'-The-Wisp only wants to flee if forcibly led somewhere, and his substance begins to fade away as the spirit escapes back to the Desolate Plain.

Cost	Power
16	+8 EGO
1	+2 END
33	<i>Compelled To Follow</i> : Mind Control 10d6; Set Effect (follow the Will-o'-the-Wisp; -½)
Total cost: 50 points	

	Disadvantages
20	Susceptibility: when forcible led somewhere, takes 1d6 damage per Segment (Uncommon)
Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points	

The Haunter: Unlike the other souls of the dead described here, the Haunter is only barely present in the world. Necromancers typically use them as spies. They can will themselves to become tangible with a successful EGO Roll, and it costs END to remain that way. When Desolidified, they can only be affected by magic and whatever object they're susceptible to. The Haunter typically died in a violent and physical way, which is why it's so hesitant to assume a more substantial form, and its Susceptibility is to the weapon used to kill it. Somewhere on its form is an indication of how it died — a deep gash on the chest or across the neck, a swirl of dark purple on its face if the spirit was beaten to death, and so on. These marks are how a character who makes a successful KS: Necromancy Skill Roll identifies the Haunter's weakness.

Cost	Power
-60	Remove <i>Insubstantial</i> from character sheet above and replace with one below.
60	<i>Insubstantial</i> : Desolidification (affected by magic and Susceptibility), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½), Inherent (+¼); Always On (see text; -½)
45	<i>Invisibility</i> : Invisibility to Sight, Hearing, and Smell/Taste Groups, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½)
1	Damage Resistance (+1 PD/+1 ED)
4	<i>Better Flight</i> : Flight +2" (6" total)
Total cost: 50 points.	

	Disadvantages:
20	Susceptibility: to object of the same type as that used to kill it (see description), takes 1d6 damage per Phase (Common)
Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points.	

The Revenant: The Revenant wishes to kill as many of the living as he possibly can before the necromancer sends it back to the Desolate Plain. Its form is tougher than other souls, and long sharp claws gleam at the ends of its murky arms. Necromancers commonly use Revenants in combat. The Revenant was hung or otherwise executed publicly, which is why it wants to strike out at the living so badly. It's Susceptible to the means of its execution is his Susceptibility — in this case, placing a noose around his neck.

Cost Power

- 7 +7 STR
- 3 +6 END
- 2 -2 INT
- 24 *Talons:* HKA 2d6 (3d6 with STR); Reduced Penetration (-¼)
- 18 *Tougher Ghostly Substance:* Armor (6 PD/6 ED)

Total cost: 50 points.

Disadvantages

- 20 Susceptibility: placing a noose around his neck, takes 1d6 damage per Segment (Uncommon)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points

The Possessing Ghost: A Possessing Ghost can take control over a living person's body by manipulating his soul the way a puppeteer does his marionettes. Because the Possessing Ghost grows so close to whomever it possesses, any earnest sorrow on the victim's part over what the soul is making him do causes the Possessing Ghost physical harm. Of course, in the cynical world of Il-Ryveras, earnest sorrow and heartfelt regret are rare things. (How you adjudicate this is up to you — it could require violation of the character's Psychological Limitation, or you could just observe the player's roleplaying and go from there.)

Cost Power

- 50 *Possession:* Mind Control 8d6, Telepathic (+¼)

Total cost: 50 points.

Disadvantages

- 20 Susceptibility: to earnest sorrow on victim's part over actions, takes 1d6 damage per Segment (Uncommon)

The Banshee: The Banshee wishes to let the world of the living hear its grief and torment, and its wail is so powerful it saps the life from any mortals that hear it. Any song about beauty and love, even one not incredibly well sung, causes it physical pain.

Cost Power

- 40 *Deathly Wail:* Drain BODY 1d6, Area Of Effect (64" Radius; +2¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Personal Immunity (+¼)
- 10 *Increased Flight:* Flight +5" (9" total)

Total cost: 50 points

Disadvantages

- 20 Susceptibility: to songs of beauty and love, takes 1d6 damage per Segment (Uncommon)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points.

The Knower Of Secrets: This soul has spent its time on the Desolate Plain learning the secrets of the living. The description simply gives it 47 points to spend on various Knowledge Skills, although you can treat this as KS: Knows Many Things 34- and apply major penalties to all questions asked due to the breadth and vagueness of such a KS. Or you can let the player distribute the points as he sees fit. But you are always the final judge about what the spirit knows or doesn't know, and you can always rule any particular piece of information unknown.

Cost Power

- 3 Scholar
- 47 47 points' worth of Background Skills

Total cost: 50 points.

Disadvantages

- 20 Susceptibility: being babbled at in a non-existent language, takes 1d6 damage per Phase (Common)

Total Disadvantage Points: 20 points.

MINIONS AND ANTAGONISTS



This section is divided into two parts. The first includes minions PCs might encounter on the streets of Elweir. These are given as simple Character Briefs, with a few words concerning their appearance, character, or duties. You can use them in a pinch if you need a quick character sheet to adjudicate a character's actions. The second part includes antagonists for the PCs; these can become major rivals or villains in your campaigns. Each is a 150-point character or more.

MINIONS

INCOMPETENT GUARDSMAN

12	STR	8	DEX	12	CON	12	BODY
6	INT	6	EGO	8	PRE	8	COM
3	PD	3	ED	1	SPD	4	REC
24	END	24	STUN				

Abilities: +2 with Short Sword, Cudgel, and Short Spear; CK: Neighborhood 8-; PS: Guardsman 8-; WF: Common Melee Weapons, Common Missile Weapons

75+ Disadvantages: Distinctive Features: Uniform; Social Limitation: Subject To Orders; Reputation: Bungler 8-; Unluck 2d6

Equipment: Short Sword or Short Spear, Cudgel, Cuir-Bouilli Cuirass, Steel Cap

Notes: This is a character brief for an incompetent guardsmen in Elweir — the city is full of these raw recruits, but most quickly move on to competent guardsmen (see below) or else lose their life.

COMPETENT GUARDSMAN

12	STR	12	DEX	12	CON	12	BODY
10	INT	8	EGO	12	PRE	8	COM
4	PD	4	ED	2	SPD	6	REC
30	END	30	STUN				

Abilities: +1 with HTH Combat; +2 with Short Sword, Cudgel, and Short Spear; CK: Neighborhood 11-, Interrogation 11-, Conversation 11-, PS: Guardsman 11-; WF: Common Melee Weapons, Common Missile Weapons

75+ Disadvantages: Distinctive Features: Uniform; Social Limitation: Subject To Orders

Equipment: Short Sword or Short Spear, Cudgel, Chain Byrnie, Steel Cap

Notes: This is the standard guardsman found in the neighborhoods of Elweir, with the exceptions of Gold's Reside.

SKILLED GUARDSMAN

12	STR	15	DEX	12	CON	12	BODY
12	INT	10	EGO	14	PRE	10	COM
4	PD	4	ED	2	SPD	6	REC
35	END	35	STUN				

Abilities: +1 with HTH Combat; +2 with Short Sword, Cudgel, and Short Spear; Conversation 11-; CK: Neighborhood 12-; Interrogation 12-; PS: Guardsman 11-; Tactics 11-; Teamwork 11-; WF: Common Melee Weapons, Common Missile Weapons

75+ Disadvantages: Distinctive Features: Uniform; Social Limitation: Subject To Orders

Equipment: Short Sword or Short Spear, Cudgel, Chain Byrnie, Steel Cap

Notes: This is the standard guardsman found in Gold's Reside and occasionally elsewhere. This is also a character brief for a sergeant in any of the neighborhoods.

MAGISTRATE

12	STR	15	DEX	12	CON	12	BODY
15	INT	12	EGO	15	PRE	10	COM
4	PD	4	ED	2	SPD	6	REC
35	END	35	STUN				

Abilities: +2 Overall Combat; +1 DCV; +2 with Rapier; Bureaucracy 12-; CK: Neighborhood 13-; CK: Elweir 13-; Concealment 12-; Deduction 12-; Interrogation 13-; KS: Elweir Law 13-; Navigation (Urban) 12-; PS: Magistrate 13-; Shadowing 12-; Streetwise 11-; Tactics 12-; Teamwork 12-; WF: Common Melee Weapons, Common Missile Weapons

75+ Disadvantages: Distinctive Feature: Magistrate's Braid Of Office; Social Limitation: Subject To Orders.

Equipment: Rapier, main gauche.

Notes: Magistrates typically emulate the Chief Magistrate of their neighborhood. This one, for instance, copies Malik Rotwell — he carries a rapier and main gauche, and wears no armor. Others might carry different weapons and wear a chain shirt.

BANDIT LORD'S FOLLOWER

10	STR	12	DEX	12	CON	10	BODY
8	INT	8	EGO	10	PRE	8	COM
3	PD	3	ED	2	SPD	5	REC
30	END	30	STUN				

Abilities: +2 with Punch, Dagger, and Short Sword; Interrogation 11-; Gambling 11-; Navigation (Land) 11-; Riding 12-; Survival (Tropical

Coasts/Pelagic Environments) 11-; Tracking 11-; WF: Common Melee Weapons, Common Missile Weapons

75+ Disadvantages: Psychological Limitation: Bloodthirsty Cutthroat; Reputation: cutthroat, 8- (Extreme)

Equipment: Dagger, Short Sword, Light Bow, Patchwork Of Soft Leather Armor (Hit Locations 4-5 and 9-13)

Notes: This is the standard follower for a Bandit Lord. An unattractive ne'er-do-well, an unintelligent cutthroat, and an untalented rogue, he's picked up quite a few Skills in his time, and is always willing to slit a man's throat for a bit or two.

SAILOR

10 STR	10 DEX	12 CON	12 BODY
8 INT	8 EGO	8 PRE	8 COM
2 PD	2 ED	2 SPD	4 REC
26 END	26 STUN		

Abilities: +2 with Punch; AK: Homeland 8-; AK: Ports Of Il-Ryveras 12-; KS: Stories And Legends Of Il-Ryveras 12-; Navigation (Marine) 11-; PS: Knot-Tying 11-; PS: Sailing 11-; TF: Large Rowed Boats

75+ Disadvantages: Money: Poor; Psychological Limitation: Likes To Drink; Psychological Limitation: Superstitious.

Equipment: Knife

Notes: This is a character sheet for a sailor who's a skilled hand. He's been in a few tavern fights and knows how to throw a punch, but isn't a fighter, and if pirates storm the ship... well, it's not his cargo and pirate ships always need another good sailor or two. You can also use it for a pirate with the addition of +2 with Short Sword, Dagger, and Punch.

STARVELING

8 STR	10 DEX	8 CON	8 BODY
10 INT	8 EGO	6 PRE	6 COM
2 PD	2 ED	1 SPD	4 REC
16 END	16 STUN		

Abilities: Fringe Benefit: Member Of Starveling Guild; Acting 11-; CK: Elweir 11-; Concealment 11-; Disguise 11-; Persuasion 10-; Shadowing 11-; Sleight Of Hand 11-; Survival (Urban) 11-.

75+ Disadvantages: Money: Destitute; Social Limitation: Beggar

Equipment: None

Notes: This is character sheet for a member for the Starveling Guild — not just any ordinary beggar, but one who makes a living at it and considers it his profession.

GANG MEMBER

12 STR	8 DEX	10 CON	10 BODY
8 INT	8 EGO	10 PRE	8 COM
3 PD	3 ED	2 SPD	4 REC
25 END	25 STUN		

Abilities: +2 with Dagger, Club, and Punch, CK: Neighborhood 12-, CK: Overhead Road 8-; Interrogation 11-, Teamwork 11-.

75+ Disadvantages: Distinctive Feature: Symbol Of Gang; Reputation: ruffian 8-

Equipment: Club or Dagger

Notes: This is the standard gang member in Low-town or Gibberish. By himself he isn't much of a threat, but get a few together...

GANG LEADER

15 STR	10 DEX	15 CON	12 BODY
10 INT	10 EGO	14 PRE	10 COM
4 PD	4 ED	2 SPD	6 REC
30 END	30 STUN		

Abilities: +1 DCV; +2 with HTH; +2 with Dagger, Club, and Punch; CK: Neighborhood 12-, CK: Overhead Road 8-; Interrogation 12-, Tactics 11-; Teamwork 11-; 10 points' worth of Contacts.

75+ Disadvantages: DNPC: Gang; Distinctive Feature: Symbol Of Gang; Reputation: ruffian 14-

Equipment: Dagger or Club

Notes: Gang leaders come up through the ranks of the gang — along the way they become very good at busting open heads, but learn very little else. The leader also has Contacts, usually with the city's underworld, since they sometimes employ his gang for muscle.



MALIK ROTWELL PLOT SEEDS

The standard plot seed involving Rotwell: he believes the PCs are guilty of a crime they didn't commit. The crime was an important one, and Rotwell won't stop until he finds and punishes them. Can they obtain proof of their own innocence before Rotwell catches up them?

The PCs find information that links Rotwell to a series of crimes. The magistrate has many enemies in the city who would pay a high price for the information. But are the PCs willing to risk earning the man's ire? Might they be better off just holding onto the information...?

The PCs have seen Rotwell one too many times that day. It's obvious the man is following them, but for what reason? Could it be the magistrate's discovered their latest plan to get some coin? And if so, should they call off their plans... or might that make him angry because he's expecting a large bribe in the near future?

ANTAGONISTS

MALIK ROTWELL

Chief Magistrate Of Lowtown

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
18	STR	10	13-	Lift 300 kg; 3½d6 [2]
20	DEX	36	13-	OCV: 7/DCV: 7
15	CON	14	12-	
15	BODY	14	12-	
18	INT	10	13-	PER Roll 13-
15	EGO	14	12-	ECV: 5
20	PRE	12	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
16	COM	4	12-	
6	PD	2		Total: 12 PD (6 rPD)
6	ED	3		Total: 12 ED (6 rED)
4	SPD	10		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
10	REC	6		
46	END	8		
46	STUN	14		Total Characteristics Cost: 157

Movement: Running: 6"/12"

Cost Powers END

5	<i>Follow-Through Attack:</i> Trigger (when Rotwell kills an opponent in battle; +¼) for up to HKA 3d6; OIF (sword of opportunity; -½), Requires A Sword Tricks Roll (-½) 1			
3	<i>Force Back:</i> see page 105 2			
	<i>Martial Arts:</i> <i>Sword Tricks</i>			
	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Counterstrike	+2	+2	Weapon +2 DC, Must Follow Parry
4	Disarm	-1	+1	Disarm, 28 STR to Disarm roll
4	Disengage	+0	+0	33 STR to escape Bind
5	Lunge	+1	-2	Weapon +4 DC
4	Parry	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Trap	+1	+0	Bind, 28 STR

Perks

2	Fringe Benefit: Former Member Of Whore's Bastards
7	Fringe Benefit: Chief Magistrate Of Lowtown
2	Reputation: deadly swordsman (among those in Elweir) 11-, +2/+2d6

Talents

9	Ambidexterity (no Off Hand penalty)
10	Combat Luck (6 PD/6 ED)
11	Evasive (see page 109)
5	Hard To Hit (see page 109)

Skills

24	+3 with All Combat
3	Targeting Skill Levels: +2 vs. Hit Location modifiers with Rapier
6	Targeting Skill Levels: +2 vs. Hit Location modifiers with All Attacks
7	+2 DCV

3	Bureaucracy 13-
7	CK: Lowtown 15-
3	CK: Elweir 13-
7	Concealment 14-
3	Conversation 13-
7	Deduction 14-
11	Fast Draw (Common Melee Weapons) 15-
7	Interrogation 14-
5	KS: Elweirnian Law 14-
10	Navigation (Urban) 15-
5	PS: Chief Magistrate 14-
3	Shadowing 13-
3	Stealth 13-
11	Streetwise 15-
15	Sword Tricks 16-
3	Survival (Urban) 13-
3	Tactics 13-
5	WF: Common Melee Weapons, Common Missile Weapons, Thrown Sword

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 230

Total Cost: 387

75+ Disadvantages

20	Enraged: when authority questioned or challenged, go 11-, recover 8- (Uncommon)
20	Hunted: Magistrate Capra Lustshine 14- (Mo Pow, NCI, Watching)
20	Psychological Limitation: Utterly Ruthless (Common, Total)
15	Social Limitation: Subject To Orders (Frequently, Major)
237	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 387

Equipment: Rapier and main gauche, 30 coin (on his person)

Background/History: Born on Whore Street in Lowtown, Malik Rotwell grew up running with the Whore's Bastards, the gang which controls that street. Though far more gifted than his fellow gang members, he chose not to make a bid for leadership of the gang, nor to go on to more ambitious criminal endeavors. Instead he joined the city guard — where crime really does pay.

He stole the coin he needed to buy a post in the city guard from his mother as she lay passed out in her bed, her last client for the night just departed, and he never looked back. He quickly climbed the ranks until he was promoted to magistrate. He bided his time for a year or two, making sure Capra Lustshine, the Chief Magistrate of Gold's Reside and the man who unofficially chose the Chief Magistrates of the other neighborhoods, knew his face. Once he had some coin, he had the Chief Magistrate of Lowtown murdered, made a gift to Lustshine, and leapfrogged past several more experienced magistrates to the head of the city guard in Lowtown.

Though many nursed an abiding bitterness, no one said a word. Rotwell had a reputation for a quick temper, a quicker sword, and an appalling disregard for life. Since that day several years ago, he has squeezed Lowtown for every coin it has — and in the process he has made many, many enemies. But few are willing to challenge him... for now.

Personality/Motivation: Growing up, Rotwell wanted nothing more than wealth, and the respect that came with coin. He has since achieved both — if you count being one of the most feared men in Elweir as being respected — and now he only wants to hold onto it. He is far from content and is constantly on guard against a young magistrate taking the same path to power he did. Rumor claims he's had several magistrates killed because he thought them too ambitious — this rumor is true, though he prefers to have such rivals re-assigned to other neighborhoods.

Rotwell brooks no challenges to his authority, and meets one harshly, violently, and cruelly. This is why the Duke's Men drive him into such a rage. For the time being they're untouchable, and Rotwell longs for the day when he may kill any or all of them.

Despite his love of wealth, Rotwell has no desire to leave his current post. He has little regard for status or the appearance of the wealthy, and he knows he can make more coin in Lowtown than as Chief Magistrate of Gold's Reside.

Quote: "Silence! Enough of this farce. I have heard enough of your story to render my judgment... twenty coin or the headsman's sword."

Powers/Tactics: Magistrate Rotwell is a skilled swordsman — the most skilled among the city guard, and possibly the most skilled in Lowtown. If an apprehended criminal challenges or insults him, he deals with the matter personally. First, he asks the crowd if they heard the threat or insult. When they nod their heads — they all know what's coming — he orders the guardsmen to arm the man. Once the criminal has picked up the weapon, Magistrate Rotwell taunts him, stringing the duel along until he grows bored. Then he kills his opponent in the most gruesome way possible — making sure with his *Sword Tricks* Skill to flick a spray of blood into the crowd on the killing stroke. In this way, Rotwell reminds his men who's the most deadly among their number. In general, though, Rotwell leads his men from behind when chasing criminals or the like — he knows many men want him dead and is ever-wary of assassins.

Campaign Use: Malik Rotwell should be a recurring nemesis for the PCs, especially if they spend any time in Lowtown. They should quickly get to the point where they're trembling with rage whenever he demands a bribe from them. Imperious and arrogant, he never hides the fact that he thinks — he *knows* — that he's better than anyone brought before him.

For PCs inhabiting Lowtown, Magistrate Rotwell is the worst Hunter imaginable, and he doesn't stop until he's drawn the object of his ire out and killed him in a duel. Rotwell always makes such deaths a public spectacle. The sole advantage to having Rotwell as a Hunter is that he can be bought off with enough coin — of course, he'll then spread word far and wide that the PC was so scared of him, he paid Rotwell a



large sum of coin for his safety.

To increase the threat Rotwell poses to the PCs, give him a Contact with the Silver-Crossed Palms, or otherwise increase his influence in the city. While he controls Lowtown with an iron fist, his influence is limited to that neighborhood — the magistrates in other neighborhoods detest him. As a combatant, Rotwell should always be a better swordsman than any single PC. To keep him there, give him *Lightning Reflexes*, more *Combat Skill Levels*, and more *Sword Tricks*. If he's already too tough, tone down his *Characteristics* and *Skills* a bit.

Appearance: Malik Rotwell is a tall man who always wears an imperious and arrogant expression — an obvious villain. He has thick black hair that hangs to his shoulders, an aquiline nose, and a mustache that curls up at the tips. He wears a tight-fitting black leather vest, and carries a rapier and main gauche on his belt.

SYLARIN FARSEER PLOT SEEDS

Sylarin begins to have strange visions. His mother reminds him that the name Farseer came from a long line of prophets in the family. He begins to wonder if maybe his visions aren't premonitions after all, because as he's walking up the street, he sees a group of people from them — namely, the PCs. He stops them and tells them he sees a terrible danger in their future — but can they trust a man reputed to be a thief?

Sylarin enlists the aid of the PCs in a criminal endeavor — a noble of the Fifty is picking up a finely-wrought tiara with a large opal at the center from Workman's End, and Sylarin plans to sneak into the workshop, exchange the opal with a fake, and then sneak out with the real one. He's sure no one will notice, but wants the PCs to stand watch in Uphill West. Do they take him up on the offer? And when everything goes wrong, do they cut and run, or do they try to help their employer?

If the PCs strike up a friendship with Sylarin over the course of their adventures, try this plot: word travels like lightning from tavern to tavern: Rotwell has caught Syl in some thieving. Crowds are gathering. Rotwell is musing aloud about the punishment, wondering if he should take half of Syl's right hand this time. Do the PCs sit idly by, or do they try to save their friend?

SYLARIN FARSEER

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
13	STR	5	12-	Lift 150 kg; 2½d6 [1]
18	DEX	30	13-	OCV: 6/DCV: 6
10	CON	4	11-	
10	BODY	4	11-	
15	INT	7	12-	PER Roll 12-
8	EGO	0	11-	ECV: 3
14	PRE	6	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
10	COM	1	11-	
4	PD	1		Total: 7 PD (3 rPD)
4	ED	2		Total: 7 ED (3 rED)
3	SPD	2		Phases: 4, 8, 12
6	REC	2		
30	END	5		
30	STUN	8		
Total Characteristics Cost: 77				

Movement: Running: 7"/14"

Cost Powers **END**

2 *Fast On His Feet:* Running +1" (7" total)

Perks

2 Fringe Benefit: Member Of The Cutpurse Union

6 Contact: Starveling Guild 11-

Talents

5 Combat Luck (3 PD/3 ED)

Skills

6 +2 with Strike, Block, and Dodge

6 Hurried Skill Levels: +2 versus Time modifiers with all DEX Skills

2 Conditional Skill Levels: +1 versus Poor Conditions modifiers with Concealment, Shadowing, and Sleight Of Hand

3 Hurried Skill Levels: +2 versus Time modifiers with Concealment

3 Breakfall 13-

3 Bribery 12-

3 Climbing 13-

3 Concealment 12-

3 Deduction 12-

1 AK: Overhead Road 8-

1 AK: Underfoot Path 8-

3 CK: Lowtown 12-

2 Language: Lowtown Cant

3 Lockpick 13-

2 Navigation (Urban) 12-

3 Shadowing 12-

7 Sleight Of Hand 14-

3 Stealth 13-

1 WF: Knife

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 73

Total Cost: 150

75+ Disadvantages

- 5 Distinctive Feature: Maimed Hand (Easily Concealed; Noticed And Recognizable)
- 20 DNPC: Dilly Farseer (his aged mother) 11- (Incompetent)
- 10 Hunted: Magistrate Malik Rotwell 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Watching)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Fear Of Rotwell (And To Lesser Extent The City Guard) (Common, Strong)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Compulsive Worrier (Common, Strong)
- 10 Reputation: Thief Of Lowtown 11-

Total Disadvantage Points: 150

Equipment: Knife, lockpicks and other thieving tools, 10 coin

Background/History: Sylarin's mother used to claim her son had been a thief since when he was born and "he stole her heart." Syl's later thefts proved considerably more lucrative.

He first became famous among Lowtown's ne'er-do-wells when he stole the silver spur from Lord Sandover Reed's left foot as the Royal Exchequer rode beside the Prince in the Oron's March parade. He only increased his fame the following year when he returned the spur just before Lord Reed entered Lowtown — for several miles, the man rode with two spurs on his left foot.

His reputation established, he found himself getting involved with many criminal groups, and after a series of low risk burglaries he had a tidy sum of coin stashed away. But the thefts had been small affairs and Syl found his reputation waning. Syl loved his reputation almost as much as loved coin, and set to performing another legendary theft. Still young and far too reckless, he chose Magistrate Rotwell as his target. Rotwell caught him as he sought to slip the magistrate's main gauche from his belt. To make matters worse, Syl had not enough coin on his person to make the bribe, and Rotwell was feeling vengeful.

Rotwell took what coin Syl had and deemed it half of a bribe — which meant, the magistrate continued with an evil smile twisting his lips, Syl owed half of a hand as his punishment for thievery. There in the middle of the street, with a large crowd having gathered to see what would happen, Rotwell took one of his men's swords and sawed off half of Syl's hand, letting the bottom two fingers and a portion of his palm fall into the mud.

After that day, Syl stopped being so reckless... but he thinks he's a better thief now. Now he knows the consequences of failure and plans never to fail again. He especially won't fail when he gets his revenge on Rotwell....

Personality/Motivation: When Syl was younger, he stole for the thrill of it and the notoriety it brought among his fellow residents of Lowtown. After Magistrate Rotwell maimed him, he lost his taste for the thrill. Now he's a cool and calm professional. His preference is burglary, but he grew up a pickpocket and hasn't lost the touch (despite what happened with Rotwell — having given

the matter some thought, Syl feels Rotwell has some unnatural luck or maybe eyes in the back of his head). He chooses targets that have coin on hand — he has no love for fences since the Silver-Crossed Palms extorted some coin from him after a theft (he knows it was the fence who told them who committed the burglary).

In any conversation not concerning thievery, Syl's all carefree smiles and devil-may-care grins — quick with a joke or a laugh — and never rude or insulting.

As for his revenge on Rotwell — he hasn't figured it out yet. He's no killer. He wants to take away something important, and only the thing Rotwell seems to hold dear is his position as Chief Magistrate.

Quote: “No! Like this: ‘One Serpentine. Two Serpentine. Three Serpentine.’ Don’t run the words together, or the timing will be off and you’ll go in there like a damned fool when the guard’s changing and not after they’re gone!”

Powers/Tactics: Sylarin Farseer is a thief, not a warrior, and doesn't fight unless he has to. He's skilled with a knife — but not that skilled — and if it's obvious whomever he's facing is both skilled with a weapon and quick on his feet, Syl surrenders with a sheepish smile, a rueful shrug, and a look that says, “OK, you win.” He's perfectly willing to pay a bribe or perform a service that's within reason in return for his freedom. Syl grew up on the streets of Lowtown; he knows how this stuff works.

His maimed hand doesn't interfere with his daily life (nor his thievery for that matter), but it is a well-known feature.

Campaign Use: Sylarin Farseer serves two purposes. First, he's meant to be an example thief your players can refer to when making up their own thieves to terrorize Elweir's wealthy, or one of your players can simply play as-is. Second, he's a thief you can use to get the PCs involved in a criminal endeavor — whether as victims, Syl's hired helpers, or his partners. He's professional about his work, but at the same time sociable outside of it, so the PCs should have little problem getting along with him.

Syl only Hunts people if they're known to have a sizeable amount of coin. He'll attempt to find out what he can about them, working to unearth information as subtly as possible and likely taking a trip to the Kneel to visit the Beggar King and hire him



and his starvelings to discover something useful. He attempts to learn the target's schedule, then he goes in after the coin at the most opportune moment.

Syl should work pretty well just as he is in most campaigns. To strengthen or weaken him, improve or reduce his Skill Rolls and Characteristics until he fits into your campaign.

Appearance: Sylarin Farseer is a short, slender man with raggedly cut hair. His face is homely, but he has a friendly smile and laughing brown eyes. He wears a hooded jerkin and a long knife hangs from his belt. The bottom two fingers of his left hand, as well as a part of his palm, are missing and the flesh is badly scarred. He tends to keep the hand out of sight — not so much to spare the other person, but to spare himself from seeing the reminder of Magistrate Rotwell's justice.

GETAB YREN PLOT SEEDS

Getab Yren has chosen a family of the Fifty to bring low, and he's hired the PCs to dig up some dirt on it... but after they've done that, he continues to have tasks for them, until finally the PCs are embroiled in a power struggle to bring down a member of the nobility. How long will it be before they realize their employer isn't human?

A man bursts into the tavern the PCs are drinking in and cries that he's seen a walking snake. Will the PCs turn away in disgust? Or will they investigate? And if they do, what will they find? The man has pointed out Getab Yren's home in the Canals — is a strange being practicing sorcery in Elweir?

A friend or relative of the PCs has recently died, and the PC is desperate to speak to the deceased about some matter. Will they approach the necromancer of the Canals? And if so, what task will Getab Yren ask in return for performing a summoning?

GETAB YREN

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
8	STR	0	11-	Lift 75 kg; 1½d6 [1]
15	DEX	21	12-	OCV: 5/DCV: 5
10	CON	4	11-	
10	BODY	4	11-	
20	INT	12	13-	PER Roll 13-
23	EGO	36	14-	ECV: 8
20	PRE	12	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
10	COM	1	11-	
4	PD	2		Total: 10 PD (6 rPD)
4	ED	2		Total: 10 ED (6 rED)
3	SPD	5		Phases: 4, 8, 12
6	REC	4		
40	END	10		
40	STUN	21		Total Characteristics Cost: 134

Movement: Running: 6"/12

Cost Powers END

72	<i>Silyssen Shape-Changer:</i> Shape Shift (Sight, Hearing, and Touch Groups, any humanoid shape), Imitation, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½)	0
34	<i>Necromancy:</i> Summon 400-point Soul Of The Dead, Expanded Class (any soul; +½); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Necromancy Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	12
26	<i>Necromancy:</i> Multipower, 90-point reserve; all slots Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Necromancy Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	
5m	1) <i>Chill Of The Grave:</i> Energy Blast 9d6, NND (defense is Mental Defense or the <i>Fearless</i> Talent; +1); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Necromancy Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	9
4m	2) <i>Possess The Living:</i> Mind Control 14d6, Telepathic (+¼); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Necromancy Roll (-½), Set Effect (controls physical actions only, not beliefs or emotions; -½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	9
1m	3) <i>Embodied Spirit:</i> Telekinesis (10 STR), Fine Manipulation; Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Necromancy Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	9
5m	4) <i>Shapes And Voices Of The Dead:</i> Sight and Hearing Group Images, -10 to PER Rolls, Increased Size (16" radius; +1); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Necromancy Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	9

2u	5) <i>The Vision Of The Dead:</i> Clairsentience (Sight and Hearing Groups), 64x Range (9,600", or about 12 miles); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Necromancy Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	6
25	<i>Necromancy:</i> Endurance Reserve (200 END) plus Endurance Reserve (30 REC); Concentration (0 DCV throughout Recovery process, see page 114; -1), Limited Recovery (-2), Slow Recovery (1 Hour; -2)	0
13	<i>Silyssen Mind:</i> Mental Defense (18 points total)	0
2	<i>Silyssen Lifespan:</i> Life Support: Longevity: ages at one-quarter normal rate	0

Talents

22	<i>Silyssen Tongue:</i> Universal Translator 15-	
10	Combat Luck (6 PD/6 ED)	

Skills

12	Hurried Skill Levels: +8 versus Time modifiers for <i>Necromancy</i> Skill	
9	+3 with <i>Necromancy</i> Multipower	
10	+3 DCV	
3	Acting 13-	
3	Concealment 13-	
11	Cryptography 15-	
11	Deduction 15-	
11	Disguise 15-	
3	Interrogation 13-	
9	KS: Necromancy 16-	
7	KS: History 15-	
5	KS: Legends And Lore Of Il-Ryveras 14-	
3	<i>Silyssen Tongue:</i> Mimicry 13-	
31	Necromancy 21-	
3	Oratory 13-	

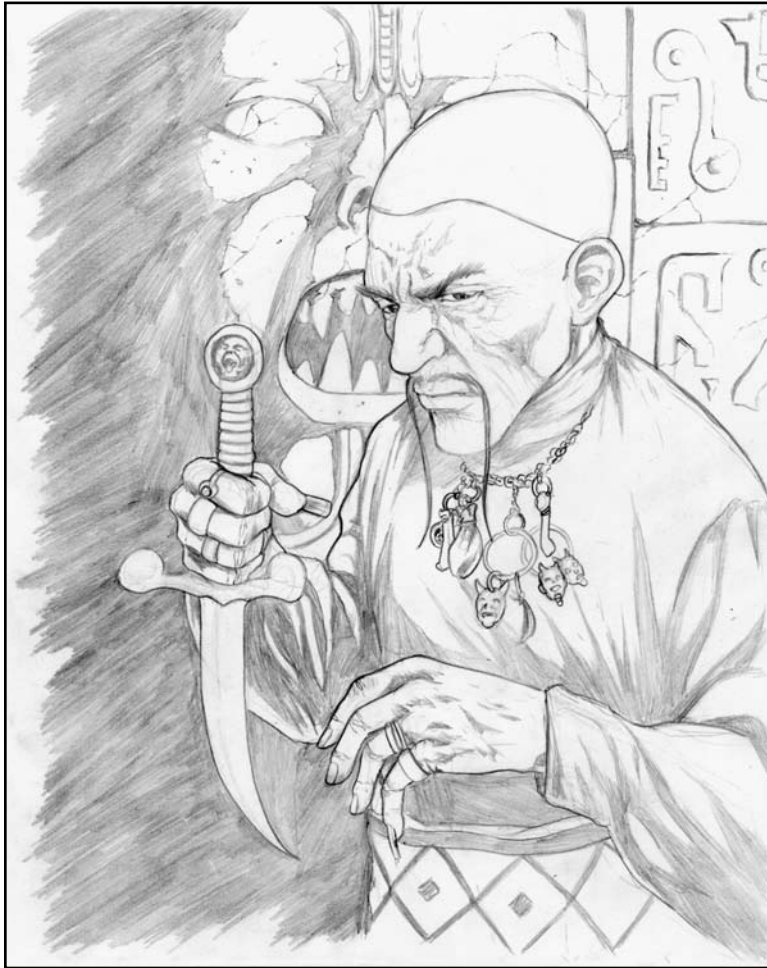
Total Powers & Skills Cost: 352

Total Cost: 486

75+ Disadvantages

10	Accidental Change: when Getab Yren goes Berserk he changes back into Silyssen form 11- (Uncommon)	
15	Distinctive Features: true form is inhuman and serpentine (Easily Concealed [Shape Shift]; Causes Extreme Reaction [fear])	
25	Enraged: Berserk when thwarted (Uncommon), go 8-, recover 8-	
25	Psychological Limitation: From A Race Set On Conquering The World (Very Common, Total)	
15	Social Limitation: Inhuman (Occasionally; Severe [hunted down and killed])	
20	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN and BODY from Cold Attacks (Uncommon)	
301	Experience Points	

Total Disadvantage Points: 486



Background/History: From out of the ruins of the Turakian Age crawled — and in this case, slithered — many races, and though few of those strange races survived the cataclysms of those times, the Silyssen did. Pulled from the muck by the dreams of their deity, the Serpent Who Forever Sleeps, the Silyssen came into the world born to evil. Predatory and sly, the Silyssen have an instinctual urge to infiltrate the races around them and conquer them. They can take the shape of any humanoid race and mimic its tongue after hearing it. And now one of those evil serpent-men has come to Elweir.

Getab Yren is both necromancer and Silyssen, and he begins to plan his conquest of the city. Once he has subverted its structures and come to rule — if not in name, then in truth — others of his inhuman race shall join him. Like Zothedris before it, Elweir will become the plaything of the Silyssen, just one more step down the path to conquering the world.

Getab Yren is the cause of the Quiet Smoke, the murderer who haunted Elweir's smoke shops. The Quiet Smoke is a powerful Possessor, a soul of the dead that can pass into a person's body and take over their soul. In addition to taking control, this spirit also absorbs the knowledge and memories of those victims. Getab Yren called it out from the Desolate Plain and set it to the task of gathering knowledge about the city's inner workings. To please the spirit, a soul who wished harm to those stilling living, Getab Yren allowed it to kill those it possessed. And as for why the smoke shops — what better place to find people enervated by narcotics, their souls lying open to visitations from the other-worldly?

Now the killings have stopped, and Getab Yren has a firm understanding of Elweir and its people. He has decided the first step is to infiltrate the Fifty, and so he must bring one of the families low. Like all true sorcerers,

Getab Yren has no desire to dirty his hands with such dealings — he must find some agents. Cunning men, but not too cunning, for he must keep his true identity a secret. Men with a wide variety of skills between them and a taste for coin. Rootless men with few entanglements.

Men very much like your PCs....

Personality/Motivation: Getab Yren is evil to the core. As a member of the Silyssen, he has a soul-deep urge to infiltrate societies of other races and bring them under his yoke. He is cold-blooded and ruthless, but strangely alien and removed. This often serves to disguise his arrogance, people confusing his aloofness for abstraction and an involvement in arcane matters. The only time he shows emotions other than a detached disdain for worldly matters is when he is thwarted. When that happens he flies into a rage — and occasionally he loses control of his shape, reverting to his serpentine form.

Furthermore, much like how he shapes his body to those around him, he shapes his personality to suit his role. This is an unconscious action — a part of his nature to lurk among an unsuspecting populace and disguise himself as one of them

Quote: “Yesss... A task. I have one for you... Yessss. Of course. You will be paid very well...”

Powers/Tactics: Having had centuries to study the dark sorcery of binding the dead, Getab Yren is a necromancer of the first water. Despite his power, his first instinct is to escape if attacked. He uses Shapes And Voices Of The Dead to cause the souls gathered to take on hellish shape and make cacophonous sounds, and while his attackers deal with the confusion and attempt to recover their wits, he flees. Once out of sight, he uses his Shape Shifting to assume a different form. If pressed to fight, he often restrains his magic, intentionally keeping the Active Points low, so he never need risk accruing favors. Getab Yren does not enjoy doing tasks for others — he is a ruler born and not one to serve gladly the pitiful needs of the dead. But if he feels his life is in danger, he'll pull out all the stops.

Getab Yren's Endurance Reserve only recovers when he's eaten the flesh of a *zegré* fruit. Similar in appearance to a pomegranate but with blackish flesh, the fruit induces strange hallucinations in the eater that leave him insensible for several hours. Getab Yren purchases the fruit from a merchant in Gibberish; among poisoners the distillate of the fruit is an often used as an ingredient in poisons that induce convulsions.

Campaign Use: Getab Yren is a major adversary for the PCs. His necromantic power alone is enough to make him a threat to be reckoned with — add to that his Silyssen heritage and he only becomes more dangerous. Ideally, the PCs don't know what they're dealing with until they're nearing the end of a series of encounters with necromancer. Then you can spring on them that he is not only a necromancer of fell power, but a serpent-man too.

Getab Yren is only likely to Hunt the PCs if he feels they can further his ambitions. If that's the case, he sends spirits to spy on them, followed by the Quiet Smoke to steal their secrets.

To decrease Yren's power, first change the slots on his Multipower to fixed slots, then begin to remove his Combat Luck and DCV Levels. To increase his power, add more slots to his Multipower and increase the number of 400-point Souls Of The Dead he can Summon to 2, or even 4.

Appearance: In his human form, Getab Yren appears looks like a tall, saturnine man with sallow skin and sunken eyes. He wears scarlet robes and a silver skullcap. He has a thin black mustache, the ends of which hang down to his chest. His wrists and neck are circled by silver chains hung with charms — twists of braided hair, carved demon faces, small bags holding crushed powders, finger bones, and the like. In his true form, he's a serpent-man with purplish-green scaly skin and a flaring, cobra-like hood around his head. His fangs are only vestigial, but he often bares them when he's enraged, and his hands have six fingers.

RANTEREN EVERDUSK

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
8	STR	0	11-	Lift 75 kg; 1½d6 [1]
12	DEX	12	11-	OCV: 4/DCV: 4
10	CON	4	11-	
10	BODY	4	11-	
18	INT	10	13-	PER Roll 13-
18	EGO	20	13-	ECV: 6
15	PRE	7	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
8	COM	0	11-	
4	PD	2		Total: 4 PD (0 rPD)
4	ED	2		Total: 4 ED (0 rED)
2	SPD	0		Phases: 6, 12
4	REC	0		
20	END	0		
20	STUN	1		Total Characteristics Cost: 62

Movement: Running: 6"/12"

Cost	Powers	END
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17	<i>Divine Magic:</i> Summon 200-point Divine Servant, Expanded Class (any divine servant; +½); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Divine Magic Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	6
17	<i>Divine Magic:</i> Multipower, 60-point reserve; all slots Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Divine Magic Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	
2u	1) <i>The Darkness Of Enodia:</i> Sight Group Flash 6d6, BOECV (Mental Defense applies; +1); Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Divine Magic Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	6
1u	2) <i>The Kiss Of Kypris:</i> Mind Control 9d6, Telepathic (+¼); Set Effect (only to inflict love or hate; -½), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Divine Magic Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	6
1u	3) <i>The Rage Of Anyu:</i> Succor STR and CON 3d6, two Characteristics simultaneously (+½), Area Of Effect (3" Radius; +1), Ranged (+½) (45 Active Points); Side Effect (subject suffers from Enraged: all the time (Berserk), go 11-, recover 8- until effect ends; -1), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Requires A Divine Magic Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	5
1u	4) <i>The Teller Of Secrets:</i> Telepathy 12d6; Only To Learn A Target's Deepest, Darkest Secret (-½), Gestures (throughout casting; -½), Incantations (throughout casting; -½), Mandatory Effect (EGO +20 required; -½), Requires A Divine Magic Roll (-½), Extra Time (5 Minutes; -1)	6
13	<i>Divine Magic:</i> Endurance Reserve (100 END) plus Endurance Reserve (20 REC); Concentration (0 DCV throughout Recovery process, see page 114; -1), Limited Recovery (-2), Slow Recovery (1 Hour; -2)	0

Skills

9	Hurried Skill Levels: +6 versus Time modifiers with <i>Divine Magic</i> Skill
2	CK: Lowtown 11-
11	Divine Magic 15-
3	KS: Divine Magic 13-
3	KS: Religion Of The Old Gods 13-
1	Literacy (Valdorian)
5	Oratory 13-
2	WF: Common Melee Weapons

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 88

Total Cost: 150

75+ Disadvantages

15	Hunted: The Gods' Regents 11- (Mo Pow, NCI, Watching)
20	Psychological Limitation: Paranoid (Very Common, Strong)
10	Reputation: crazy priest who lives at the Crossroads 14- (small group, only to those in Lowtown)
20	Social Limitation: Dirty Secret (he's a sorcerer-priest and member of secret cult) (Frequently, Severe)
10	Unluck 2d6

Total Disadvantage Points: 150

Equipment: Staff

Background/History: Born in Valdoria, Ranteren Everdusk only came to the city two years ago. His coming was quiet and strange — he made his way to the shrine of Enodia, picked up a coin that had fallen on a flagstone, and then used it to pay the rent on a small home across the way. Since then he has tended to the shrine, and most in the area know him as the priest who spends a considerable amount of time staring out his window.

Ranteren came to Elweir for two reasons. First, to discharge a debt to the divine servants, which he did when picked up the coin. Second, to spy on the proceedings for the Gods' Regents, an illegal Valdorian cult of sorcerer-priests. The cult is preparing to make a bid for power in Valdoria and doesn't want any unexpected happenings on the Frontier to disrupt that. Ranteren is supposed to have infiltrated a temple, preferably the one in the Gold's Reside, and attempted to get near the Divine Advisor, Yrvenus Hollow.

Instead, Ranteren decided to leave the Gods' Regents. He has little interest in taking over the priesthood in Valdoria. The one unique thing about the members of the cult, at least as far as sorcerer-priests are concerned, is that they have absolute faith in the divine and the divine's plan for mankind to take their place (or so the cult believes). Ranteren Everdusk has decided the gods were right to turn their backs on the wickedness of mankind — if he could do the same, he would. But having decided to leave the cult, he doesn't know what to do next.

He's certain the Gods' Regents have agents combing the city for him (if they haven't already

RANTEREN EVERDUSK PLOT SEEDS

A booming sound comes from the skies and shakes the building on the Crossroads. Everyone looks up to see the image of Pythos descending from the heavens and calling out for the crazy priest who lives there. Will the PCs let this divine servant come into Lowtown and kill Ranteren, whom many have come to think of as a friend... or will they come to the priest's aid?

The PCs see Ranteren kneeling in front of the statue of Enodia and holding his face in his hands. A divine servant has called in a favor and set Ranteren some impossible task. Will the PCs offer to help? Will they stay true to their word when they discover Ranteren must assassinate an important person?

A Sacred Purge is raging through Lowtown and only a priest stands a chance of stopping it... will the PCs be able to drag Ranteren from his room in time to prevent the whole neighborhood from going up in a riot?

located him). He's on constant guard for them, in fact, staring out his widow his every idle moment and forever expecting a powerful servant of the divine to come thundering out of the heavens, bellowing his name.

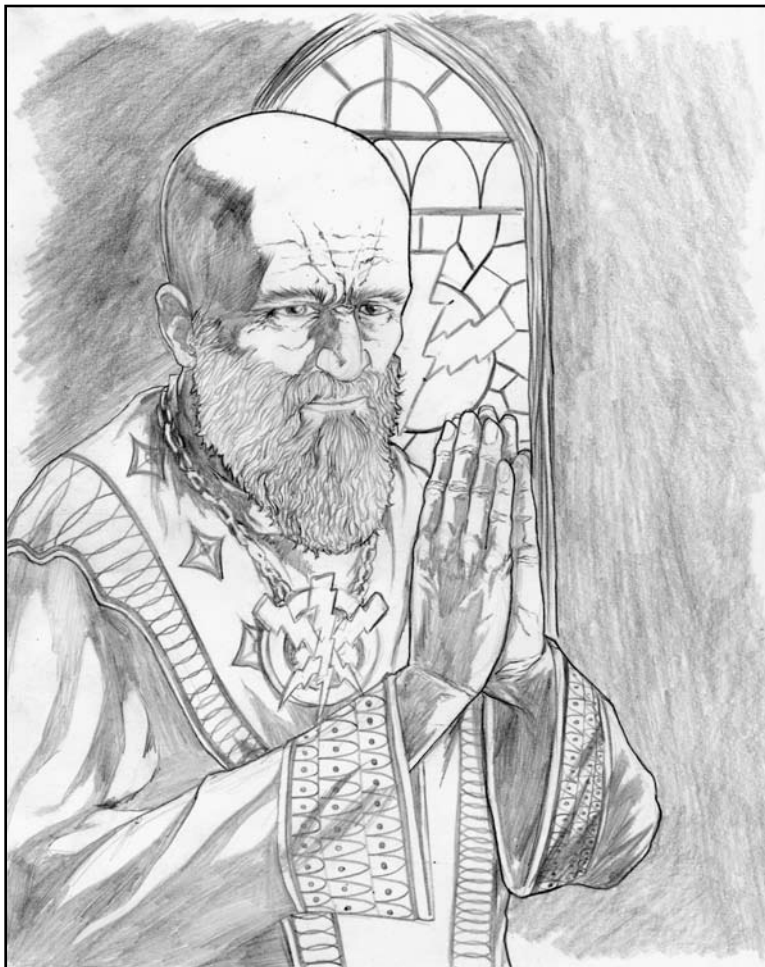
He knows he needs to move on from the shrine, but isn't sure what direction to move on in. What he needs is some good advice, maybe from the PCs....

Personality/Motivation: Ranteren is paranoid in the extreme. Though the cult does have other agents in the city, none of them realize Ranteren has left their ranks. They merely think he's inexperienced with politicking (which he is) and unfamiliar with religion in Elweir. They believe he thinks that, since he has taken up the role as caretaker of the shrine in Lowtown, the Divine Advisor will be impressed with his devotion and approach him. That's what would happen in Valdoria (not that a shrine there would ever be unintended, but still...). While his paranoia is his most prominent trait, he's also world-weary and becoming more cynical by the day.

Quote: "Who sent you? Why are you here?"

Powers/Tactics: Ranteren Everdusk has never been in a fight, not even a tavern brawl. If one were to break out near or around him, he would flee. He dislikes using his sorcery — once upon a time, he was a devoted servant of the gods, and each time he haggles with a divine servant he remembers his lost faith.

Campaign Use: Ranteren Everdusk is an example of a starting sorcerer you can use as an illustration for your players or as one of their characters. As an NPC in your campaign, you can use him to introduce some of the political goings-on in Valdoria beyond the ones that impact Elweir directly. Eventually agents for the Gods' Regents contact Ranteren, and either provide him some direction or give him another task. At that point, Ranteren has to deal with the situation rather than sit in his room and worry. He might come looking for some help of the bodyguarding variety. Or perhaps he decides to "rejoin" the Gods' Regents and they send him out of Elweir about some different task — and since no one is safe traveling the roads alone, he could certainly use some guards.



Ranteren only Hunts people if he thinks they're members of the Gods' Regents, and he'll only Watch them. He's neither a fierce man nor a vengeful one.

Ranteren is already fairly weak, though you could always remove some of his spells or decrease the power of his magical abilities. To increase his power, give him some abilities that help him stay alive in combat: DCV Levels and Combat Luck are both good choices. Then give him some slots to his *Divine Magic* Multipower to expand his sorcery, or provide him with flexible slots instead of fixed.

Appearance: Ranteren Everdusk is a bald man with a thick grey beard. His bone-thin body often seems lost in the white robes he wears. His expression is often nervous and anxious, his bloodshot brown eyes darting from face to face suspiciously. Around his neck he wears a thick chain hung with a large medallion of three crossed thunderbolts. Scratched on the back of this symbol of Pythos is a sigil marking his membership in the Gods' Regents.

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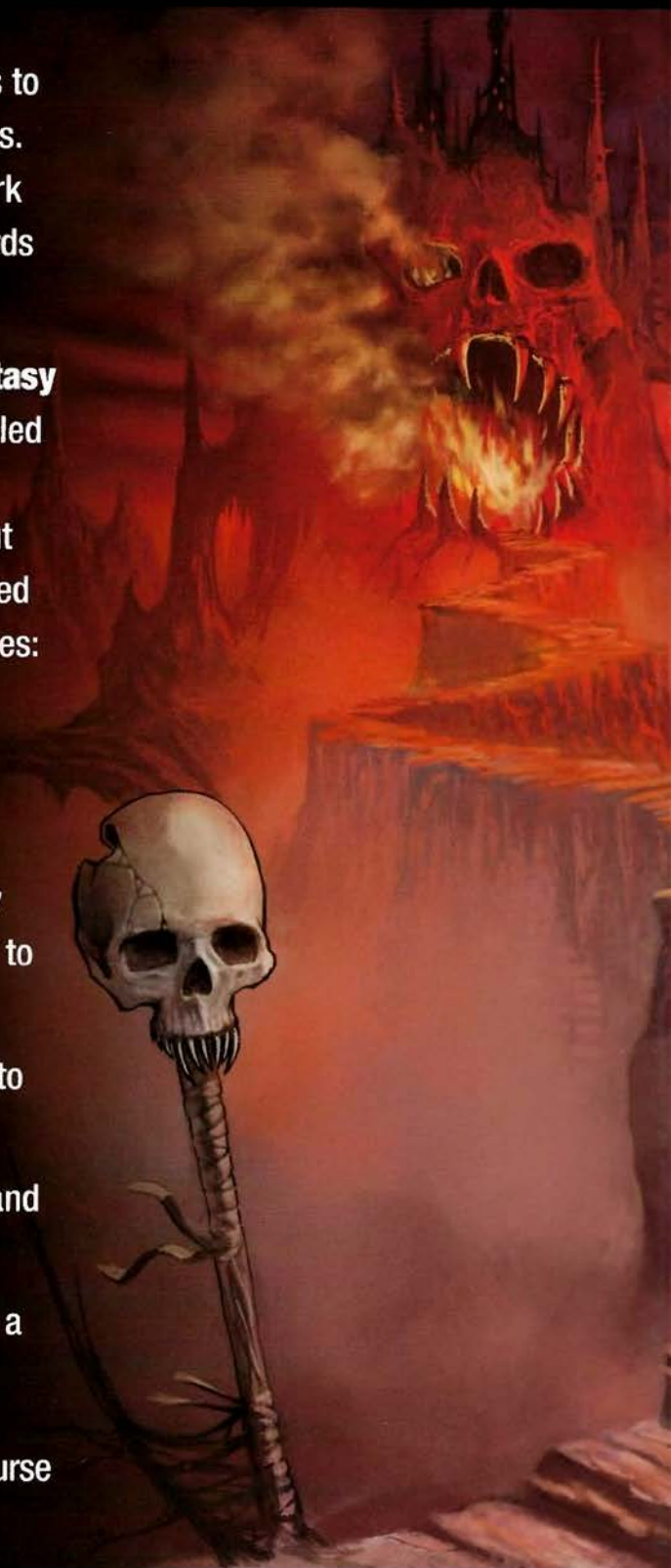
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