

MIDNIGHT

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The Legacy of Erenland

Destiny of Shadow

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Introduction

A hunter's moon rises through a cloudless sky, casting its pale light through the forest canopy. At the base of a tall oak in a secluded clearing, a small spring bubbles out of the earth, its waters glistening in the moonlight. Kneeling upon the damp ground as if in reverence is a young man, his arms bared and raised above the water. Turning to the darkness beneath the trees, the man quietly states, "I am ready." Out of the darkness step three men, weathered and scarred with age, their dark cloaks concealing forbidden weapons. They surround the young man, their presence both protective and threatening.

As the moon nears its zenith, the oldest of the warriors speaks. "Doran, on this night, what will you pledge to us?"

"I pledge my life, my very soul," the youth answered.

"And what will you do with this life, upon peril of that soul?"

"To seek the salvation of our people, to find what has been lost, so that the Kingdom may cast off the shackles of he who has enslaved us."

The three men answered in unison, "So it he has pledged." Then, one at a time, they began to intone the chant of their brotherhood. The first: "The enslaver believes we are a defeated people. The enslaver devours the land's richness. He claims that the one we seek is no more, his bloodline banished to the darkness." The next: "We have not lost our will to fight. Our land holds richness still. The lost blood still beats in the veins of our hidden king." The third: "The people but wait for a spark to enflame the land. The land itself keens for vengeance. The enslaver will not stand against our lord returned."

As the final words leave his lips, the old warrior lays a dagger in front of the kneeling youth. The weapon is old, the leather grip stained and cracking, but the blade is still sharp. Etched into the metal is a crest not seen in a hundred years, a mark of kings. Taking it up, the boy, now a man, completes the chant with the fourth stanza: "I am the future of our people. I give myself to the land. I devote myself to the quest for the scion of the bright towers."

And so the red blood of an Erenlander flowed, as it had so many times before, into the waters of the land. But this night it was not spilled by vardatch or arrow, by spell or stone. This night it was given freely, drawn by a blade that had been etched with the mark of the griffon. And the land embraced another defender, doomed to die in a quest for freedom.

Way of the People

Erenlanders are the progeny of two great races that crossed the Pale Ocean and tamed the continent of Eredane: the Dorn and the Sarcosans. Created from the political and racial merger of the two cultures, the Erenlanders played a vital role in building the bonds between Sarcosan noble families and the Dorn clans, allowing the Kingdom of Erenland to tie these disparate people into one nation. The Erenlanders, filled with the promise and energy of a united Erenland, tamed the central plains, turning the grasslands into farms and harvesting their bounty. They facilitated trade between the fey of the mountain and those of the forest, and earned the trust of the fey of the river and the fey of the grasslands. Villages and towns spread across the plains, and a prosperous people filled the High King's coffers. With allegiance not to caste, nor to clan, but to the land, these people became the loyal heart of the Kingdom of Erenland.

Before they were conquered, Erenlanders had a well-deserved reputation as sturdy yeomen, devoted to their families and to the soil that provides their livelihood. They did not suffer as a people from the hardships of weather or of war that the Dorns and dwarves had to face. Yet theirs was a quiet endurance, first exemplified in the creation of their homes on the open plains, then in their persistence and flexibility in the face of hard labor, drought, hunger, and conflict with their fellow residents of central Erenland. And though their lots might have been to lead lives without battle, it was Erenlanders who formed the core of the kingdom's standing army, filling garrisons across the land, patrolling the King's Roads and the rivers, and supporting the Dorn houses in securing the Fortress Wall. In the High King's court, the stolid Erenlanders filled roles as administrators, builders, judges, and tax collectors. They were the foundation, the strength of the kingdom. At the end of the Third Age, as the Dorns fell to fighting among themselves and the Sarcosans succumbed to the Shadow's manipulations, the Erenlanders remained true and tried to hold the kingdom together in its darkest hour.

Yet, after the Last Battle, the center could not hold. Sporadic fighting by the remnants of the High King's armies and militias was crushed within a few years of the dawn of the Last Age. Central Erenland became an armed camp, the Shadow quickly taking control of its two largest cities, securing the banks of the Eren River and the Ardune, and moving tens of thousands of orcs through the plains to Eisn to war against the elves. Unlike the fey in their seas of forest and stone, the Sarcosans on their swift horses, and the Dorns with their vast, trackless wildlands, the Erenlanders had no safe haven, no refuge where they could build a force able to con-

front the Shadow. Their towns and villages were occupied, their roads were patrolled ceaselessly, and brutal examples were made of the families of those who attempted guerilla resistance. The Erenlanders had little choice but to bury their weapons and find some way to survive in the Last Age.

A century of living under the dark god's dominion has not been kind to the Erenlanders. They had scant racial heritage to unify them and no legends to keep alive. They have had no victories against their foe, not even pyrrhic ones like those of the other races, who at least can give their lives to strike meaningful blows against the Shadow. The Erenlanders have only their adaptability, and the land, and the fact that the dark god's creatures see them as nothing more than defeated, cowardly worms. Alone, these seem like meager things on which to base a sense of hope. Yet there is something more. Unbeknownst to most of them, a spark lies in wait to unite all three into a fire that could rage across the dry plains that are the Erenlanders' despair; it could destroy them all, true, but it would consume those who have enslaved them, as well.

Lay of the Land

Central Erenland covers a vast region from the Burning Line in the west to the foothills of the Kaladrums, and stretches from the shores of the Sea of Pelluria to the lake called the Ardune. This land has five distinct geographic regions: the Westlands with the charred remains of Erethor and the still untilled plains of swordgrass; the rich farmlands that line the banks of the Eren River and the Ardune; the rocky coastline of the Pelluria and the great cities of Baden's Bluff and Erenhead; the arid foothills that rise from the eastern bank of the Eren River; and the sheltered valleys nestled beneath the looming and harsh Kaladrun Mountains.

The people of this land were decimated by the invasion, but have since nearly returned to their pre-war numbers. With the demands levied by the Order of Shadow to feed the dark god's armies, most of the rural population has been forced to remain at their farmsteads along the Eren River and the fertile lands just north of the Ardune. The descendants of the pitiable survivors of the sacking of Erenhead remain in that ruinous city, acting as unskilled laborers, practice foes for the battle-hungry orcs, and in some lucky cases, administrators and skilled craftsmen. A few Erenlanders still live relatively



free lives in scattered villages, struggling to survive against all manner of beasts and Fell while being subjected to random and debilitating visits from the Shadow's tithe-takers. Others forego the agricultural life, instead trying to remain unseen by the Shadow altogether; these drive meager herds of boro and ort in the rocky foothills of the Kaladrums, or subsist on what they can hunt or gather. Wide areas of central Erenland remain untouched or abandoned, farmsteads overgrown and villages gutted, empty, or haunted by Fell.

Since the arrival of the first Dorn clans, the region now known as central Erenland has been a crossroads linking the continent's peoples and cultures. First colonizers, then conquerors, and finally merchants and tradesmen used the mighty Eren River to transit from the steamy shores of the Kasmael Sea to the dark blue waters of the Sea of Pelluria and beyond. Elven galleys traveled down the Felthera River, and they built trading outposts along its length with the gnomes who plied the river's edges. Dwarves left their clanholds in the Kaladrums to trade metalware for fresh meat and finely tooled halfling leather. Horsemen and halfling nomads traveled the high plains, driving the herds of boro to markets in Baden's Bluff, Erenhead, and as far south as Alvedara. In this Last Age, central Erenland is still a crossroads, but only those on missions for the Shadow may move freely. Without the rivers and roads of central Erenland, the Shadow could neither retain its dominion over the south nor continue its war against the fey.

Central Erenland is more than just a larder for Izrador's orcs and a highway for his forces, however. It lies between mountain and forest, ocean and freshwater; it draws from the spiritual power of all that surrounds it, and Aryth's inherent magic coalesces here, at the center of all things. The gnomes and halflings have long recognized and revered this power, using it to sustain their villages and master the elements. Before the fall of the Kingdom of Erenland, nature spirits roamed freely, nurturing the land. Those spirits that were not destroyed or tainted by Izrador have been forced to flee into Erethor, ascend into the unforgiving Kaladrums, or burrow into the rich soil of the plains, there to slumber until they are free to wander once more. Were the halflings freed and the gnomes released from the Shadow's service, they might marshal these spirits to their side, gathering them and their power once more.

How to Use this Book

This book expands on the information found in the *MIDNIGHT 2nd Edition* campaign sourcebook. *Destiny and Shadow* is meant as a multi-purpose resource for both players and DMs alike. The information presented here is a comprehensive guide to the Erenlanders, and can be used to add richness to an entire *MIDNIGHT* campaign or to a single Erenlander character. Erenlanders are more than just the forgotten and faceless offspring of the Dorns and Sarcosans; they were the strong base for the Kingdom of Erenland, and while most of them have despaired in the face of their plight, PC Erenlanders are examples of how truly heroic and capable the Erenlanders can be.

Destiny and Shadow is organized into three chapters and an appendix. The first chapter details the history of central Erenland and the melding of the Sarcosans and Dorn into a new race. The second chapter, which takes up the majority of the book, describes the five major geographic regions associated with the Erenlanders. Chapter Three provides new rules for your campaign, and the appendix presents one possible hope manifesting within the plains.

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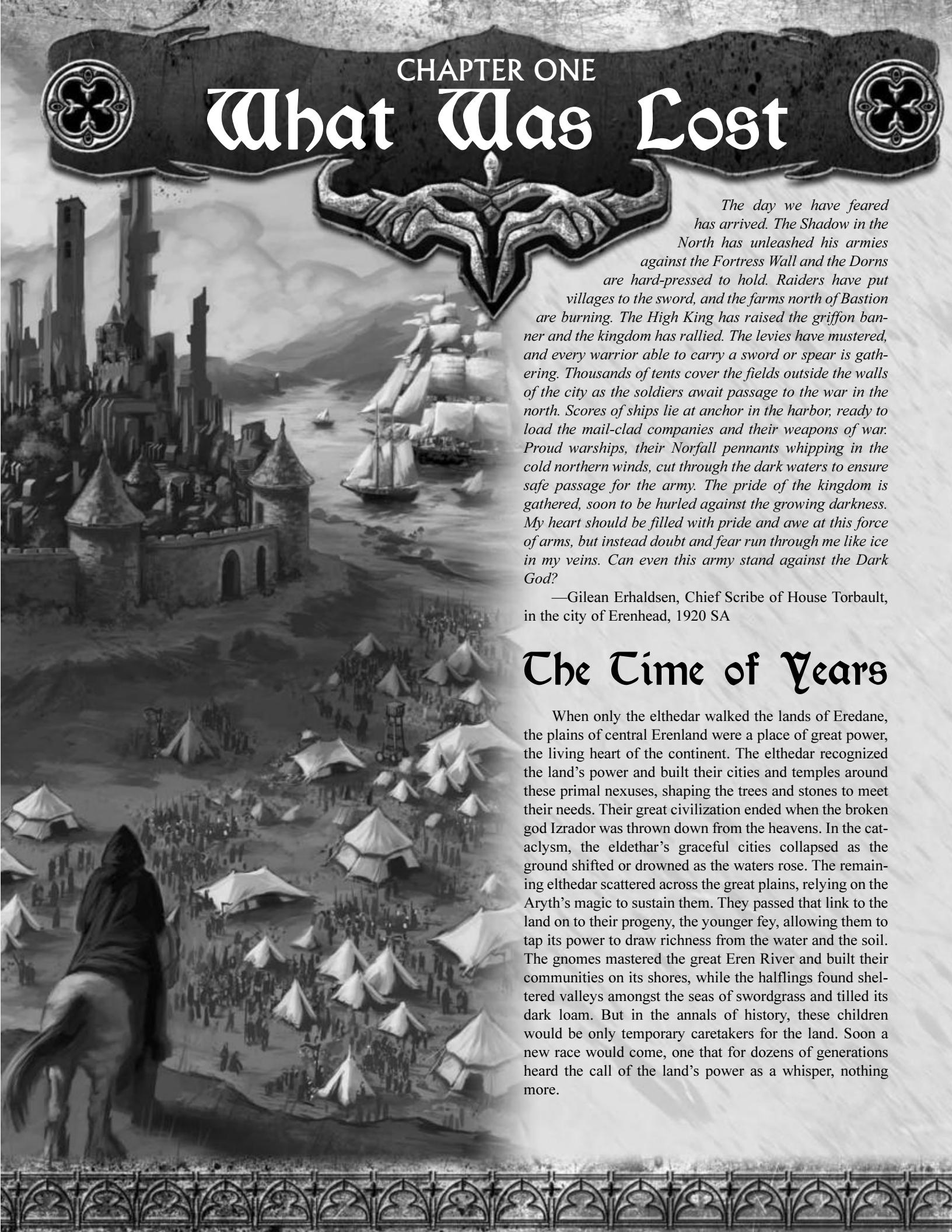
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CHAPTER ONE

What Was Lost



The day we have feared has arrived. The Shadow in the North has unleashed his armies against the Fortress Wall and the Dorns are hard-pressed to hold. Raiders have put villages to the sword, and the farms north of Bastion are burning. The High King has raised the griffon banner and the kingdom has rallied. The levies have mustered, and every warrior able to carry a sword or spear is gathering. Thousands of tents cover the fields outside the walls of the city as the soldiers await passage to the war in the north. Scores of ships lie at anchor in the harbor, ready to load the mail-clad companies and their weapons of war. Proud warships, their Norfall pennants whipping in the cold northern winds, cut through the dark waters to ensure safe passage for the army. The pride of the kingdom is gathered, soon to be hurled against the growing darkness. My heart should be filled with pride and awe at this force of arms, but instead doubt and fear run through me like ice in my veins. Can even this army stand against the Dark God?

—Gilean Erhaldsen, Chief Scribe of House Torbault, in the city of Erenhead, 1920 SA

The Time of Years

When only the elthedar walked the lands of Eredane, the plains of central Erenland were a place of great power, the living heart of the continent. The elthedar recognized the land's power and built their cities and temples around these primal nexuses, shaping the trees and stones to meet their needs. Their great civilization ended when the broken god Izrador was thrown down from the heavens. In the cataclysm, the eldethar's graceful cities collapsed as the ground shifted or drowned as the waters rose. The remaining elthedar scattered across the great plains, relying on the Aryth's magic to sustain them. They passed that link to the land on to their progeny, the younger fey, allowing them to tap its power to draw richness from the water and the soil. The gnomes mastered the great Eren River and built their communities on its shores, while the halflings found sheltered valleys amongst the seas of swordgrass and tilled its dark loam. But in the annals of history, these children would be only temporary caretakers for the land. Soon a new race would come, one that for dozens of generations heard the call of the land's power as a whisper, nothing more.

The Children of Aryth

Before Izrador was cast from the heavens, befouling the land with his taint, Eredane was alive with spirits who drew their power from and were an integral part of Aryth. The spirits flowed through the dark blue waters, were carried on the wind as it howled through the Kaladrums and onto the Eren Plains, and lived in the ancient trees in Erethor, nurturing the land and shepherding its growth. When the first children of Aryth, the elthedar, spread across Eredane, building their cities and shrines to gods now long lost, the spirits rejoiced. It was the spirits who taught the elthedar magic, and in time nurtured their children, the younger fey. The Sundering forever changed the spirits' relationship with the land, ripping the very fabric of Aryth apart. The spirits were likewise split, becoming the Eternal, the Lost, and the Trapped. In this time of crisis, the younger fey, the gnomes and halflings, turned to the spirits for protection and guidance, forming the eternal link between gnomes and the great spirit of the Eren River, and between the halflings and their wogren.

The Human Invasions

For centuries the fey lived in peace, the darkness in the north still slumbering, buried under the ice. That peace would not last. In the spring of 3958 FA, as the season's first boro foals were born, Dorn longboats were sighted on the Eren River. The Dorns were conquerors and skilled warriors who quickly captured the gnome and halfling villages. Unprepared, few of the gnomes were able to escape; those who could fled in their barges and took refuge upon the deep waters of the Ardune. The halflings fled into the swordgrass, and became wanderers following the herds of boro. The fey learned hard lessons as servants and slaves of the Dorns, lessons that would unknowingly prepare them for the horrors of the Last Age.

This was not a unified invasion force. Though all the Dorns had fled Pelluria together, once their new homes had been established, it quickly became every clan for itself. The Dorns were ill at ease away from the water that had been their livelihood and their refuge for so long; nor were they farmers, seeing the act of scrounging in the dirt to be demeaning. Some brought battle to the elves and dwarves, but were soundly repelled. They therefore spread primarily along the Eren River, moving ever north toward the vast inland sea and

raiding the fey and one another as they migrated. This left the great plains virtually untouched, inhabited only by outcasts and hunters.

This lifestyle persisted for a few decades, until word of the Sea of Pelluria, then called the Ebon Sea, reached the southernmost communities. Having slaughtered or chased off all of the fey within easy reach, and becoming nervous should the ships of the Sarcosan Empire appear on the horizon, these southern settlers took to their ships once more, abandoning most of their southern towns. When they arrived at the two best natural harbors on the southern shore of the inland sea, they found them already claimed by powerful clans. The brave pushed on to the northern coast of the sea, refusing to live under the banner of another clan; the practical accepted that a new life might be in order, and helped build the first large human settlements on Eredane. These grew into Erenhead and Baden's Bluff, and remained the two largest cities of Eredane until well after the Sarcosan conquest.

Meanwhile, within a few generations, Central Erenland had been conquered, claimed, and then left at peace once more. The trade offered by the herders, fishermen, and city-builders of the south made amends for their ancestors' brutality, and the strong stand of their land-hungry cousins in the north against Izrador's first invasion solidified those bonds of brotherhood.

The land would remain at peace until the ancient enemies of the Dorn, the Sarcosans, landed on the shores of the Kasmael Sea. The Sarcosans followed the same invasion route the Dorns had used centuries earlier, racing up the Eren River and swiftly conquering the isolated Dornish towns. The cities along the southern Pelluria were temporarily spared while the Sarcosans warred with the elves on the plains south of the Felthera River. The Dorns, who refused to join their elven allies in their war against the Sarcosans, learned the cost of their betrayal when the Sarcosan host made peace with the fey and crossed the Felthera. Isolated from their northern kin, the three southern Dornish cities of Baden's Bluff, Erenhead, and Low Rock stood alone against the massed might of the Sarcosans. The plains outside Erenhead were drenched in blood as the Dorns sought to stem the Sarcosan advance, but House Torbault could not match the Sarcosan cavalry, and the city fell in 835 SA. With the fall of Baden's Bluff in 840 SA, the last free Dornish house south of the Pelluria was forced to swear fealty to the Sarcosans. While the war against the Dorns would continue for 13 more years, the Sarcosan control of Central Erenland was never threatened.

The Kingdom forms

The Dorns surrendered in 853 SA, and the marriage of Hedgreg the Younger of House Redgard to Princess Ialla of the Sarcosans in 861 SA united the two races in spirit. The rebellion against the Sarcosan Empire then fused the military

might of the Dorns and Sarcosans, with longboats and caravels fighting side by side to protect Eredane. The new kingdom moved quickly to strengthen the realm and ensure the dominance of the royal houses. Roads were built across central Erenland linking the two great Dornish ports with the dwarven capital of Calador in the east, and the gateway to Erethor, Eisn, in the west. Bridges were built over the lesser tributaries of the Eren, opening vast regions up for trade and colonization. Each year, more of the great plains felt the bite of iron plows, replacing swordgrass with wheat and corn. Central Erenland, once the battleground between the two races, became the avenue first of peaceful trade and eventually of colonization.

Land grants were the reward of choice for sussars and clansmen who made names for themselves in battle, and Dorns and Sarcosans alike answered the call put out by these new nobles for hunters, herders, craftsmen, and laborers to populate their households and work their land. Central Erenland became a symbol of hope and potential, an untamed place where those with little to their names but their skills and earnest desire to make new lives could claim a stake in a forming community. This drew the idealistic as well as the desperate; a significant number of these early settlers were exiled from their previous lands for some minor crime or left after losing the support of their families through unpopular words or deeds. Dorn farmers denied or dispossessed of enough land to feed their families traveled south to claim the rich new farmlands. Lower-caste Sarcosans seeking opportunity to advance their stations and find fresh grazing land for their herds joined the Dorns in taming the wilderness.

Birth of a New Race

Simply sharing the same lands did not mean an automatic unification and blending, however. In the early years, members of each race had a tendency to socialize and intermingle mostly with those of their own kind. Two things changed that. First, their lords and ladies very often formed mixed-race marriages of political convenience, as parents married their children off to one another to create stability in the new kingdom. Each half of the marriage brought their trusted friends, advisors, and servants with them, and as the lord and lady shared a bed despite cultural boundaries, so too did their entourages begin to intermingle. The other primary cause of the intermingling of the races was simple necessity. Dorns who wanted their children to receive educations, or who needed healing, or desired to learn better metallurgy, had to go to Sarcosans; meanwhile, southlanders who needed to learn how to deal with the local fey, or who needed strong backs to help with an irrigation project or a construction task, had to go to their Norther neighbors. Finally, neither traders nor wandering beasts differentiated between Dorn and Sarcosan. The two peoples shopped together, worked together, and defended their homes together, forming close bonds. Over time the Dorns' ties to distant clans faded, replaced by

The Knightly Orders of Erenland

In the first years of the Kingdom of Erenland, the High King formed three orders of knights to help unite his people and build an elite force tied neither to clan nor caste nor noble family. The three orders were the Knights of the Wall, the High King's Heralds, and the Queen's Guard. The Knights of the Wall were tasked with organizing the defense of the Fortress Wall and fighting the Shadow's forces along the northern frontier. These tended to be scions of nobility, sent north by their families to find glory or volunteering to go as an escape from the tedium of administration. At the end of the Third Age, the Sarcosan general Jahzir led this order before his corruption by the Shadow. Much of the order was taken with Jahzir and turned to the dark god's service; those who survived the fall and refused to serve Izrador were mercilessly hunted down by their former leader.

The order of the Heralds acted as the High King's messengers, speaking with his voice, settling disputes, and dispensing justice. Heralds could come from any caste or background, so long as they showed both wisdom and compassion. Those who were of noble birth were required to forsake any titles or family affiliations so that they could act as neutral judges in legal cases, and so their presence did not cause the local lord to feel threatened. The Heralds were scattered across Erenland, trying to rally support for the High King, when the Shadow's armies surged out of the frozen north. Most died fighting with militia groups and protecting refugees. Those who survived have tried to keep the hope of the people alive, becoming the Wardens of Erenland (see page 48).

The last and most elite order was the Royal Guard, charged with the protection of the royal family. These were drawn solely from the most gifted warriors of, surprisingly, only the lowest castes. None who were suspected of ulterior motives or with any potential to profit by the fall of the High King or his heir were allowed into the order, which exempted any with money, connections, or noble blood. These men had nothing but their honor, and cherished nothing more than their duty. When the High King rode out of Alvedara with the tattered remnants of the kingdom's armies, he tasked the Royal Guard with spiriting away his wife and unborn child to a place of safety. For 100 years the fate of the Royal Guard and their most valuable charges has remained a mystery.

Shield and Sword



friendship and loyalty to the local Sarcosan horse breeders and craftsmen. The Sarcosans, no longer limited by the bonds of caste, found much in common with their Dornish neighbors. By the end of the Second Age, a new social order was formed.

Central Erenland also prospered from renewed alliances with the fey. Dwarven stonemasons and elven artisans traveled to Baden's Bluff and Erenhead to transform the crude but functional cities into the pride of the new kingdom, a blend of dwarven strength and elven grace. Many fey, whether traders, artisans, or scholars, established homes in Central Erenland. Baden's Bluff, with its elven quarter, had the largest concentration of elves outside Erethor until the last days of the Third Age. The dwarves of Low Rock were an integral part of the city, and were close allies of House Orin. That alliance is still strong today, with Dorn rebels fighting alongside their Kurgan allies to control key mountain passes and slow the Shadow offensive.

The newly established kingdom was not blind to the threat looming in the northlands. The Shadow had recovered from its losses at the Battle of Three Kingdoms and was slowly building its strength. Every arc there were reports of more dark abominations crossing the frontier and destroying isolated villages, and of orc warbands sweeping further south, raiding herds and attacking Dorn patrols. A means had to be found to protect the northern Dornish settlements and contain the growing orc tribes. With the guidance and assistance of the fey, the kingdom harnessed all its resources to build a series of strongholds across the breadth of Erenland: the Fortress Wall. For 70 years the kingdom poured men and material into its construction. This massive effort bound the kingdom together, providing purpose and a sense of pride. New roads, quarries, canals, and trade routes had to be built to support first the construction, and later the resupplies of the Wall. The cost was enormous but, through the foresight and commitment of the first kings of Erenland, the north would hold against Izrador for 1600 years.

With the growing strength of the Shadow and the establishment of the Fortress Wall, the kingdom could no longer rely only on a feudal muster of clansmen or Sarcosan riders for defense. A permanent military force was necessary to man the fortifications, secure the roads, and hold the line until the kingdom could send out a call to arms and an army could form. Infantry companies were recruited from throughout the kingdom. Not constrained by conflicting obligations to clan or caste, most of the recruits were Erenlanders, sons of farmers and tradesmen whose sole loyalty was to the kingdom. Each region of Central Erenland had its own companies, building a tradition of service to the High King. In an effort to unite the realm, orders of knights, drawn from all three races, were established to provide leadership and a powerful striking arm for the army. Throughout the kingdom, military academies were built to train elite units while planning for the future war against Izrador.

Erenlander infantry proved its worth in the three decades of war at the end of the Second Age. With the northern clans, the Erenlanders held critical strongholds along the Fortress Wall, repulsing wave after wave of orcs and goblin-kin, allowing the north vital time to send their women and children to relative safety in the south. The companies' organization and training proved crucial in preventing the army from crumbling under the Shadow's assault. Polearm-equipped Erenlander infantry formed the solid center for the High

King's army, providing a base from which the wide-ranging Sarcosan cavalry could strike, driving back the orc hordes. Erenlanders also manned key forts and protected fleeing refugees, freeing up warbands of the more heavily armed Dorns to strike against the ogres, oruks, and other giant-kin of Izrador's forces. Finally, after the Flight of Dragons, the Erenlanders joined with elven battlemages and archers to drive the shattered remnants of the Shadow's army back into the Frozen Wastes.

Dissolution and fall of the Kingdom

The devastation wrought by Izrador's second coming was a mortal wound to the Kingdom of Erenland. Hundreds of thousands had died; two generations of warriors would not return to their devastated or abandoned farms. The north was a ruin, and the specter of famine loomed over the land. Barely able to feed its people, the kingdom could not repair fortifications destroyed in the war or provide soldiers to protect the Dorns from the remaining shadowspawn and the wandering armies of Fell. One by one the great Dornish houses broke their fealty to the High King. Without strong support from the Sarcosan noble families, many of whom were bitter over the loss of their sons, the High King was unable to bring the Dornish houses to heel. Control of the Sarcosan south also slowly slipped away. When the Shadow finally rose again in the north, the Erenlanders comprised the majority of those who stood with the High King at the Last Battle.

With the death of the High King, resistance against Izrador's armies shattered, and the people of Central Erenland fell under the Shadow. Villages were stripped of food, herds were slaughtered, and Erenlanders in their thousands were sacrificed to power the dark god's zordrafin coriths. The gnomes were forced into service, plying the Eren and the Ardune, ferrying supplies and troops to the ongoing war in the west. None suffered more than the halflings, with all but a few scattered nomadic tribes forced into abject slavery or fed to the dark god's ravenous hordes. In but a handful of years, the Shadow ripped the heart out of the former kingdom, casting down the symbols of its former glory and hunting down any who could claim leadership of its people.

The Last Age

Central Erenland is critical to the Shadow's war against the fey. Vast armies are arrayed along the Burning Line or march under the Kaladrums to besiege Calador. The burden of feeding these hosts has fallen largely on the farms along the Ardune and the Eren River and on the herds of boro in the central plains. Tithes on harvests and herds are heavy, but the richness and the slowly growing strength of the land has allowed the Erenlanders to survive and, unseen, to slowly rebuild their strength.

While the people of Erenland have suffered under almost a century of the Shadow's dominion, a small spark of hope has burned, hidden from even the dark god's eyes: An heir to High King still lives. As the Last Battle was being fought, the remnants of the Royal Guard escaped south and east of Alvedara, just a day ahead of Izrador's army. Whether even the High King's heirs know the nature of their bloodlines, none can say. Perhaps the Royal Guard blended into the local communities, hiding the king's son with a common family but remaining close to watch him. Or perhaps they took him to the Island of Asmadar, and are training his descendants there for their day of reckoning. If ever there were a time to strike, with orc garrisons across Erenland stripped to support the war against the fey, it would be now.



CHAPTER TWO

Lands of Destiny

Central Erenland stretches from the burning edge of Erethor to villages in the shadows of the mighty Kaladrun Mountains. This vast area encompasses the seemingly endless sea of swordgrass known as the Eren Plains, still-fertile farmlands along the banks of the Ardune and the Eren River, and regions despoiled by a century of war against the fey. The expanse is home to Erenlanders, a dwindling number of gnomes and halflings, and tens of thousands of orcs. As the war against the fey enters what may be its final stage, central Erenland has become a critical but overlooked region of Eredane. Though few see it, the future of the continent may well be decided here.

This chapter divides central Erenland into five distinct regions: the Westlands, Erenhead, the Eastern Hills, Low Rock, and the Eren River that connects them all. Each region includes locations, organizations, and leaders important to both the Shadow and the resistance. The chapter does not include information on one of the two largest Erenlander cities, Baden's Bluff, which is detailed in *Under the Shadow*.

The Westlands

"We could wait no longer. The village was getting suspicious, and there were rumors of a witchtaker seeking cursed children. I had to get Garid away. To a place of safety. We left under the dark god's moon, stumbling through the newly tilled fields. I didn't know what to expect. I had never been more than a day's walk from our village. We fled to the north and west, seeking the old road to Baden's Bluff, sleeping during the day and traveling only after the sun set. It took us four days to reach the road; thank Aryth, we saw no one and were able to slip across it unnoticed to continue moving west. I had hoped to find the great forest of the fey, and maybe follow it north. Instead we found only blackened ground and scattered copses of pine and birch. I had no idea where to go . . . north? Farther west? Our food had run out, and Garid could barely walk anymore. Then we found it. Or maybe it found us. One minute we were in a sea of swordgrass, wandering, nearly delirious. The next we were in the middle of a tiny, hidden village, folk staring at us uncertainly. They offered food and water. When I told them of our plight, they said they would take my son, but that I must go. There was no room, they said.

So I gave him up. I gave him up, and I wandered back out into the wastes, and for the first time in my life, I prayed."

Lands and People

At the end of the Third Age, as the Kingdom of Erenland shattered under the weight of the dark god's armies, the Westlands was a sparsely populated region dominated by the Caransil trading city of Eisin. The elven trading posts farther east along the Felthera had long since been abandoned to the gnomes, and only a few scattered human farming villages sheltered in the eaves of Erethor. Now, after a hundred years under the Shadow's dominion, the forests of the Westlands have been turned to ash and the land despoiled. The Westlands is one of the largest and most important Shadow districts, one that stretches from the Ardune to the burning edge of Erethor. Fittingly, the orc general Grial the Fey Killer rules the district to ensure that the Westlands meet the needs of his army. The roads from Baden's Bluff and Erenhead are choked with wagons bearing the weapons of war and the seemingly endless herds of boro needed to feed the rapacious hunger of hundreds of thousands of orcs. Once-rich farmland lies fallow. Forests of elm and birch have been burned down to bare earth, the soil charred and suitable only for thistle or swordgrass. Once-plentiful streams have been drained dry by the boro herds or fouled by ash and offal. Only in the north, near the approaches to the Green March, has the land recovered with scattered copse of young, stunted trees and lush grasslands untouched by boot or hoof.

Over the past hundred years, the old communities of the Westlands have been swept away with the orc assault on Erethor. Villages have been emptied to fill orc larders, to provide slaves, or to be sacrificed upon Izrador's altars. Those who escaped fared little better, as the open plains only yield food and shelter to the combined efforts of many farmers and laborers. As the Shadow offensive moves ever westward toward the heart of Erethor, small groups of escaped slaves and refugees from central Erenland, often no more than extended families, have tried to rebuild their lives in sheltered vales well north of Eisin and the Road of Woe.

Governance

The Westlands is a war zone, and its resources are devoted to the offensive against the fey. The orc general Grial the Fey Killer administers the region for the Night King Jahzir, ensuring that there is no delay in the upcoming offensive along the Burning Line and against the southern elven stronghold of Three Oaks. Support for the armies has forced the Shadow to build a logistics network across northern Erenland that funnels troops and supplies through Baden's Bluff and Erenhead to Eisin and points west. Control of these vital roadways is the main task for the garrison at Eisin and the dozens of smaller orc outposts along the former King's Roads. Off the roads, the few large villages are left to the whims of the regional garrisons and the local legates. The Fey Killer does not care about a handful of farming villages; as

long as they pay their tithes and don't interfere with the flow of supplies for his army, they are to be left alone.

The Shadow

The Westlands has the largest concentration of orcs outside the Frozen North. Thousands of orcs stream through Eisin every arc en route to the fighting in Erethor. The roads are heavily patrolled and the old outposts along the King's Road have been rebuilt and garrisoned. The orcs easily outnumber the remaining human population. Some minor tribes, unable to gain power or expand their warrens in the south, have even begun to take land around Eisin, digging new warrens into the hills overlooking the Felthera River.

The presence of Izrador's faithful is also heavy here, with hundreds of soldier legates fighting with the warbands or leading human mercenaries. Minor shrines to the dark god, grim structures with the horned symbol of Izrador burned into the dark wood, can be found along the main roads and in the scattered villages, tended by legates fanatical in their zeal. Due to the district's very limited population, the one great temple is at Eisin. Bloody rituals and mass sacrifices are common there as the orc warbands prepare to give their lives for their god. Members of the smaller, more specialized orders like the Witch Takers or the Sisters of Tender Mercies are rarely found in the district, due to the small human population.

Grial does not have complete control of the Shadow forces in the Westlands. Some orc warbands, once routed from the forest, attempt to live under their own authority among the plains of ash and fire. Their existences are usually cut short due to ancient tribal rivalries, lack of organization, struggles for leadership, and the horrors that haunt the plains. Shadowspawn and demons driven mad by the fighting have fled the carnage and established hunting grounds behind the orc lines, attacking orc and goblin-kin scouts and patrols. Large bands of Fell are a major threat and have forced the Fey Killer to divert thousands of warriors from the fighting to secure the Road of Ruin and Road of Woe, as well as to hunt down the most cunning and dangerous undead bands. Grial cannot even be assured of the obedience of the orc legions and warbands under his command, as the tribes are always seeking to eliminate rivals, even if it means allowing the elves to win a battle.

Eisin

When the Shadow's hordes crossed the Sea of Pelluria and routed the remnants of the High King's army, their first target after securing the southern Pellorian ports was the elven trading city of Eisin. Built beyond the edge of Erethor, Eisin was not defendable by traditional elven methods. The city was evacuated except for a few hundred warriors who refused to let the city fall without a fight. In the limited time the elves had to prepare, the defenders turned the center of the

The King's Roads

At the height of the Kingdom of Erenland, the High King commissioned the construction of seven roads to link the cities of southern Erenland. Only five were completed, as the battles at the end of the Second Age crippled the kingdom's economy and neither money nor manpower could be spared to complete the last two roads. The first road to be built was the Salt Road, linking Erenhead and Baden's Bluff, the hubs of trade with the Dornish north. Due to the importance of the alliance with the dwarves, the Iron Road was built from Erenhead through Low Rock to the dwarven city of Calador. In the west, the elven trading city of Eisín, gateway to Erethor, was joined to the bustling docks at Baden's Bluff. Since the fall of the kingdom and the destruction of most of the towns and villages along this road, the once-vibrant trade route is now known as the Road of Ruin. The fourth and grandest of the roads was built from the kingdom's capital of Alvedara to Erenhead. Even in this dark age, it is still called the Kingsway, and hidden amongst its broken cobbles are stones that bear the symbol of the lost kingdom. The last road, from Swift Water in the East to Eisín in the west, was built to speed travel across the heart of Erenland. Winding along the banks of the Eren and Felthera, the River Road has become vital to the supply of the Fey Killer's armies, bearing a seemingly never-ending stream of supplies west to feed the armies assaulting Erethor.

city into a fortified maze. It took the orcs three days to eliminate the last of defenders, and in the process the city was destroyed.

As the first century of the Shadow's dominion comes to an end, all that remains of the former elven city is its name. The once graceful spires and elegant gardens have been replaced by squat stone warehouses, smithies, fortified barracks buildings, slave and animal pens, and in the heart of the old elven city, a towering temple to the dark god. The city is home to almost 500 human slaves, over 2,000 orcs, and half as many goblin-kin. That number can easily swell by 4,000–6,000 when warbands en route to the frontlines stop to rest and resupply.

Eisín is the administrative center of the Westlands and its only true city. Grial has entrusted Eisín to Hurok (Orc male, Ftr 11), a former legion commander who has fought for the general for the past 20 years. While the warbands rest and refit, Hurok evaluates the warband leaders for their skill and

ability to follow orders. It is Hurok who recommends where the warbands will be sent, with the least reliable ordered to their deaths along the Burning Line. Hurok has little time for events outside of Eisín, leaving control of the district's villages to their local garrisons. As long as the tribute of food and slaves continues to arrive in Eisín, Hurok and Grial care little for what happens in the rest of the district.

Looming over the city is one of the first temples to the dark god built after the invasion. The first stones were set while the fires from the assault still burned. The temple is on the verge of becoming a blood mirror, and it has fed on hundreds of fey, thousands of human slaves, and those orcs who are deemed too weak to be of any other use to the offensive. The temple is also one of the cabal's strongholds in the south; Jahzir and Grial have shielded the legates from Sunulael to prevent the Priest of Shadow from expanding his influence among the tribes. The master of the mirror is the legate Darman Mordsin (Erenlander male, Leg 15). The unspoken alliance between Grial and Darman is dangerous, but it has allowed the orc general to fend off Sunulael's attempts to undermine his warbands' loyalties.

As one of the oldest elven cities, Eisín was built on the site of an ancient elthedar settlement. The first elves adopted the elthedar practice of burying their dead in chambers below the roots of the sacred Homewood trees. When the city was evacuated, the defenders did not have time to remove the artifacts buried with these first elves; all they could do was to destroy or disguise the entrances to the burial chambers. The chambers have remained undiscovered for the past 100 years, with potential covenant items or tomes of knowledge hidden under the orcs' very feet.

Felthera River

From the earliest days of the Second Age, the Felthera River was the avenue into Erethor. Trade flowed from the elven heartland to Eisín and the growing human cities in southern Erenland. Graceful boats carried the art and wisdom of the fey into the newly formed and vibrant Kingdom of Erenland. Today, the river carries far different cargo, and in the opposite direction: orc soldiers, warrior legates, and the supplies for a war of extermination. This broad river, once the lifeline of the Caransil, is now a dagger striking into the very soul of the great forest.

The Felthera is surpassed only by the Eren River in length and breadth, stretching for over 1,500 miles from its origins in the Tanglethorn Deep to its entry into the great lake called the Ardune. The Felthera is a river of many faces, running swiftly through fern-strewn banks near the elven capital of Caradul, increasing to raging white water as it reaches the Keep of the Cataracts, and finally broadening and slowing as it leaves the flaming edge of Erethor. Like the great forest, the river also suffers under the Shadow's assault. From Medoc to the Burning Line, the river is choked with ash, charred wood, and the remains of fey, orcs, and shadowspawn.

Control of the Felthera is critical to the Shadow's war against the fey. The river is the fastest and safest means to reach Medoc and Fachtendom, and is the preferred method of sending couriers to and from Alvedara. While the river remains navigable as far inland as the Keep of the Cataracts, the gnome barges rarely travel farther than Medoc; they believe, and more importantly have convinced Grial, that the elves have studded the banks past the town with submerged stakes and sunken boats, making navigation deadly. This has allowed the gnomes to stay well east of the fighting. The general knows the value of the service the gnomes provide, and will not risk them or their barges on foolish attempts.

With the recent increase in the pace of the Shadow offensive, the former elven fishing village of Medoc has become the hub for the orc army assaulting Three Oaks. The Felthera narrows and slows near the village, making it the safest crossing point. Grial has commandeered almost 40 gnome barges to ferry warbands across the river.

To accommodate the barges and the thousands of orcs who make the crossing each arc, the simple port of Medoc has been expanded with enough piers to unload twenty barges at a time. It is guarded by a dozen fists of orcs and oruks, who oversee several hundred human slaves as they load the army's supplies on wagons and also act as drovers as the supply trains move toward Three Oaks. To ensure that there is always sufficient labor available, bugbear slavers maintain stockades on the outskirts of the town, bringing in slaves from the great plains and villages south of the Felthera. Inside the town, the gnomes have built their own small compound along the piers.

The conditions for the gnomes in Medoc are grim. The pace of operations allows little rest for the bargemen, who must navigate throughout the night by torchlight. They are forced to ferry unblooded, heavily armed, and barely restrained orcs across one of their greatest fears, deep and dark water. The orcs' fear and explosive violence have resulted in the deaths of dozens of gnomes and the loss of two barges in the last three arcs. To protect the gnome bargemen, one trading family, the Clearwaters, volunteered to take control of Medoc and work with generals Grial and Jorg Kinslayer to control the warbands and guard the safety of their people. The Clearwaters are a well-known family that has earned Grial's trust, and has used that influence to convince him to station members of his own legion in Medoc and on each barge. Those who abuse the gnomes answer to these enforcers.



The leader of the Clearwater family is Josian (Gnome male, Rog 5/Smuggler 4), an aging gnome who piloted his first barge on the Eren before the Shadow's army breached the Fortress Wall at the end of the Third Age. He has seen friends horribly murdered, villages he traded with emptied by slavers, and barges suspected of aiding the rebels burned. Those experiences have convinced Josian that resistance against the Shadow is futile and that the best hope for his people is to make themselves too valuable to suffer the fates of their fey cousins or their human allies. To that end, Josian will not aid or harbor any gnome raft he suspects has worked with the resistance. The leader of the Clearwaters is not without mercy, however; Josian is haunted by the atrocities he has witnessed over the past hundred years and does all he can to limit the pain and improve the conditions of the human slaves living in or traveling through Medoc, without endangering his own family.

Josian's efforts are being undermined by his younger, more idealistic cousin Taeon, who has begun harboring escaped slaves until they can be safely sent downriver and set ashore on the river's southern bank, well clear of the orc armies. Taeon has thus far been extremely careful to limit the number of slaves he helps, aware that his family's value to the orcs provides only limited protection. If Josian discovers Taeon's activities, he would at best exile him, at worst turn him over to the Shadow.

Road of Woe

In the later Second Age, when the Kingdom of Erenland was at its height in wealth and power, the High King commissioned the building of seven great roads to link the cities of southern Erenland. Due to the importance of trade with the fey, two roads were built to Eisn, one from the port of Baden's Bluff, the other following the western bank of the Eren River from the port of Erenhead. The roads were constructed under the watchful eyes of the finest dwarven engineers and designed to withstand the ages. Built on a bed of

gravel and faced with finely cut stone, they were wide enough to allow two wagons to travel side by side. Throughout the Second Age and for much of the Third Age, the roads helped to tie the kingdom together.

During Izrador's third assault on the people of Eredane, those same roads became a liability, allowing his troops and supplies to travel rapidly throughout the collapsing kingdom. The King's Roads continued to benefit the Shadow, as they were critical supply lines for the armies assaulting Erethor. Orc warbands, human mercenaries, wagons laden with food and weapons, and vast boro herds were driven along the King's Road to fuel the raging war. As the fey were slowly forced back from Eisín, the Night King Jahzir emptied villages along the road of any man or boy able to haul rock, forcing them to extend the road west, following the army's line of advance. Oppressed by cruel slave masters, unprotected from the elements, and fed the foul dregs of food left by the passing orc warbands, thousands of slaves died each year building and maintaining the road. Slaves sent west to build the road rarely returned, and the section of the King's Road that crossed the Westlands became the Road of Woe.

Today the road is like a great wound cut across western Erenland. Villages within 50 miles of the road are deserted, their people enslaved or fled. The land is overgrazed by the countless boro that are forced to follow the road west. Each year the human drovers, under the watchful eyes of their goblin-kin guards, are forced to move the herds farther from the road as the land is ruined. Once-rich land is barren, alternately dusty and dry in the summer and a morass in the spring and late fall. The rotting carcasses of boro and the bleached bones of humanoids line the road. Water near the road is foul, and the slaves forced to drink it, already weakened from malnutrition and physical abuse, sicken with dysentery and fever. No Erenlander willingly travels on or near the Road of Woe.

Maintaining the road is critical to ensure the timely supply of the orc armies. Grial has rebuilt the system of guard towers that his ancestors demolished, and has established regular mounted patrols along its length. He has entrusted the maintenance of the road to a former Erenlander mercenary, a son of two influential Cabal legates, who proved his loyalty and skill in the campaigns in the Green March. The Erenlander, known as the Lashmaster by both the orcs and the slaves who toil under his care, is brutally efficient, caring little for the human cost to maintain the road. The Lashmaster is a sadist who takes great pleasure in the pain he causes. He has personally tortured dozens of slaves to feed his perverse needs. Most of these would freely give their lives for the chance to kill him.

Hidden deep within his twisted psyche, and as yet undetected by the Shadow, is a binding placed on the Lashmaster during a short-lived captivity among the elves. The binding is similar to that used by the Witch Queen when she chooses her avatars. Through the binding, Aradil is able to see through the Lashmaster's eyes, but has no control over his actions. She is like a ghost who lurks unseen within his mind, forced to

endure his cruelty as she gathers information on the warbands and supply trains traveling along the road. The knowledge she gains through the Lashmaster is critical to the defense of Erethor, though the cost is the continuation of the misery visited by the Lashmaster upon his victims.

The Resistance

The scattered human population, the constant flow of orc warbands through the district, and numerous Shadow patrols make effective resistance in this district almost impossible. Villages are afraid to harbor resistance fighters, knowing the terrible retribution they would face if caught. The burned shells of villages and the long chain of slaves moving west are more than enough warning that the damage that could be inflicted to the Shadow is not worth the suffering it would bring. Due to the difficulty of moving safely through the district, resistance fighters and elven spies skirt the Westlands, traveling instead through the Green March to Baden's Bluff or moving south of the Felthera River.

While there is little direct resistance, the Erenlanders do what they can to deny the land's bounty to the Shadow. Boro are culled throughout the year to provide fresh meat and to limit the size of the herd when the orcs come for their tithe. Fields are left to go fallow or are poorly used to limit crop yield. Families with reason to fear the Shadow are spirited away, seeking homes in Erethor. With this passive resistance the Erenlanders have limited the supplies flowing to the Shadow's armies without bringing down the wrath of Izrador upon them and suffering as the Dorns have.

Brahaman's Balm

Nestled in a small dell south of the Green March is a pool barely visible through the dense growth of ivy and interwoven stands of magnolia trees. There is but a single path through the underbrush, bearing signs of claw and hoof, to the cool, clear water. The air in the hollow is heavy year-round with the sweet smell of the magnolia blossoms, whose white petals blanket much of the pool. The dell is tranquil, and has an aura of peace enveloping it. In a land wracked by the horrors of war, it is and has been a welcome refuge for those fleeing the Shadow's armies.

The dell was once a shrine to one of the lost gods. The god's temple and the stele that once surrounded the pool are long since toppled, their inscriptions worn smooth by the elements. Fractured pieces can still be found hidden under layers of dirt and ivy. The shrine was dedicated to nature and the healing arts, and some small elements of its power remain, infusing the small pool. Now only the animals, through some inherent instinct, still visit the shrine to drink from its healing waters.

When the Shadow's offensive swept into the Green March, most of the forest surrounding the pool was burned to the ground. The dell survived, and through its influence

the land surrounding it has recovered some of its old richness. Wildlife has cautiously returned to the area, and fresh growth covers the nearby hills. With no road or settlement of any size within leagues, no orc or shadowspawn remain to despoil the land's return to life. The power of life is so strong in the dell that no Fell will enter. Even the carrion eaters that follow the armies of the Shadow avoid Brahaman's Balm.

In 92 LA, when the Caransil struggled to retain the southern edge of the Green March, a battle was fought against tremendous odds just north of the dell. An elven patrol and its dire animal allies made a stand against two full orc warbands to buy time for the evacuation of nearby villages. The patrol and most of its allies died, their bodies left to rot. Only Brahaman, the leader of the dire bears, escaped the carnage. Cut off from the Green March and driven mad with pain, the great bear struggled south, seeking a place to die. As if called, Brahaman came to the pool and drank deeply; the cool waters forced the foul poison from the orcs' blades out of his wounds, cleansing his body. Instead of death, Brahaman was gifted life and time to heal. In return for this gift he has become the guardian of the pool, the last servant of a lost god.



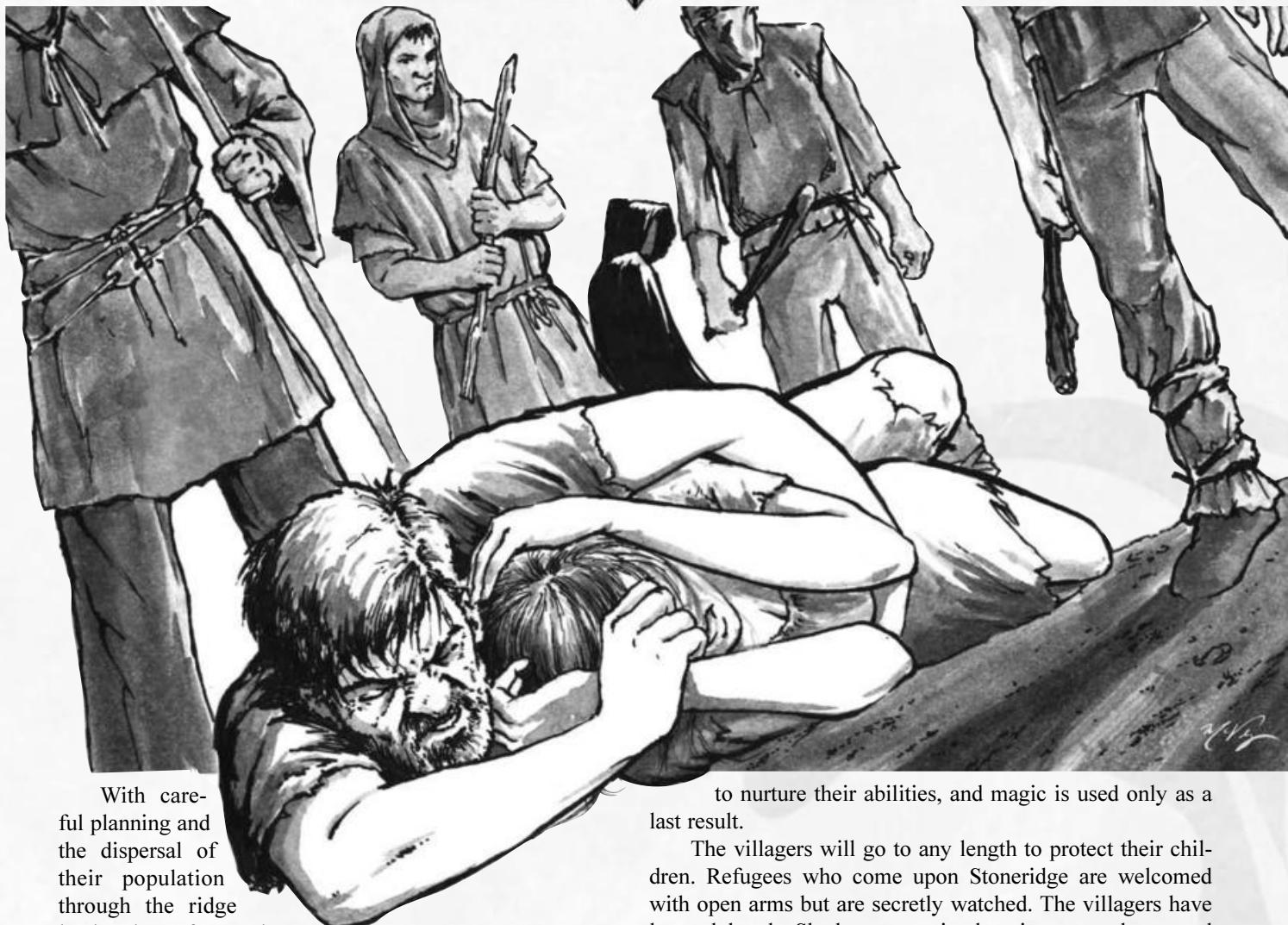
Stoneridge

To the south of the Green March is a series of hills and ridgelines that were once covered in majestic oak, spruce, and elm trees but are now scored bare by fire or covered in sword-grass and heather. Hidden in the sheltered dales are a cluster of small hamlets centered on Stoneridge, a village built at the very base of one of the largest outcrops of rock. Stoneridge is home to 400 souls, refugees from the fighting in the Green March, escaped slaves, and families from central Erenland seeking to live free from the Shadow. With the war front hundreds of miles to the north and west, and with the nearest town at least ten days' march to the east, the refugees have found safe haven, at least for now.

Stoneridge has been carefully built to both protect and hide its residents. The village buildings are all made from unrelieved, dull grey stone. The houses are built in a square, anchored on the ridgeline, with the houses forming a wall against predators and the Fell. There are no windows outside the village square, and the only entrance is a gate not even wide enough for a wagon. Animal pens are built under the escarpment, and the few boro and goats are kept more for their milk than meat. The villagers fear that larger herds would draw predators or worse. Their tilled fields are small, hidden in the dales or surrounded by swordgrass. The simple smithy is open to the elements to allow its smoke to rapidly disperse. Every effort has been made to make the village safe from the prying eyes of the Shadow.

Powers of the Glen

As a shrine of the old gods, Brahaman's Balm does not radiate magic or have spell energy like a power nexus. Only a greater legate (legate level 15 or higher) whose soul is infused with Izrador's divine power (5th-level or higher divination spell) could recognize the pool for what it is. Brahaman's Balm has several beneficial effects for any that drink from its waters: It negates all active poisons with a DC 20 or less, closes open wounds, and doubles the healing rate for each day the pool's water is drunk. The water must be drunk directly from the pool; taking the water from the pool, even a few feet away, dissipates its power. The pool's water can not be polluted by any natural means, but a legate channeling negative energy into it could destroy the pool's powers. Doing so would require a turning check that would affect a 20-HD undead; success deals "damage" to the pool equal to the HD worth of undead rolled on the turning check. The pool has 40 "hit points," and regains 1 per day if damaged.



With careful planning and the dispersal of their population through the ridge lands, the refugees have

found a means to not only survive, but to thrive. The land is rich and takes to crops easily. Groundwater is clean and still plentiful, offsetting the limited rains. Without the dark god's tithe, the refugees are well fed and have ample stores built into cold vaults inside the ridge. No one goes hungry, and those who stumble upon Stoneridge are free to share their bounty, but that bounty could cost them their lives.

The precautions the villagers have taken help them hide a secret, which they believe to be a curse, that would have them all sacrificed on Izrador's altar. That curse is the spark of sorcery that runs true in their children. Over half the children in Stoneridge and a handful of their parents can manipulate the raw power that courses through them. In an age when those who can channel are actively hunted by Witch Takers, whole families sacrificed on the slightest hint of sorcery, and not one child of every thousand born with the ability to tap Aryth's raw power, the concentration of children with this power is extraordinary. What should be seen as a blessing is treated like a sentence of death. No effort is made

to nurture their abilities, and magic is used only as a last result.

The villagers will go to any length to protect their children. Refugees who come upon Stoneridge are welcomed with open arms but are secretly watched. The villagers have learned that the Shadow uses animals as its eyes and ears, and any stranger with an animal is suspect in their eyes. Those who wish to stay will be given lodging but remain under their scrutiny. However, those who wish to leave are given food and water laced with poison or killed in the night. Killing innocents in this manner weighs heavily on the souls of the residents of Stoneridge, but the villagers feel they cannot risk word of their existence reaching the Shadow. They will use any means, including magic, to prevent anyone from leaving.

The Eren & Ardune

Berl squatted low in the bow of his tiny skiff, cursing silently to himself. The moon, full and brilliant, had peeked from beneath the clouds, just as the orc patrol barque he had been eyeing turned its way toward the small inlet in which he was hidden. Its occupants would be clear of the tall reeds between them in moments; Berl wagered they wouldn't miss a lone gnome craft out in the middle of nowhere, and they would be quite interested in the sack of swords and axes crammed into the aft compartment.

He lowered his head to the dark water and, swallowing his desperation, he softly sang an old fey song of appeasement.

*"Watcher, if you will, grant me thy boon tonight,
Deliver me from searching foes and aid me in my flight.
My pledge to thee, time shall attest,
Unwav'ring service, without rest,
Through ages long our service sure,
To make your sacred waters pure,
We humbly seek to remain blessed and worthy in your sight."*

As he finished his prayer, his eyes returned to the approaching ship. Only a matter of time now, he thought, as his hand came to rest upon the hilt of the dagger at his belt. As the barque passed the mouth of the inlet, it suddenly listed violently to its side, and the orcs cried out in terror as they tumbled headlong into the water. The serpentine head broke water soon after, a screaming orc struggling in the sea dragon's deadly maw.

As the tumult went on, Berl silently paddled his skiff into the darkness.

Lands and People

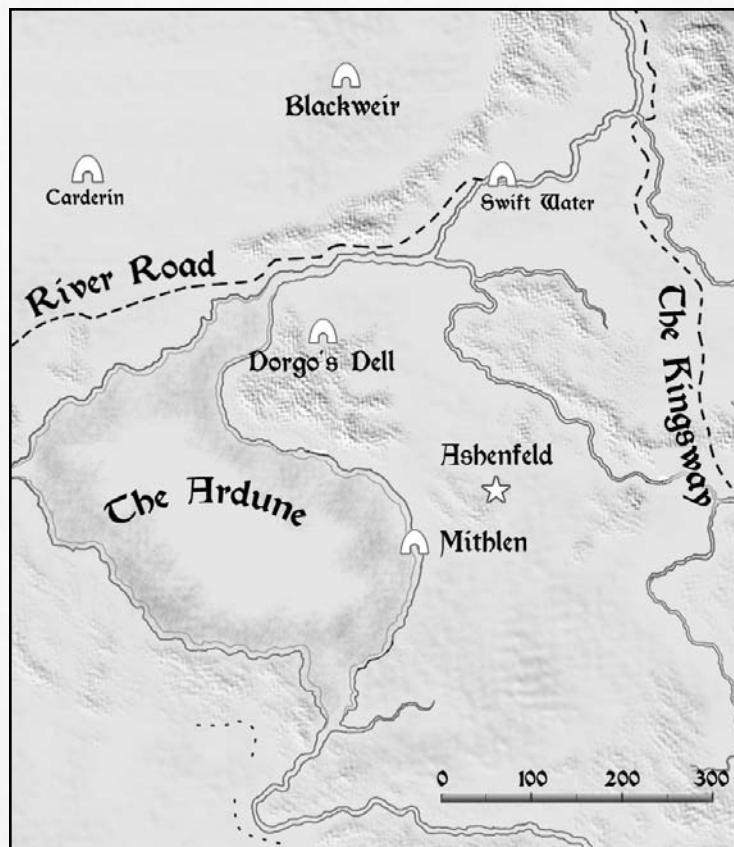
The Eren and Ardune belong to no Shadow-administered region, but rather act as a middle ground between several domains. This fertile region has always served as the quiet heartland of the central plains, the natural home of the peaceful smallfolk, the gnomes and halflings. As the fey led their simple lives, tilling the soil and fishing the bounty of the Ardune, they gave no thought to conquest and power. These virtues came with the arrival of the humans from over the sea; the violence and strife visited upon the shepherds and fisherman brought an era of invasion and misery to the unsuspecting fey. The invading Dorns stormed through the area on the way to constructing their kingdoms upon the Pelluria, then the Sarcosans guided their mounts over vast grasslands and past the murky shores of the Ardune to bring war to the northmen. When the Kingdom of Erenland fell, the Shadow's armies trampled the grasslands flat on their way to subjugate the cities of the southlands. The waterways of Central Erenland have never been the place where history happened, but rather have served as the pathway to places where it would be made.

Seas of undisturbed swordgrass and gentle hills border the river and large lake, which are fed by gentle brooks and small, clear pools. The occasional overgrown trade path or broken remnant of one of the King's Roads leads off into the overarching, thick grasses; these may wend their way to a fortified town, but more often lead to the deserted remains of former

halfling or human villages scattered across the countryside. The relative tranquility of the plains is contrasted by the activity along the muddy banks of the Ardune and upon its dark waters. The northern shore is often restive; the dark shoreline is broken by a number of gnomish shipping villages, stop-offs for the dozens of fishing and trade vessels and the shipping and transport craft of the Shadow that traverse the lake. The known human fishing villages are spread along the northern shores, with many more isolated settlements scattered upon the largely unpatrolled eastern and southwestern shores.

In the Last Age, the Eren River and the Ardune are once again seen by outsiders as a path to more important places. Most gnomes upon the busy northern shore of the Ardune provide courier and transport services to the military, moving supplies and troops west to Eisin. However, for every two barges serving the Shadow, a third is going about its business virtually unmolested, visiting the remote, uncharted settlements and waters of the great lake. These gnomes trade goods, crafts, and information with others living upon stark shorelines, or with the secretive sailors of the Ghost Raft.

Some Erenlanders, meanwhile, fish upon the shores, but many more thousands of them live throughout the grassy heartlands north and east of the Ardune. Each of these human communities, be it a well-maintained walled town or a village of crude huts, serves to bring forth the rich bounty of the lush grasslands. Gardens, groves, and vineyards surround the human settlements; every person of a village has some degree



of skill in farming the land, for their ability to work the land is the only reason they are allowed to live. Some towns are controlled by legates or minor nobles, and most of the yield of these farms is lost each year to the tithe or for the use of those in power, leaving the Erenlanders who work the lands nearly starving. Other settlements live free from the control of the Shadow other than sporadic visits from orc patrols and tithe takers; they might live prosperously for months or years, only to be subjected to brutal “check-ups” that leave in their wake murdered townsfolk, burnt buildings, and emptied larders. The everyday lot of the people along the Eren and Ardune is often left to the whims, or the lack of notice, of the occupiers.

Governance

Many of the numerous small towns and villages scattered along Central Erenland’s waterway administer to their own needs. Gnome raft towns come and go according to the requirements of the pilots who form these temporary shelters. Their conduct and interaction are mostly determined by river etiquette; these communities are too temporary to require any further organization. Gnome fishing villages are influenced by the various trade families who live there. Bargaining and meetings among notable merchants and ship captains decide the nature of the day-to-day conduct of a village’s residents. Erenlander shoreline villages are primarily led by a sheriff and a loosely organized town council. The people usually choose these individuals on the basis of their overall dependability and strength. The council is expected to see to the defense of the settlement from outside threats, particularly Fell and wild beasts, and to maintain order among the townsfolk.

Some outposts fall under the administration dominion of legates and former generals of the Shadow’s armies. Towns formed around important checkpoints, particularly those with access to the Road of Ruin, are maintained with a firm hand; these towns are expected to provide food, supplies, and services for military traffic passing through. Other towns may be occupied by a Shadow-appointed lord and his retinue, who runs the settlement however he sees fit. Some of the more remote settlements serve as the personal protectorates or fiefs of their masters. These communities range from enclosed compounds to sprawling, extravagant plantations.

The Shadow

The Shadow’s primary focus regarding the Eren and Ardune is on the provisioning of the military and the movement of the necessary warriors, food, and supplies to the elven and dwarven war fronts. As a result, much traffic flows through these waters, but few orcs or goblin-kin dwell permanently in the region, and the comparative presence of administering legates is light. The local lords and proxies of Shadow nobles live well in the areas they control, fully

exploiting the labor of the serfs and slaves they govern. The preferred methods of a given lord depend upon his personality: Some headmen vent their innate cruelty and sadism upon their charges, while others, content and comfortable in their positions, let the populace work the lands and live their lives in relative peace.

Ashenfeld

Before the fall of the kingdom, a few priests of Shadow stole into secluded regions of Erenland to set up secret power bases for the coming reign of their dark god. The town of Eorfeld, nestled along the hills east of the Ardune, was the site of a once-productive iron mine that closed as the decline of the kingdom resulted in little demand for ore. A force of legates and their human mercenaries stealthily overwhelmed this small backwater town; within a year, a garrison was established at the remote site, and the secret construction of a temple and black mirror began. The mines were reopened, and a small trickle of smuggled iron began to make its way to the black market.

The Shadow came, Erenland fell, and the forces at Eorfeld increased the pace of their operations. After many years, the yield of the mines had tapered somewhat, and the town’s garrison was lessened. The black mirror, however, had aged considerably, and the demand for blood increased. The population of the town, already depleted through years of harsh slave labor, was needed for the mines; another source for sacrifice would be necessary. The elderly legate of the town cast his eye toward the tiny and insignificant fishing village of Mithlen to the southwest. There, he thought, was fresh fodder for his mirror, and he began to make the necessary arrangements to capture the villagers.

At this time, the sheriff of Mithlen, Samel, received a vision of the bloodshed to be visited upon his previously undisturbed home, and knew the temple and its mirror at Eorfeld must be destroyed to save his people. After conferring with a few of his more capable companions, he decided to take action. Retrieving his ancestral staff from its hiding place upon his farm, he and his group hiked to the outskirts of Eorfeld and assaulted the temple. Their timing was fortunate, as the occupiers were overly confident of their control of the populace and were not expecting an attack. When Samel and his party attacked the temple, the miners revolted and overwhelmed their guards. In the ensuing confusion, Samel won through to the darkest chamber of the temple, and sundered the corith.

The resulting destruction of life and land was absolute. The mirror had drained magic and vitality from the region for over 100 years; the violent release of so much power scorched the earth, rendering it forever lifeless. The area is a blasted, flat plain of wind-blown gray dust and black, reflective glass. The region of deadlands is considered cursed by both the Erenlanders living near its borders and the forces of Shadow, who avoid the area altogether. The name of the old



town was forgotten, and this lifeless region has been renamed Ashenfeld. No living creature approaches this wasteland, and it is whispered that black, hulking shapes and shadowy wraiths prowl the region, seeking to consume the living.

The Resistance

Among the populace of the Ardune regions there are those who refuse to bow their heads and accept the dominion of the Shadow in the heartland of their fallen kingdom. While life in the fortified towns and supply centers is harsh and often hellish, the settlements on the eastern and southwestern shores are either lightly policed or are left largely to their own devices. Those people who would see an end to the tyranny and a return to the glory days of Erenland do what they can to resist the Shadow. The methods of resistance vary among communities, from the concealing of forbidden texts to the sheltering of known outlaws. Overt resistance is not a viable option. Both human and fey realize that open rebellion might prove successful for a short time, but the resources and might of the Shadow are boundless, and such action would bring doom.

The humans in their farming and fishing villages labor each day to feed their families and build up their food stores for the tithe and for the colder seasons. They see to the upkeep of their hamlets, and maintain defenses against the depredations of outside threats. These activities are practiced each day, and are accepted by the legates and overlords who oversee the settlements. However, much lies hidden among the disparate communities of the heartlands. Former soldiers of the kingdom blended into the populace when the Shadow fell; weapons, armor, and other supplies were secured in safe places, kept ready against the day when they might be required. Vital skills are passed down through the generations. The art of growing and preparing herbal concoctions is maintained and passed on by the many healers throughout the plains, largely through the oral tradition. In some areas, the prohibited skills of reading and writing are still taught in hushed tones, a stubborn refusal to embrace the ignorance propagated by the Shadow.

The traditions of unarmed defense and protection emerged in the Last Age as a direct result of the banning of weapons and armor. The need for the common man to combat danger and ensure the survival of his fellows gave rise to the precepts of the defenders. Disparate numbers of these warriors are scattered along the Eren River's course and the shores of the Ardune, acting alone or in small, organized groups. Those settlements controlled by Shadow occupiers treat the presence of these warriors with disdain and distrust, as they are already protected from outside threats by the masters they serve. However, in regions outside the purview of the Shadow's servants, the reaction of the populace is often dictated by how defenders conduct themselves. Aggressive defenders who cause unrest and stir up trouble are often

regarded coolly, or with outright hostility by those they seek to protect. These men and women are regarded as bravos, disturbing the status quo. They often take it upon themselves to travel across the lands, countering the attacks of bandits in the wild, bands of slavers, and wandering undead. At times these warriors even engage Shadow patrols if encountered in particularly isolated areas. Chief among these wandering defenders are the insurgent commanders. While many townspeople regard these warriors as troublesome rabble-rousers to be violently opposed and cast out, other villagers feel the stirring of long-suppressed passions in their hearts when one of these charismatic generals and his fellows appear on the horizon.

Yet there are defenders who follow strict codes in the pursuit of their duties, acting with more subtlety and restraint. These warriors seek to keep their charges safe while pressing their cause against the Shadow. Unlike their less conspicuous counterparts, these defenders seek to keep a low profile; they know that the rash actions of their brothers-in-arms can cause more harm than good to the people they shield. Such men and women often form the core of their settlement's security forces, teaching their unique skills and approaches to warfare to able-bodied adults as well as to those youths who show promise. These protectors remain within their respective communities, never straying from their own environs. Generally, the common man appreciates the abilities of these noble defenders, respecting their abilities and fighting prowess.

The gnomes operating on the waters who are not in the service of the Shadow enjoy freedoms unmatched by any of their brethren across the lands. Lake patrols of orcs and human mercenaries cannot cover much territory, or lack pilots skilled enough to penetrate the hidden havens upon the great lake. The most prominent gnome trading families coordinate their activities with resistance groups across the southlands and central plains. These sailors provide smuggling and transportation services upon their many swift vessels. Messages are ferried between contacts on both the eastern and western shores, allowing communication between separate human and elven elements. Those resistance groups desperate for the most reliable supplies, contraband, and information trade with the gnomes for access to their greatest resource, the Ghost Raft. Many of the most successful resistance operations in the central plains attribute their fortunes to the clandestine efforts of the gnomes of the Ardune.

Dorgo's Dell

Dorgo's Dell sits perched within a fertile, grassy cleft in the hills east of the northern leg of the Ardune, a bustling village of 500 or so halflings. The Dell is an enigma among halfling dwellings in the Last Age, as the farming settlement enjoys little to no molestation from the forces of Shadow. Never has an orc set foot within the village, as the legate who administers the region from her remote villa leads an opulent lifestyle, and favors her earthy comforts. The fey living within her environs need only donate half the yield of their plentiful crop to the legate twice a year, a price they are glad to pay to live in relative freedom.

Farmer Ham, a particularly rotund farmer, has always had a particular talent where his garden is concerned. When the villagers gather the season's harvest at the festival of Zimra, Ham arrives with his cart full to bursting with the leafiest cabbages, the most succulent fruits, the ripest tomatoes. All who eat his squash, corn, or beans swear they come away a bit healthier, a bit sharper...altogether a bit *better* (not to mention a bit fatter) than they were before the meal. Indeed, there is strength in the soil of Ham's plot never before seen in the rich, bountiful farms of the central plains.

Some claim that a spirit sleeps in the soil below, others that it gave its life here to bless the halflings' community. Regardless, those who eat of the harvest during the pale, hot days of Zimra receive some unusual benefits: Some feel more robust or gain a spring in the step, while others feel a boost of mental alacrity. However, there is a dark side to the plot's magic. Should one gather the garden's yield under the night sky, the fruits of the earth instead inflict weakness and dull the senses. The effects of the garden's yield, whether taken during the day or night, last 24 hours. However, a particularly deadly danger comes during the darkness of the new moon. Should one eat of the garden's spoils taken under the new moon, he gains a boost in all of his physical abilities, suffers a loss in all of his mental abilities, and enters a raving, murderous rage. For the next 48 hours he will seek to slay all living creatures he sees in bloody, glorious melee.

Ham is aware of the evil potential of his garden, and takes great pains to ensure that no fruit is taken under the night sky. However, he has just made a horrifying discovery: Following the darkest night of the year, after suffering through a fitful sleep rife with horrifying nightmares, Ham woke to find a large amount of fruit and vegetables missing from his garden, torn from the dark earth.

Village of Mithlen

Upon the eastern banks of the Ardune, at the foot of the steep hills rising to the east, is the remote fishing village of Mithlen. This community of 600 Erenlanders lives a simple existence upon the waters, piloting rafts offshore to gather nets bursting with many varieties of the lake's fish, or expertly using rod and reel to draw forth the plentiful yield. One of dozens of similar villages along the Ardune's shores, the people of Mithlen have managed to live their lives under the gaze of the Shadow without drawing any attention. This is due largely to the village's distance from any major roads or waterways and its proximity to the deadlands of Ashenfeld to the northeast. When the rare orc patrol wanders by it is often on its way to places of greater import, and without fail dismisses the village as just another backwater to be passed by.

The current sheriff of Mithlen is a man in the prime of life, a capable fisherman and carpenter named Soril (Erenlander male, Def 3). He directs his community with a watchful eye, promoting order among his people, assisting in the maintenance and repair of the simple wooden dwellings, and when necessary guiding the defense against roaming beasts and Fell. The people respect Soril and regard him as a trusted friend and protector. Yet despite his love for his people and his village, Soril maintains a secret from his brothers and sisters, something he feels could be either a boon to the village, or a danger: the divinatory powers of the abandoned well upon the edge of Mithlen.

When Soril was a young man, his father related to him the tale of his grandfather's discovery of the unusual properties of the well. Before Soril's grandfather had left Mithlen to meet his doom he shared his knowledge with Soril's father,

Dorgo's Dell

Depending on the method of harvest, a subject who partakes of the fruits of Ham's plot is affected as follows.

Time Harvested	Fort Save	Effect	Duration
Daytime	DC 10	+2 to one physical ability score and to one mental ability score*	24 hours
Nighttime	DC 15	-2 to one physical ability score and to one mental ability score*	24 hours
New moon	DC 20	+2 to all physical stats, -4 to all mental stats, frenzy	48 hours

and bade him wait until he was such an age to learn its lessons fully, and to keep the secret power of the well safe. When Soril's father was 18 he descended into its depths, and there learned the hiding place of his own father's journal. Being unable to read, he kept the journal hidden until the time its contents might be revealed.

Soril's father died of illness soon after relating his tale to his son, but before he passed he gave the journal to Soril. When he reached his 18th birthday, he braved the secrets of the well, and emerged with the ability to read. As he grew into adulthood, he absorbed the writings of his grandfather, and learned many secrets that had been kept hidden from the people of Mithlen: his grandfather's former role as a protector of the kingdom; his association with knights of the realm in hiding; and the ancient, enchanted weapon he bore, bequeathed to him by generations of warriors of the land (the Staff of the Elder Tree; see p. 53). The last, hastily scribbled words upon the parchment also revealed his vision of the black mirror to the northeast and his resolve to destroy this threat.

Soril now serves as the successor to his family's legacy. He protects the secret of the well, and he has used the knowledge he gained from his grandfather's journal to keep the villagers under his care better prepared against the threats abroad. Soril also wrestles with the choices before him: Should he remain in Mithlen, keeping the people safe, but ignorant of the knowledge he guards? Should he share the secret of the well's properties with his people, possibly benefiting them, but in so doing risking drawing the attention of the Shadow? Or should he choose his successor as sheriff and seek out his grandfather's mighty weapon, taking up his former burden and purpose as his own?

The Wily Captain

Captain Glan Gemwinkle (CG Gnome, Chn [Charismatic] 10/Rog 3) is nearly a legend among the sailors upon the Ardune. He has been a servant of the Shadow for decades, transporting supplies and weapons from as far north as Swift Water all the way west to Eisin. Recently, his swift barque has been pressed into service as a carrier of elite orc fists; the orcs, ordinarily terrified to travel upon the water, do not seem to mind journeys upon Glan's craft. Indeed, the chosen of Izrador who must traverse the Ardune approach the prospect of such a journey with almost a savage glee, as the reputation of this captain and the services he provides has spread among the Shadow's forces in the region.

It is said among the former passengers of Glan's ship, *Marlin*, that the craft glides upon the waves with nary a bump. The captain of the vessel carries the strongest, most bitter ale and liquor available in the region. He makes available incredibly fragrant, heady tobacco in great quantity. He knows a thousand of the bawdiest orc songs, and his crooning and singing never fail to send the orcs into fits of howling, screaming laughter. Those orcs disembarking from

Glan's ship leave in as pleasant a humor as the odrendor are capable of.

Captain Glan and his crew have spent years consorting in secret with gnome resistance contacts of the Ghost Raft, gathering lore and hidden knowledge. They have trafficked with elemental spirits of the darkest regions of the Ardune and bargained for the power they confer. And they have carefully developed their innate talents for magic, applying the rare

The Well of Ancient Wisdom

This small, decrepit well lies upon a small spit of shoreline off the Ardune. Those who draw forth the waters of this well and drink must make a DC 15 Will save or immediately lose interest in the well and wander away, the well considered mundane from that time forward. A person who makes the save, or who makes a DC 20 Spot check, takes notice of the well-camouflaged handholds running down the narrow shaft. A descent to the well's bottom, a hundred feet below, reveals a small cavern, where the slow trickle of spring water murmurs like voices in a long-forgotten tongue. Should one spend a day and night listening to the waters he may make a Will save. The result of the save determines the degree of knowledge gleaned from the murmurs of the past, be it some small piece of local history, a lost skill, a rumor of powerful lore, or a truly wondrous ancient secret lost since the time of the elthedar. Further time within the cavern yields no further knowledge from this conduit of Aryth's lore.

Will Save:	Degree of Knowledge Learned:
DC 10	Piece of local history of past 10 years
DC 15	Little-known historical fact of last 10-50 years; access to a skill not normally available
DC 20	The name or general disposition of an important leader or personality of the region; the nature and weaknesses of a beast of the region; the rumored haunt of a powerful spirit
DC 25	The location of a power nexus in the region; the forgotten location of a covenant item; the formula for a spell
DC 30+	The location of a lost fortress of the elthedar; the True Name of a powerful spirit; a secret only one of the Night Kings shares

spellcasting rituals they have learned in ways best suited to subvert and sabotage the servants of Shadow they come in contact with. When transporting the orcs to the eastern front, Glan and his gnome crew soften up their passengers with the best spirits and tobacco they can obtain. Outrageous performances are staged featuring vulgar orc songs and clownish antics. Then the gnomes begin weaving in the influence of their powerful magics, insidiously manipulating the minds of the orcs on board, altering their perceptions of the journey. Through employing their rituals, they ensure that their spells are virtually undetectable by any astiraxes that might be on the lake or wandering the shores. After a few days of being subjected to these potent glamours, the orcs go their way, secure in the belief they have had a rollicking, rolling time upon the *Marlin*. Further, the rumors of this wonderful ship and its comforts are reserved only for the elite of the Shadow's troops; former passengers feel that mere grunts are not deserving of such pleasures.

This is exactly what Glan desires and has worked so hard to achieve over the years. For, in addition to altering the memories of the orcs upon his ship, he and his crew conduct their secret rituals to plant harmful suggestions and triggers within the minds of the weakest troops they carry on board. Those they influence often carry out these directives days or even weeks after leaving the *Marlin*, and the results are quick and brutal. A warrior might hurl a vicious, personal insult against a superior during inspection. One orc's grip upon his weapon may slip during a drill, severely wounding a compatriot. An officer could fall to the blow of a trusted bodyguard during battle. Thus far, no connection has been made between the journeys upon the *Marlin* and these incidents, and Glan and his crew continue to inflict as much damage as they can upon the enemy.

Erenhead

The sallow brute sauntered through the stagnant alley, smiling crookedly as he turned to the burly bugbear behind him. "There's one over there, next to that sack of garbage. Go fetch her, Rog." The malformed goblin-kin shuffled forward, his arms nearly scraping the ground before him. He loped past the pitiful ranks of the drunk, the diseased, and the starv-

ing, drawing up short before the slight, shapely form wrapped in filthy blankets. Matted black hair hung down from what was visible of the woman's face; one of her eyes was swollen shut and purple, and when she took in breath in shallow wheezes, Rog could see that only a few teeth remained behind her chapped lips.

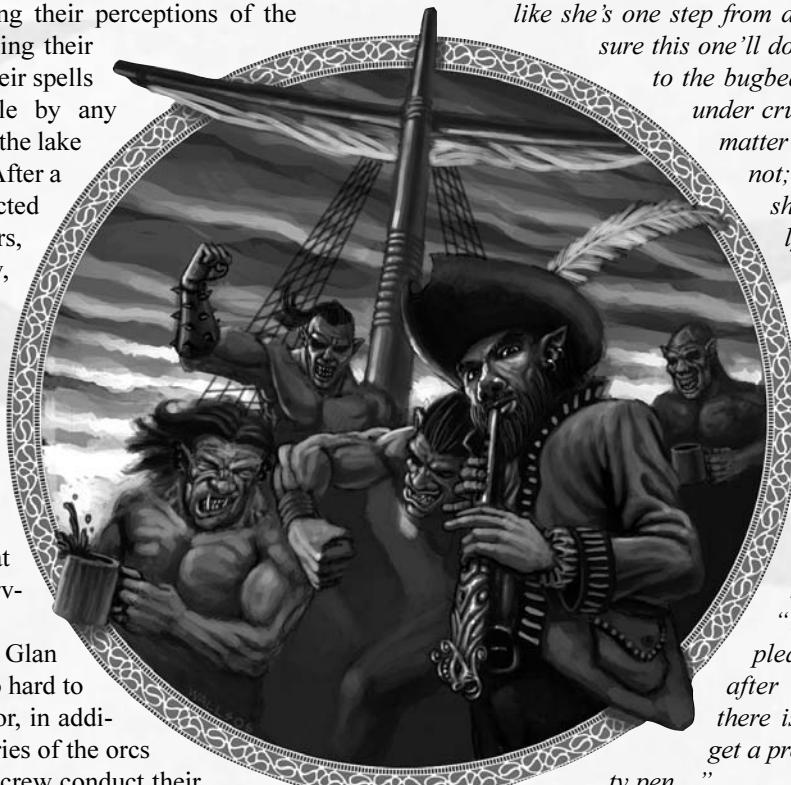
Laughing, Rog scooped up the wretch, lifting her roughly to her feet as she moaned weakly in protest. "Looks like she's one step from death," he croaked. "You sure this one'll do?" The huge man turned to the bugbear, showing a rude smirk under cruel yellowed eyes. "Don't matter much if she can step or not; where she'll be goin' she'll be of more use just lyin' still." The man chuckled as he turned to continue down the alley. "Check her pockets for barter, Rog. You never know what this trash might've lucked into, eh?"

A rough, muffled gurgle came in reply. As the slaver took a few more steps, he remarked, "Yeah, Lohknar will be pleased with this bunch. And after that piece you've got there is cleaned up a bit, we'll get a pretty penny for her. A pretty pen..."

The steel blade plunged through his windpipe, the air of his last word escaping the jagged hole as a rough gasp. As the body slumped to the stone, the bedraggled woman returned the ornate knife to its hiding place in the folds of her torn cloak, the leering skull on its hilt dripping with blood. "The hell you will, scum," she hissed. "The hell you will."

Lands and People

Erenhead, the gateway to the south, crouches upon the southern shore of the Sea of Pelluria, straddling the headwaters of the Eren River. The city served as a major trade partner with the Dornish coastal cities upon the north shores of the sea until the end of the Third Age. When the Shadow's black war galleons made their ponderous crossing of the Pelluria toward the port city, the Torbault fleet led by Hedgreg the Last flew north over stormy seas to stem the enemy's advance. They could not hope to defeat the forces stretching across the horizon, but served to deflect their landing west of the city, there to be met by the desperate remnant of the High King's army. Alas, this final alliance of man, elf,



and dwarf was swept aside before such overwhelming force, and the armies of darkness marched on to the defenseless city. Rich farmlands, as well as the humble Erenlanders who carefully nurtured nature's yield, were trampled and smashed underfoot. Tiny villages of halflings, who lived secure in the comforting shadow of the great city's walls, were borne screaming to the orcs' cookpots. The city walls were breached, and the black hordes burned the trade fleets at the docks, sending a fortune of Dornish trade goods to the bottom of the sea. Within a day most of the city's people lay hacked to death in the streets or were devoured by vicious shadowspawn; those who survived were clapped in irons and immediately pressed into servitude and slavery.

In the present, this once-proud gateway to the south is a filthy, sprawling city, resembling a vast black heart pulsing with the rhythm and flow of the orc military machine. Its two halves are bisected by the southern surge of the mighty Eren River. A constant stream of battle barges, troop transports, and supply skiffs piloted by harried gnomes pass under the soaring arch of the Peredon, the enormous stone causeway connecting the east and west districts of the city. These craft make their way south hundreds of miles, passing squat watchtowers and way stations for the Shadow's patrols. The ancient storehouses off the port and along the Eren, which once held the riches of the greatest Dorn cities upon the inland sea, now hold weapons and supplies for the orc troops. Once-opulent mansions of the Great Houses and trade coalitions of Dornish nobles have been converted to barracks and smithies for the Shadow's troops. Those inns, taverns, and tackhouses in good repair near the heart of the city service the ever-moving orc soldiery. Farther from the city's core are the rundown slums and shanties of those humans still trying to eke out an existence under the Shadow's boot heel. Beyond the last of the crumbling limestone buildings and the gray stone walls lie thousands of acres of farmland, worked by several thousand halfling and human slaves and policed by vicious bands of bugbears. Goblins drive acres of boro across the grassy plains; these are allowed to feed what meager grass they can find before being sent along with departing army groups or are slaughtered to feed those soldiers stationed within the walls.

In the Last Age, the majority of the city's human population is enslaved. Erenlander and Dornish thralls spend all of their waking hours loading and offloading materiel between transport ships for the Shadow's armies. Gnome rivermen avoid the barked insults and the occasional whip of orc overseers as they scramble to prepare their crafts for landing or launch. Those residents who operate the few establishments remaining in the city work for the needs of the orcs. These once-proud business owners and workmen are practically slaves themselves, working excruciatingly long and difficult days with little sleep to accommodate their vicious patrons. In the slums, the plight of the people is grievous. Starvation, disease, and death are common, and often the destitute savage each other for a cast-off, filthy blanket or a scrap of rank

Battle of Shadows

Since the middle of the Third Age, legates sought to establish power centers for the dark priesthood throughout the human-controlled lands. A few of the earliest temples of the Order, constructed hundreds of years ago in secrecy, still stand in remote, desolate regions of the central plains. While some of these early footholds of Izrador's faithful were discovered and destroyed by the kingdom's troops, or were deserted over the years, a handful have grown into potent strongholds for the legates. These temples and their dark mirrors are hard-pressed to claim enough victims from the rural countryside to maintain their powers, and their control switches frequently between the Cabal and the Devout. Many legates consider these shifting strong points to be the front lines of the battle between those two factions of the Order.

garbage. Outside of the city walls, the enslaved halflings and humans live a hopeless existence. The plight of these slaves is perhaps the most desperate among the human and halfling populations under the Shadow: These pathetic laborers are worked unceasingly until they drop, only to become fresh rations for their overseers.

Governance

The district commander, Murkul (LN Orc, Ftr [Leader of Men] 10), a skilled veteran of Jahzir's army, maintains iron discipline among the orcs active in Erenhead. He metes out swift and brutal punishments and executions to keep the troops in line. Infighting is rare, with the orcs often taking out any frustrations upon the unlucky Erenlander or Dornish serfs who get in their way. When orc fights orc, Murkul makes a special example of those who break discipline. The *dugh thruk*, or "road of filth," runs along the final stretch of cobblestones approaching the east gate of Erenhead city. Orcs line either side of this morbid street, hamstrung by their own vardatches, and bound to wooden posts with shackles melted down from their own helms. The dregs of the population are encouraged to taunt and ridicule the ranks of damned before their black souls are claimed by Izrador; this final humiliation at the hands of the maggots of the slums is more hateful to the orc troops than any death on the battlefield or torture by the legates.



The military machine runs more smoothly in the city of Erenhead than in any other settlement in Erenland, and with good reason: When Jahzir's forces took the city, he knew this port would be the most important supply point for the Shadow's forces south of the Pelluria. The Night King would tolerate no lack of discipline among his troops, and particularly no interference from members of the Order. When Erenhead fell at the beginning of the Last Age, he used all of his political influence to install military leadership in the district. In the present day, Soldier Legate Lerima Surali (Erenlander female, Leg 16) oversees the temples of the Erenhead district. Her loyalties lie with Jahzir and the Shadow's military, and her greatest passion is to press Izrador's war against the hated fey. She proudly works with Murkul and elite officers of the Order of the Fulminate Shield to deliver the Shadow's chosen to the far-flung war fronts, and she utilizes her sanction to ensure that the influence of other legates, particularly those of the Devout, is kept reined in within her domain.

The Shadow

Life in the city and its environs is a constant state of furious movement and oppressive misery. In addition to the thousands of troops and heavy supply trains headed west to Grial the Fey Killer, Jahzir's gift for the dwarves—an orc juggernaut 120,000 strong—gathers within the walls, upon the plains, and along the docks. The pace is frenzied yet ordered as the movements to the fronts churn onward. Thousands of new troops arrive every day, and within the space of a few days they drill, resupply, form up with their respective warbands and armies, and ship out again.

The temple of Erenhead resides underneath a small keep overlooking the harbor and northern shores of the Pelluria. The newly-ascended blood mirror within claims the lives of many of the weak of the city: The diseased, the elderly, the infirm, and those slaves worked to the edge of death all fall under the sacrificial blade. The same fate awaits those orc warriors who are crippled by battle or accident and are unable to fight at the front; they meet their end moaning their last, bloody gasps into the ebon surface of the black mirror.

Dominion of the River

Commerce and transport of military supplies and personnel are monitored closely and ruthlessly by the patrols traveling the Eren River. Craft

within miles of Erenhead city, departing or arriving, are subject to frequent searches for contraband and hidden cargo. Hobgoblin patrols seek out resistance operatives known to move along the crags and cliffs of the eastern bluffs of the river valley, and pursue them upon the water. Orc fists also search along the numerous overgrown trails and dirt paths stretching into the central plains, keeping watch for militant riders of the horseclans, lone wildlanders who harass Shadow couriers, and insurgent commanders who travel to different communities, fomenting unrest.

Shadow activity is heaviest from Erenhead port to the gnome village of Swift Water. Southwest of Swift Water, the rivercraft head more directly southwest toward the mouth of the Felthera, away from the shore and into the deeper waters. Fishing boats and skiffs are much more plentiful here as the gnomes and few human fishermen stay close to the shorelines, leaving the deeper waters to passing barques and barges. In these areas a cautious traveler who keeps his head down may avoid the reach of Izrador for a time.

Road Towers

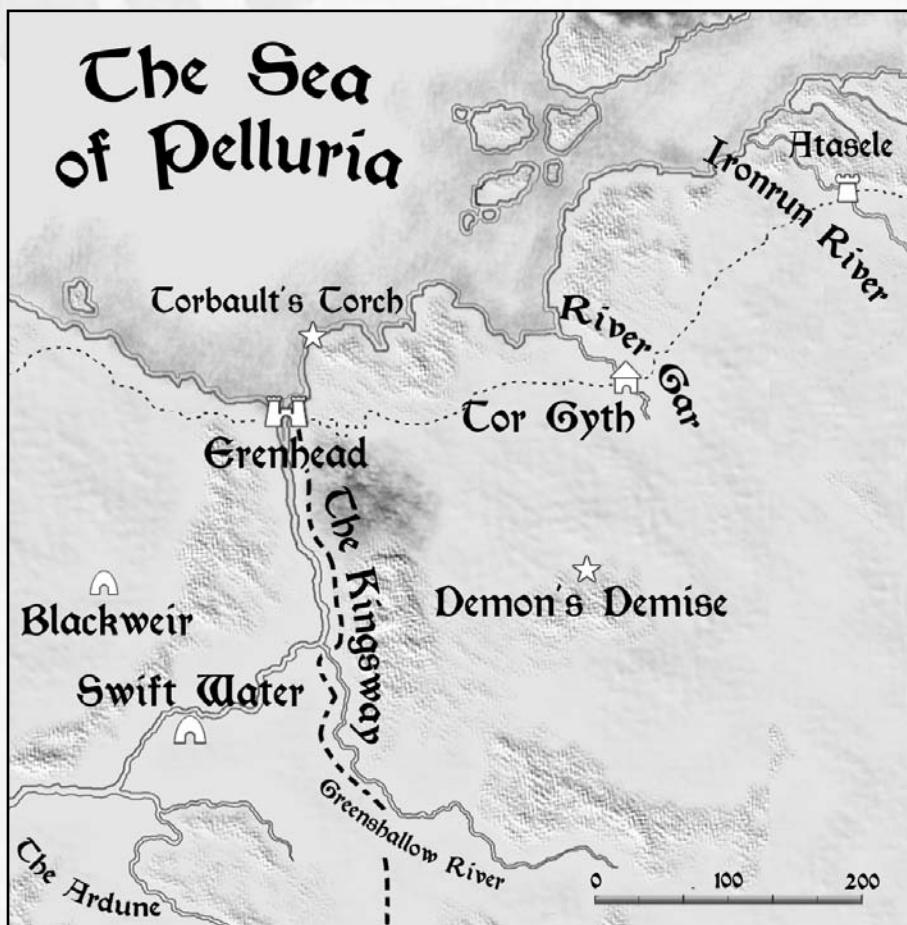
Stretching a few days' march apart along the Salt Road, the River Road, and east into the open plains are the old road towers of the lost Kingdom of Erenland. Those towers within 100 miles of Erenhead city are well maintained, with ample smithies, stables, and food stores for Shadow forces. They are constantly used by passing orc patrols, tithe takers, and the occasional traveling legate and his entourage. Towers are spaced less frequently the farther they are from Erenhead, and are sparsely manned, with fewer resources available for soldiery. The towers southwest of Swift Water, in particular, bear the full brunt of 100 years of decay and neglect; many of these small forts are either partially collapsed or are inhabited by reclusive bandits, foul spirits, or worse horrors. Travelers upon the road would be wise to avoid camping within a few miles of one of these ruins.

Tor Gyth

Some 200 miles east of the city of Erenhead, perched upon a stony bluff overlooking the River Gar, is the town of Tor Gyth ("Battle Hill" in Dornish). The site of a deadly engagement between Dorns and Sarcosans in the Second Age, this sprawling collection of limestone houses and granaries

provides additional rations for troops on the road to Low Rock. The 2,000 or so Erenlanders and Dorn farmers raise boro for the bulk of the orc soldiers, but also harvest crops and tend to additional livestock on the rising hills and fields northeast of the village. The vegetables, bread, and cheeses they produce are largely reserved for the human members of the Order of Shadow who occupy the town.

The legate Herumar (NE Erenlander, Leg 9) controls the community; he oversees the activities of the Shadow temple in town and administers the distribution of goods and supplies to the orcs passing through to the eastern front. Installed in this region by the Devout, he works to forward the interest of the legates of the region, and has an additional mission: to obtain and secure hidden magics and enchanted items throughout the area. These are to be given to the most worthy of Jahzir's troops to sway their loyalties toward the Devout, as well as to be taken to Cambrial for the experiments of the Night King, Sunulael. Herumar's indispensable minion in this task is the wizened sage Zalvius Curiata (LE Erenlander, Exp2/Chn 6), a gifted herbalist and student of arcane lore. Herumar grants him considerable freedoms in his research: The legates and their astiraxes have been instructed to turn a blind eye upon many of Zalvius's activities. However, Herumar is aware of the fine line he walks in allowing a channeler to operate so freely in his service, and is sure to



Demon's Demise

Within the vast swordgrass of the Plains of Erenhead lie the blackened bones of what was once an astirax-possessed beast, killed when a huge lightning bolt struck a Shadow patrol heading toward Tor Gyth. This violent release of energy was enhanced as the powerful enchanted items being transported by the astirax's party were destroyed by the blast. The shards of these detonated items fused with the astirax's remains, resulting in the creation of a unique power nexus.

Items crafted from the creature's bones, and the effects they create, are undetectable by *detect magic* or similar spells or the detection ability of astiraxes. However, the unique substance of the nexus must be incorporated into magic items thus crafted, and there is a finite amount of the remains which can be so utilized. Once all of the astirax's remains have been used, the nexus is destroyed forever.

Spell Energy: 50

Feats Allowed: Any item creation feats

Affinity: None

Recovery: 1 spell energy per day. Note: Spell energy used in the crafting of items is permanently depleted.

Special: While items are being created, the spells used to form them burn like bright, invisible beacons. The range at which this magic energy can be detected by astiraxes is tripled.

make Zalvius aware of it as well. Any suspicious activity or spell cast for the wrong reason could send Zalvius to the sacrificial altar.

Unknown to Herumar, Zalvius has recently made an incredible discovery while searching an area south of Tor Gyth, upon the plains of Erenhead. At the site of a mighty lightning strike, he discovered a power nexus which imparts unique eldritch benefits: Items crafted at the nexus shed no magical signature. Zalvius has not yet reported his discovery to Herumar. Though he knows that withholding this knowledge could cost him his life and his soul, having access to such unbridled power has proven to be a temptation difficult to resist. Zalvius, despite his advanced age and his sense of personal preservation, has a great love and hunger for eldritch power, and this outlet of Aryth's lifeblood beckons him. He faces a very dangerous decision.

The Resistance

The Shadow holds absolute control over the communities of the Erenhead district. The port city is run with an iron

fist. Slaves working within the city and outside its walls keep their heads down; they dare not look upward, even in hope, for fear of catching the eye of a harsh overseer or an unruly orc. Traffic along the major roads and the Eren River is heavily regulated, and many towns and villages are either occupied by orc garrisons or visited monthly for collection of the tithe. The common people living off the land must remain within the boundaries of their communities, working together to provide for their daily needs and to defend themselves from vicious beasts and predators without. Prevailing wisdom dictates that the common man does what he must, without complaint, and is thankful for his life.

Despite the apparent acceptance of this imposed servitude, there is the potential for the flame of rebellion within every Erenlander. It might exist as a mere spark: A woman keeps surplus food for her family beneath a trapdoor in her root cellar; a lone fisherman lies to a passing patrol about the wanderer he met that day; children find a rusty dagger by a brook and hide it from the town's legate overseer. Sometimes the bright spirit within the people is roused, and generations of lessons teaching temperance and restraint under the Shadow are forgotten in a blazing moment of fury and righteousness. Those who can no longer tolerate their lot, and the state of the suppressed people around them, are capable of desperate action: shouldering pack and bow and braving the wilderness in hopes of joining a band of raiders; hiding and abetting an armed wanderer within one's basement; or using a family's heirloom, a decorative sword hidden for decades in the rafters of an old house, to attack an unsuspecting orc trooper.

Blackweir

Perched atop a grassy tor, rising above scrawny orchards and dull fields, is the town of Blackweir. This agricultural settlement of about 500 people lies midway between Eisín and Erenhead, as the astirax flies. The people of the region have lived in relative isolation for many years: Blackweir is far enough away from the bustle and chaos of the war to have avoided drawing attention to itself after the end of the Third Age. However, the Shadow has many eyes, and this remote town has finally fallen under the gaze of the black tower.

Over the course of the last century, legate priests have occasionally been dispatched to Blackweir to complete the construction of its Shadow temple. Yet time and time again, the legates sent to Blackweir have disappeared, never to be seen again. With the minds of the elder legates occupied with the Shadow's expansion elsewhere, the disappearances in the remote backwater town have gone largely unnoticed by Theros Obsidia. As the decades pass, other legates are eventually dispatched to Blackweir again, only to once more vanish. In fact, should an archivist of Theros Obsidia seek to study the matter (none have yet done so), records would show that more than a dozen legates have disappeared in the Blackweir area since the end of the Third Age.

Business in the small town has continued unchanged at its slow rural pace. The inhabitants of Blackweir are aware of the strange occurrences surrounding the past legates of the town, but ask no questions and lock their doors at night. Only local ghost stories, told to the children by firelight, hint of Blackweir's savage history.

The absence of any continuous legate presence has over the years made Blackweir a little-known haven for both the corrupt and the idealistic. Yet, despite its relative safety, no substantial shadow resistance ever took root in Blackweir. Although members of both Sarcosan and Erenlander rebel groups have sought to use the remote town as a base, such activity has been discouraged by resistance elders. It is rumored that powerful forces, perhaps even the Witch Queen herself, desires Blackweir to remain forgotten and unnoticed by the shadow.

Five years ago, the most recent legate arrived in town and ordered the resumption of the temple construction. The legate, named Tosh Kamar, brought with him an Erenhead master builder, Dolan, to oversee the work on the temple. To the people around him, Legate Kamar seemed self-absorbed, aloof, and oblivious to the machinations of the town's corrupt mayor of many years, Madame Lesher. Keeping his own counsel, Tosh Kamar was a remote and conflicted personality, often absorbing himself in books and scrolls of Erenland history. About two years ago, like the others before him, Tosh Kamar disappeared in the dark of the night. The town resumed life without a legate, as it had done many times before.

With the disappearance of Tosh Kamar, Lesher saw an opportunity to increase her lot. By intimidating the master builder Dolan, she has concocted a scheme to tithe the town's residents in the name of the temple construction, but keeps the lion's share of the profits herself. When a local band of outlaws recently appeared in the nearby woods, she used their disruptions as yet another opportunity. With Dolan's knowledge of the temple supply caravans, she is feeding information to the outlaws through a third party. The temple supply attacks have conveniently given Lesher pretext to increase the tithing further, and thus her own wealth. Lesher's residence is the old ruined keep atop the tor, where, like a loathsome spider, she weaves her webs of theft, murder, and corruption. Neither the legates nor the outlaws have yet uncovered Lesher's clever manipulations.

The fate of Blackweir is about to change. As Sunulael grows increasingly impatient to see the completion of all the Erenland temples and their mirrors, the powers of Theros Obsidia have finally noticed the slow progress of the Blackweir temple, and with it, the disappearance of Tosh Kamar.

The Order has thus dispatched the legate Mag Kiln (LE Erenlander, Leg 7/Redeemer 5) to investigate the disappearance and resume the temple construction. He has brought his bodyguard Kruse (CE Erenlander Def 2/Rogue 6), and on the request of his superior, is escorted by Chuzara, a Preceptor of Pain of the Sisterhood of Tender Mercies (NE Erenlander Leg 9).

Beneath Blackweir

Blackweir is more than just a dilapidated village. Beneath the old ruins of the hill rests a significant history. Though the stories of the late Third Age have been suppressed, the keep on Blackweir tor was a strongpoint of Erenland's defense, holding out against the Shadow's army for weeks after the initial invasion. The dragons came, of course, and razed the town and upper keep, but a massive network of tunnels hid the resistance below. Some say that the King of Erenland retreated here after the Last Battle, and used the maze of tunnels to strike out against his foes. Whatever the truth of that tale, it is known that Jahzir himself came to the remains of the town and personally led the final push that destroyed the surviving defenders. The town was rebuilt, repopulated with nearby families who had surrendered, and the land has moved on.

Yet, the ground beneath Blackweir remembers. It is a mysterious and haunted place. In its depths lingers a great secret and power of the past. Whatever it is, the Witch Queen thinks enough of it to occasionally send high-ranking elves to Blackweir to meet with its secret protector, a human named Grimmor (N Erenlander, Channeler [hermetic] 13). The elderly sage has recently been aided by a man named Morrec, who appeared at about the same time that Tosh Kamar vanished. Morrec has gathered and trained a band of outlaws, leading them on occasional raids against orc patrols and temple supply caravans. His actions have earned him the name "The Hunter" among friend and foe.

Deliverance from Below

Slaves of the Erenhead farms live pathetic, abbreviated lives. They work stooped among the rows of vegetables, their sweat and tears falling upon the rich earth, laboring from the early light of dawn well into the twilight hours. Bugbear and goblin overseers, irritated by the bright, blinding daylight hours through which they must drive their thralls, are particularly cruel with the slaves; beatings are as likely to be delivered upon hard workers as they are upon those who fall behind.

Halflings comprise much of the slave labor of the region: Their natural skill at farming and the ease with which they can be supervised and dominated doomed the smallfolk of the region to lives of unending servitude. While many of these thralls struggle through their days without hope of salvation, there are a few who do what they can to win freedom for their enslaved brothers.

One such halfling, Nob (NG halfling, Chn [spiritual] 7), found himself in the role of deliverer after being captured while searching out nature spirits upon the plains of Erenhead. Years of previous freedom had allowed Nob to develop considerable skill with magic; he was already an accomplished channeler before he was abducted by slavers and marched to the farms. After some time in the fields, he realized that when the sun was highest and brightest, the goblins were the most lax, tending to stay in the shade of their few lean-tos and guard shacks. Nob's strong will and desire for freedom overcame his common sense, so one particularly sunny day he chanced using his magic to summon a creature, anything that he might use to cause a distraction or give him a chance of escape. The ground gave way beneath him, and he found himself in a tunnel facing a huge, mandibled insect that readily obeyed his commands.

Since that day, Nob has hidden beneath the fields and expanded his tunnels by hand, cautiously summoning his burrowing friend to Aryth to help him dig out the more difficult sections. Always under the cover of brightest day, during lulls in the goblin patrols, Nob and his companion open small, rough tunnels in the farmland above, allowing the escape of one slave at a time. When taking a slave, Nob casts some amount of rabbit or rodent blood upon the grasses in the area; this leads the goblins to believe that the missing worker was taken by a prowling grass cat or plains leopard. Nob and his companion then carefully seal up the hole to avoid detection, and guide escapees to the unpatrolled plains. Thus far he has been successful in his endeavors, freeing some 20 slaves. However, he realizes that his luck cannot hold out forever, and with every rescue he risks discovery, torture, and death by the minions of Shadow.

Gnomes on the River

The span of the Eren River from southern Erenhead city approaching the village of Swift Water is under the absolute control of the Shadow. The many patrols, towers manned by Izrador's soldiery, and frequent stops and searches of passing craft make travel on the northern span of the Eren a risky venture. The gnomes operating under direct command of Shadow forces, whether transporting troops, military supplies, or couriers, have few freedoms. Crews of these craft must be attentive and vigilant, lest the slightest comment or sideward glance be construed as an insult to the boat's occupants, a sure path toward painful or lethal punishment.

Those gnomes traveling in the environs of Swift Water and areas south along the Eren suffer far less interference from Shadow forces. The higher number of gnome villages along the banks result in shorter journeys, and the shorter the journey, the more likely a gnome captain is to take on the risk of contraband cargo. Communication between villages and passing craft is rapid and effective; the use of colored flags and banners, the blowing of horns or other musical instruments, or the spreading of colored dyes in the water all serve

to pass along messages regarding the state of affairs upon passing craft, or indeed within the dwellings of the region. It is the rare gnome crew that is caught unawares upon this area of the river.

The Horseclans

While the armies of Shadow were sacking the city of Erenhead, mounted couriers were spreading word of its fall as they sprinted from town to town throughout the falling kingdom. Those men of the central plains who had skill on horseback and the will to fight gathered up their weapons and joined the mounted bands roving the Eren River Valley and the Plains of Erenhead. Several thousand of these armed riders fought harrying actions against the Shadow's advance, ambushing scouts, raiding supply depots, and attacking isolated orc nests. As the first few years following the kingdom's collapse passed, the number of free clans was decimated as the cavalry of the Shadow armies, mostly Sarcosan mercenaries, was brought north to hunt down their former brothers, band by band.

In the present day, a few thousand riders, mostly comprising Erenlanders and Dorns, roam the central plains, but these groups are isolated, small in number, and have wildly disparate motivations. Some parties have devolved to savage banditry, raiding remote villages for food, tools, and sometimes women for their own sport. Others have entered the slave trade, dealing with groups of humanoids who have no scruples as to the source of the flesh they acquire. There are those, however, who have not lost their humanity and their sense of what is right. These bands do what they can to harass the occupiers within their lands. Some groups escort refugees displaced from villages sacked by marauders or depleted by slavers. Other riders attack isolated watchtowers or patrol groups. A few bands seek contact with Sarcosan freeriders upon the borders of Erenhead district, sometimes joining together briefly to perform difficult raids. These groups, though brave and with noble aspirations, are spread thin across the lands, and lack a leader to unite them into a cohesive force.

Torbault's Torch

When Hedgreg the Last led his fleet north from the harbor of Erenhead to meet his doom, a great annual storm had already begun sweeping its way along the southern Pellorian coast, roiling the waves and blackening the sky. The ferocity of that storm was greater than any alive at the time could remember. Some witnesses claimed it was the anger of Aryth herself made manifest that day, railing against the coming Shadow. When the black fleets arrived some days later, a winged serpent flew ahead of the black ships and assaulted the harbor, engulfing the docked ships in flame. Before it flew away, the dragon attacked the lighthouse offshore, reducing it to a melted spire of slag resembling a burned-out candle.

As the decades have passed, the great storm still pays its yearly visit, tossing about the craft roped to the quays, flooding the docks, and effectively shutting down the city while it spends its fury. Since the end of the Third Age, the chaos and deafening noise of the storm has been a time of relative inactivity and respite from the harshness of daily existence. The orcs of the city stay indoors to wait out nature's fury, and the taverns overflow with patrons taking advantage of the lull to drink the taps dry. However, over the years the time of the storm has brought with it a growing legend: the flame of Torbault's Torch. Some say that when the skies blacken and the thunder roars, the spirit of Hedgreg returns to his city, blazing as a defiant beacon upon the top of the former lighthouse of the harbor, bringing illumination and hope to those living in perpetual darkness.

Despite the legend, many of the residents of the city have never looked upon the flame during their lifetimes. This is not surprising to those who hold hope, as it is also said that only a man with a stout heart and goodly comport is able to glimpse the flame upon the ruined tower; certainly many who have braved the docks during the height of the storm have glimpsed nothing but black swirling clouds and smashing waves off the shore. Still, from time to time a particularly brave and noble soul will look out beyond the churning surf and spy the bright, pure flame of Torbault's Torch, and gain its wisdom.

Urban Resistance

Organized resistance in the city is a difficult to maintain, given the overwhelming numbers of heavily armed orcs that dominate the population. Direct, violent action against the military is almost unheard of. Those who raise knife or fist against the soldiery find themselves drawn and quartered (and often eaten) publicly, or crucified and put on display within the central square of the city. This said, the cover provided by the amount of activity moving troops and materials to the fronts allows for some limited activity against the occupiers. Gnome river crews secrete the occasional escaped halfling slave in a cramped crawlspace of a barque. Erenlander craftsmen forced to work the forges under orc whips pass along iron scraps for transport by gnome smugglers. Innkeepers poison select droughths of beer and ale to sicken orc patrons.

The one organized element within Erenhead is the Avenging Knives, whose scattered cells work independently from one another within the city. These individuals receive their instructions through coded, discreet messages, such as obscure symbols carved upon dock pylons or colored rags hung out of windows. Agents perform select assassinations when they can, and avail themselves of indiscriminate killings when the rare opportunity presents itself. These agents are aware that tensions and frustrations among the orc



Torbault's Torch

Effect: A subject must be of good alignment with minimum Charisma and Wisdom scores of 14 in order to see the flame. Meditation upon Torbault's Torch bestows the following spell effects (CL 20th) upon the subject for the entirety of the duration of the Great Storm (three full days): *commune with nature, heroism, remove fear*.

military are particularly high with the coming escalation against the dwarves of the Kaladrums. Jahzir's ire and waning patience is represented by an increase in the public punishment of troops. The Knives have taken advantage of this spike of anger and paranoia to press their attacks. A captured vardatch might be used to kill a lone, belligerent orc staggering away from a tavern brawl. Weak acid might be dripped on the iron bonds of those orcs along the dug thruk who have become Fell, allowing them to later burst their bonds and wreak havoc among passing patrols. The Knives take what targets they can, always hoping for the chance to strike at higher-ranking officers or legates.

Low Rock

"What if they're following him?" As always, Hano was the first to voice doubts. Kerin was getting old. He was aging, and had started to feel it. The ride had tired him, and that fact pained him no end. In his resentment, he did the wrong thing, and took his anger out on his juniors. "Then we'll just have to kill his pursuers, Hano!" The statement could have been meant as a joke, but his glare and cold tone carried anger and sarcasm. The younger dunni looked confused, and the wogren shifted uncomfortably, sensing the rising tension.

Realizing his unfairness toward the inquisitive novice, Kerin sighed, and turned back to viewing the fugitive through his eyeglass. It was one of the tribe's greatest treasures, and once again, he thanked the winds for having blown the starving horsemen their way. Friends were hard to come by, and friends with something to offer the Kedunni were even rarer. Exactly where the thing had come from he did not know, but it carried intricate scrollwork that Kerin assumed to be letters in the southerners' high tongue. It did not matter.

"We'll just have to keep an eye on him for now," Kerin concluded. "Wait and see." Still viewing the haggard human through the tube, he couldn't see which of his trainees answered, but Hano's voice was unmistakable: "He doesn't look well. What if he dies?" This time, Kerin retained his calm. He's just learning. Let him. This won't be your duty much longer, so let them question and learn. "He'll fall before that. If he does, and does not get up, circle around a few miles behind him and look for followers. If there are none, bring him in. If he's tracked, leave him."

"Kinda brutal, isn't it? What if they're hunting him, not using him as bait?" Kerin lowered the telescope, and looked the next generation's warrior in the eyes. "It's a harsh world, lad. Learn that now, and learn it well."

Lands and People

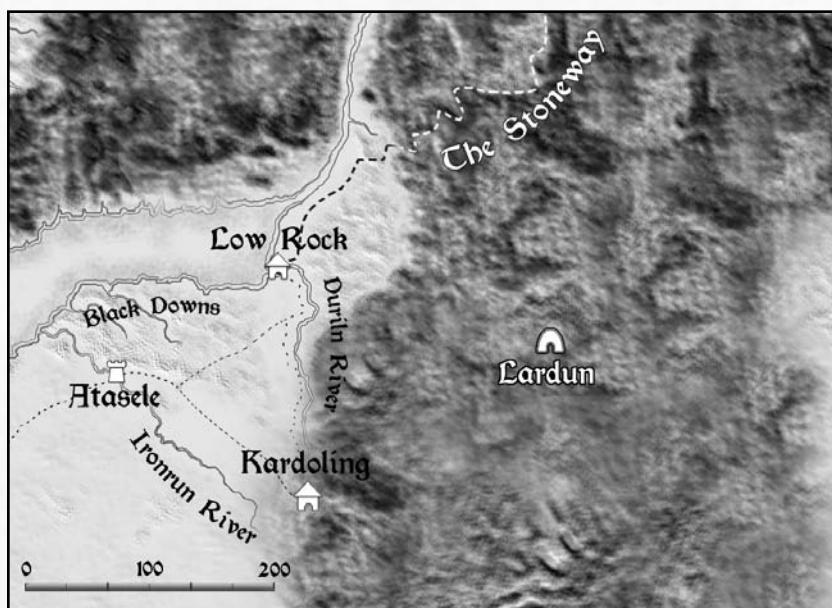
Even before the coming of Izrador, Low Rock was a difficult region to live in. It is dominated by moors, cliffs, and foothills, and possesses few natural resources to sustain itself or to trade with a decaying world. Its people had once gotten by on trade with the mountain fey, but the growing isolation of the dwarves in the Second and Third Ages reduced the district to poverty. Its remote location and lack of resources made it beneath the notice of the struggling Kingdom of Erenland in its waning days, and the same held true when the Shadow came to conquer it. Despite their bravery, the warriors of House Orin were easily overrun by the orcs; the odrendor saw them as nothing more than an obstacle that kept them from facing their hated enemies, the dwarves.

Like the distant Westlands, Low Rock has now become a district dedicated to war. The Shadow's minions pour in from Erenhead before making their way into the Kaladrums to wage war on the mountain fey. This activity is mostly concentrated along the Stoneway, the old king's road that once tied Erenhead to Low Rock and Calador, now cracked and worn by 100 years of hobnailed boots.

There are few free folk in the Low Rock district, and those who exist are scattered in the most remote areas, struggling to survive. Most humans live as oppressed serfs, either along the rivers running out of the Kaladrums or relocated to pitiful farming communities in the hills east of the district's capital. No matter where they stay, the human population lives in constant fear of orcs. Low Rock is overseen by an orc warlord, Gaalak, who has given the warriors under his command a loose rein where humans are concerned. The Shadow's chosen, eager for battle, often vent their aggression by molesting, mutilating, or killing the subdued serfs.

Governance

The orcs rule Low Rock. Every arc, thousands of them make the journey along the Stoneway to take the places of their kinsmen who have died in the ongoing war. These passers-through are eager for battle, and often kill livestock and destroy property on their way, adding more misery to the already severely oppressed serf population. Beyond the Stoneway and the few occupied strategic villages, orc presence is limited throughout the region, as the warriors of darkness care only for closing with their hated enemies in the Kaladrums. This does not mean that those areas are left to themselves, however, for Gaalak, having long administered the territory, knows full well how the Dorn-descended humans resent the presence of their conquerors. He therefore gives goblin-kin slavers



nearly as much leeway in his lands as he does his orc soldiers: So long as they stay out of the orcs' way, these brutal bands can comb the hillsides looking for potential victims, and if they manage to eliminate (or at least weaken) a few insurgent bands without draining any of his own resources, so much the better.

Low Rock

A masterpiece of combined Dorn and dwarven architecture and engineering, Low Rock was one of the sturdiest, most defensible cities in all of Erenland. Laid out in a circle on the northern side of the Duriln River, it is designed much like a dwarven holdfast, with solid foundations, thick walls, and narrow streets laid out in a maze-like pattern. The city is surrounded by a 10-foot-thick, 20-foot-tall stone wall, which is studded with towers and encircled by an equally wide and deep moat fed by the river. A large, square citadel guards the dilapidated harbor, and Castle Orin rests in its center, a massive, round castle with four great towers. So imposing are the defenses of the city that the Sarcosans never attempted to breach it when they strove to conquer all of Erenland. Instead, they took Baden's Bluff and Erenhead by force, and starved out Low Rock with an extended siege.

At its height, more than 4,000 humans of Dorn and Erenlander stock called Low Rock home, living side-by-side with some 500 dwarves. The seat of House Orin boasted the largest dwarven population outside the Kaladrunk mountains. After 100 years of occupation, the legacy of the mountain fey still remains in the town: Deep cellars, sturdy construction, and skilled engineering are clearly evident. Even after being sacked and subsequently occupied, most of the city stands strong. Though houses burned, their foundations were centuries-old rock, and new roofs have been raised over finely crafted stone walls. Almost 5,000 orcs under the warlord Gaalak now call Low Rock home, keeping a much smaller number of human slaves alive in order to maintain the city and serve the troops who pass through it.

Gaalak

Gaalak (LE male orc Ftr[Adapter] 6/Wld 3/Orc Commander 3), warchief of the Black Spears, is the third Black Spear commander to oversee Low Rock, and is more than aware of the precarious position he has been put in. He is in command of nearly 18,000 orcs and goblin-kin waging war in the mountains, of which only some 6,000 are Black Spears, as the rest of his tribe's warriors must be used as garrison forces. The warbands, who control the mountains as far north as the Pale Mere and as far south as Kardoling and Lardun, are spread thin and often far removed from Gaalak's authority. In order to keep the other orcs in check, the warchief tries to ensure that the largest contingent of any sizable host is made up of Black Spears, and that several tribes are included in each and every warband, so that other orcs won't unify and rise up against his own tribe. The only orcs

he allows to enter Low Rock are the Black Spears, and he spreads the camps of the other orcs out across the hills east of the town, ensuring that they are kept apart from each other until they are moved into the mountains. Even so, Gaalak often has to face challenges from discontent orcs, and has become an incredibly skilled orc-slayer.

Gaalak's war in the Kaladrunk mountains has been limited to probes and patrols-in-force. His armies are tasked with locating dwarven fortifications and cutting off the routes through the mountains from north to south. Though he keeps his headquarters in Low Rock, the constantly shifting situation in the mountains requires that he often travel between his own base of operations and those of his subordinates in Kardoling, Lardun, and other strongpoints. Because of this, Gaalak has seen much combat despite his strategic duties, leading orcs all over the northern Spinewall Range.

The Shadow

Currently the inhabitants of Low Rock, both human and orc, are preparing for the greatest amount of activity the town has ever seen. More than 100,000 orcs are soon to march to the city to use it as their staging point for a massive campaign into the Kaladrunk. Supplies are pouring in both by land and sea, and the population is hard-pressed to get everything stored and ready in time. Gaalak realizes that his greatest chance for honor and glory may soon arrive, and is driving the slaves and his own tribe harder than ever. For the first time since gaining control of the district, he is focusing more on keeping his base of operations working than he is on planning and executing probes and raids into the mountains. Once the host and Jahzir arrive, he hopes to impress the Night King with his abilities as a leader and be rewarded with command of at least part of the host.

A Divided Army

Though the armies of Izrador are unified in their goal to destroy the fey in the name of the dark god, they are divided by ancient tribal rivalries. The orcs have always been a warlike breed with blood feuds stretching back over the centuries; warfare between the tribes is barely held in check. As a new army musters in Erenhead and marches to Low Rock, tensions are rising. The host comprises orcs of many tribes and mothers, and nearly every one of the different factions that make up the army pursues its own agenda.

Black Spears

The Black Spears is one of the largest lesser tribes among the orcs, and has achieved in Low Rock what many other smaller tribes in the north desire: rule of a great territory. The orcs hold a position of authority in the region, a role held for almost 40 years, as their warchief governs the district and conducts the war in the northern Spinewall Range.

Human Mercenaries

As the fourth generation of humans is born under the Shadow's dominion, Erenlander mercenaries are becoming more prevalent, serving as auxiliaries in Jahzir's armies, temple guards, and escorts for legates traveling through central Erenland. With no effective resistance and the seemingly docile population in the former heartland of the kingdom, the Shadow has allowed local administrators, petty lords, legates, and soldiers who have proven their loyalty and leadership to recruit and arm human warriors. Even with Jahzir's approval, the number of human mercenaries is low, less than five thousand, with easily half that number fighting in Erethor.

While Jahzir has approved the use of human as mercenaries, bearing arms in Erenland is still illegal. Mercenaries must carry a token from their sponsor that is clearly visible at all times. That token is usually a badge with the symbol of Izrador on its front and the mark of the sponsor (lord, legate, etc.) on its reverse. The sponsor is responsible for the conduct of his soldiers and ensuring the tokens do not fall into the hands of the resistance. Losing a token often cost the mercenary his life or at least his freedom. To prevent the resistance from copying the tokens, they are cast in iron and the workmanship is well beyond what a simple smithy could produce.

There are a variety of reasons why humans would serve their oppressors. A large number of the mercenaries were raised to revere Izrador, and they take up arms due to their fanatical loyalty. These devout worshippers serve as temple guards and in the personal retinue of legates who prefer the company of their own kind to the brutish orcs. Most mercenaries, however, serve not out of devotion, but instead to protect and feed their families, trying to shield their communities by loyal service to the Shadow. By preventing resistance attacks and ensuring the safety of the roads, they lessen the burden of the tithe, providing for as a good of life as is possible in the Last Age, and finding it far better to serve with a sword in their hands than in chains. The last, but most dangerous, type of mercenary are those who serve the dark god to inflict pain and to carve their path to advancement in the Shadow's hierarchy through the misery and blood of their own race.

Currently some 16,000 warriors strong, the tribe commands the town of Low Rock, holds the passes to Lardun, and has been waging war in the mountains for most of the last century. Their familiarity with the terrain and its dangers, whether men, fey, or nature, has allowed the tribe to dominate the region and thrive in the territory it has taken. Their position is not one easily accepted by other tribes, and more than one death has been caused by orcs of the great tribes who ques-

tioned Gaalak and his presumably inferior tribe's claim to the territory. Constantly having to deal with orc aggressors, the Black Spears have developed an intense dislike of those not of their own tribe. Their frequent skirmishes with other orcs have made the Spears very skilled at killing their own kind. This trait they will have to put aside, at least for a time, as they participate in the campaign against Calador.

Mother of Blood

Though the Mother of Blood tribe is quite possibly the largest orc tribe in existence, its participation in the wars south of its lands has traditionally been limited. The tribe's lack of activity against the fey has not gone unnoticed, and Jahzir has ordered the tribe to supply warriors for the new attack on Calador. Now, 20,000 orcs and oruks of the tribe, grouped into 19 legions, march with the army bound for the great dwarven city. They are led by Orgot (LE Oruk, Ftr9[Leader of Men]), an oruk so intimidating he frightens even his own kind. One of Baeraga's own minions, Orgot has issued orders that are simple, but difficult to accomplish: Preserve his forces. What Baeraga plans to do with 20,000 warriors and auxiliaries, if not hurl them against dwarven defenders, remains unknown even to Orgot. Each banner is accompanied by an orc witch, and a kurasatch udareen by the name of Ashaga (NE Channeler 7) remains ever close to the warchief, acting as an advisor and the mother-wives' voice in the legions. Whether or not Orgot will be successful in keeping his forces intact, as his mistress desires, remains to be seen.

Feral Mother

There is a minimal presence of Feral Mother orcs at the southern front. Already 70,000 of their warriors besiege Calador, and the tribe's knowledge of the area surrounding the city is unsurpassed by any forces readily available to the Shadow. Orcs from the tribe are acting as advisors on the planning of the southern siege in an attempt to coordinate the operation with the already entrenched hordes to the north. However, they are seen as little more than meddlers, and were it not for the fact that one in three Feral Mother tribesmen sent south is an oruk, it is doubtful their presence would be tolerated by the other tribes, many of whom are under the sway of the Mother of Blood. As with the Mother of Blood orcs, the Feral Mother troops are commanded by an oruk. Horshog (NE Oruk, Brb7/Shieldsplitter 1) is a warrior hand-picked by Torgut, commander of the Feral Mother's forces around Calador, for his bullheadedness, and he keeps his warbands tightly regimented, all too aware that he is far outnumbered by his so-called allies.

Dead Mother

Among the strangest additions to the army soon to march on Low Rock is a warband of Dead Mother orcs. Numbering only some 400 warriors, they have become a sinister island in

the middle of the iron-clad horde. The Dead Mother orcs are undoubtedly the smallest contribution to the army. However, this has done nothing to dampen the dread these orcs have managed to inspire. Clad in old, darkened armor, wielding ancient weapons and wrapped in tattered black cloaks, the silent soldiers seem shrouded in a palpable menace, the air around them crackling with an unnatural cold like that of winter nights. Few dare to challenge them; those who do, do not survive. Where the orcs of this dying great tribe received their gear and their powers is uncertain, but the name "Darshod" has been whispered more than once. They take orders from none but their own chief, Marnok (CE Orc, Brb3/Ftr4 [Survivor]/Ancestral Bladebearer 3), and only he ever raises his voice, even in battle. For now, they stay with the army in unbroken silence, having made no attempts at establishing any authority, their purpose known only to themselves.

Minor Tribes

The rest of the 100,000-strong force is made up of orcs from the minor tribes. While sometimes capable of forming their own legions like the Black Spears, the tribes' warriors are just as often divided among several legions. Though these minor factions all pursue their own agendas in the north, their influence typically ends at the northern shores of the Sea of Pelluria, and whatever unrest caused by these lesser orcs is typically simple animosity over old feuds or petty desires. Though they make up the majority of the army, these orcs are regarded as expendable fodder by the greater tribes, and if the

powerful tribes have a say, most of the probing and suicidal fighting will be left to them.

The Stoneway

Stretching from Erenhead to Low Rock, and once having led all the way to Calador, the Stoneway was one of the great King's Roads. By the time the Night Kings destroyed the armies of mankind, the Stoneway had already fallen into disuse. The dwarves had shut themselves in their mountains, with orcs and goblin-kin swarming around their holdfasts. Contact between orcs and House Orin occurred long before the third rise of Izrador, as the Dornish house sent forces to wage war with their dwarven allies. However, the army fared ill, ambushed in the mountains before they could join their friends. The aftermath of this disaster gutted the fighting capacity of House Orin for the rest of the Third Age, and quickly saw the destruction of several bridges along the Stoneway as the humans sought to protect their own lands.

The Stoneway still plays a role in the kingdom, but its traffic mostly runs one way, and its trade is war. Thousands of orcs who have made the journey across the sea then continue their journey by land to bring war upon the dwarves. They march along this road year-round, bringing supplies and reinforcements in the steady stream necessary to make up for the horrible losses inflicted upon their warbands. The half of the Stoneway that runs through human lands is maintained by slaves and crews of serfs living near the road, who work in shifts dragging stone from the Black Downs. Slaves who die



are swiftly decapitated, their bodies mixed in with the mortar and gravel or eaten by their overseers. As it progresses into the mountains, the road's quality and stability decrease rapidly. Though attempts have been made to reconstruct some of the bridges torn down by House Orin, the orcs and their allies lack the skill. The temporary bridges they build bear the passage of a few hundred, perhaps a thousand orcs, before collapsing, sending the heavily armored soldiers plummeting to their deaths below.

This condition can no longer be tolerated by the Shadow's army. With the plans for the upcoming southern offensive against Calador, the Stoneway must be rebuilt to bear the brunt of the tens of thousands of orcs marching in Jahzir's army. To this effort, the Night King has summoned engineers from clan Dorin, black-blooded dwarves who betrayed their kinsmen long ago. Overseen by Fundak Dorin (Dwarf male, Exp13), hobgoblins and slave crews have been sent into the mountains to repair the road once and for all. The road is stable and secure for the first treacherous hundred miles along the bluffs above the Torbrun River. Thereafter, the paths multiply, and the orcs can spread farther afield from the road as they continue their advance; however, this means that there are also more places for the dwarven defenders to hide. Progress past this point has been slow, as the mountains demand a high toll from the slaves and their overseers alike, and dwarven raiders are not above causing rockslides to bury the slaves along with the goblin-kin.



Atasele

Perched high on the cliffs above the Ironrun River, Atasele was once the gateway to the House Orin heartlands. Constructed around a large tower that commands a view for leagues into the Plains of Erenhead, Atasele is a powerful fortress barring the Stoneway and is one of the few places where one can cross the Ironrun. The fortress was the bastion of Clan Tarent, one of House Orin's greatest vassals.

During the last days of the Third Age, Orrick Tarent was master of Atasele, at the age of only 15. He was an outwardly cheerful and responsible boy, but unknown to all he carried a shadow over his heart. Orrick was originally the second son of the old earl of Atasele. His older brother had died at play when Orrick was 12, having fallen off the battlements overlooking the Ironrun and into the crushing water below. Only Orrick knew that the fall had been in part his fault, the result of an overly powerful push when his brother had teased him too much. In the following years, the Orrick started hearing his dead brother's voice, his curses and lamentations in the rush of the water. When Orrick turned 15, after his father died, the voice in the water began to swear bloody vengeance.

Nothing scared the new Earl Tarent more than death, for he heard its voice at night. Ever fearful of the river after that fateful day, he never crossed the Ironrun, not even on the bridge he owned. When the Shadow came, Orrick heard the river laugh and mock him, praising the darkness for bringing vengeance. Gripped by despair and madness, Orrick barred

himself in his chambers and prayed to the dark god, offering his soul if only Izrador would spare the fortress and its defenders. Only by succeeding at its defense, the distraught boy felt, could he honor his father's trust and atone for his brother's death.

Izrador answered the boy's prayers, but not before news of his deeds reached his household guards. Even as the curse Orrick had brought upon himself and his retainers raced through the halls of Atasele, his warriors performed their final act in the service of light, and beat down his door and brought their swords upon him. Had they been but a few seconds faster they might have succeeded. But the gift of undeath had already been bestowed upon their master, and gripped his servants only moments later.

Those who watch over Atasele now are the husks of who they once were. Twisted by dark magic, their minds warped and their souls stained with corruption, the once-proud warriors of house Tarent still guard their home and the bridge over Ironrun River. Their pale, lifeless bodies walk silently through corridors and stand vigil on towers and battlements, their long, tangled manes still stirring in the wind. They are not Fell, for they need no sustenance, and their bodies do not rot away. They are wights, and they continue their existence in the service of Izrador, bound by their curse into obeying the Shadow in the North. They hate the living, and they despise the



orcs they let cross their bridge, but let them cross they must, for it is the dark god's will. Their lord and master, crippled by his own men even as his deal with evil was struck, has been doomed to a broken half-life, his shattered body stranded in his chair, from which he screams curses at the river below his window every night.

The Resistance

With the territory dominated by Gaalak's troops and the slavers he has allied with, it has been difficult for insurgents to operate effectively in the area. Resistance activity is very limited, usually consisting of very small groups defending hidden camps and hamlets in the mountains and the Black Downs. These people are descended from those not only brave enough to refuse to turn to the Shadow, but too stubborn to abandon their homes when the Shadow came. A few have contact with the dwarves, halflings, or other groups, but most are too secretive and reclusive to value any permanent contact with the outside world. There have been no attempts at organizing with one another; as long as they manage to keep their families safe and kill a few shadowspawn in the name of defiance every year, most of these independents are content.

In the Plains of Erenhead, a few dunni still roam, but they are too busy avoiding the traitorous horseclans and slavers who pursue them to be able to offer much assistance to their kin. Occasionally they manage to steal a few halfling slaves away from the Shadow. Fugitives who cross their paths are likely to receive aid, assuming that they can prove they are neither spies nor bait. This hardly amounts to resistance, however, and the fey stay well south of the heavily patrolled Stoneway.

Ghosts of Vengeance

Most of the Erenlanders who once lived in Low Rock have long since moved far away from their ancestral homelands, having resettled throughout the Spinewall Range and even in the southern Kaladrums. There, under the leadership of Dalian Jorgansen (LG Dorn, Wld 9), they live side-by-side with the Kurgun, doing their best to make what they can out of their lives.

Some of the Dorns who once called Low Rock their home fled north, however. Those who still live feel that their homes have been abandoned too lightly, and that the fight should still be continued on their ancestral lands. Whether blinded or blessed by Dornish pride and anger, these people cling to existence in the no-man's land between dwarves and orcs. Constantly on the move, they have developed mountaineering skills rivaling those of Kurgun dwarves. However, in exchange for this skill, they have had to relinquish some of their humanity, embracing the savagery within themselves. Though they retain their sense of honor, they call their warrior groups packs, elect their pack leaders through combat, and sustain themselves almost solely through raiding. They

strike with sudden ferocity, bounding down the mountain-sides while howling war cries that frighten even the orcs.

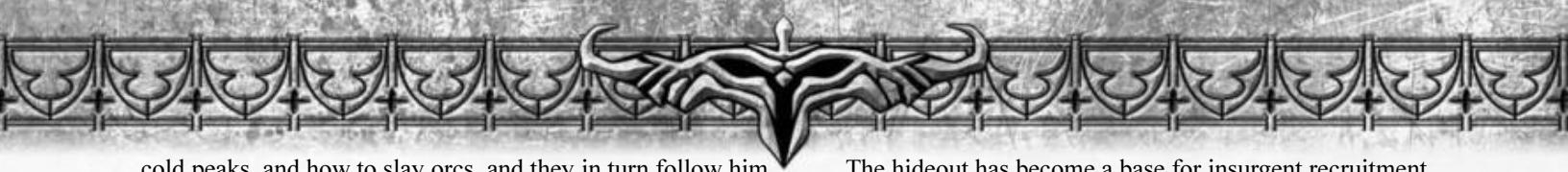
One such band, the Stone Wolves, does not fight only in the Kaladrums. Among their number are several dwarven and dworg outcasts. The Stone Wolves rarely care about their members' previous crimes, as long as they prove themselves capable and trustworthy. These dwarves and dworgs have shown the Dorns many secret passages, underwater rivers, and natural tunnels that lead deep into the Low Rock district, as far as the Black Downs. With the aid of the dwarves, the Wolves occasionally make their way back into their homelands, creeping upon the enemy from unexpected directions. Their ferocity during these attacks, and the skill with which they fade away, has severely unnerved the orcs in the region, who now claim that the hills are haunted by vengeful Dornish ghosts, so powerful that no legate can repulse them. The Stone Wolves play up on this as best they can, setting their attacks at dusk or dawn, preferably during fog or rain, and they never leave a fallen comrade behind for the Shadow to find.

Aside from raiding for supplies, the Stone Wolves have started freeing slaves during their forays, and sometimes stage attacks solely for this purpose. The condition of release is simple: Those who are freed must fight. Any set free by the Stone Wolves are expected to participate in at least one of their mountain ambushes; if they survive and make a good accounting of themselves, they are allowed to keep the weapon granted them for the battle, and are invited to join the packs. If they prove unsuited for battle, they are sent south to join Dalian Jorgansen's people, forced to make their way unarmed and unaided. The Stone Wolves hold even less respect for those who refuse to even pick up a weapon once released. Curs and cowards like these caused the kingdom to crumble, and the harsh world they created for themselves has no mercy. They are often used by the Stone Wolves as bait for traps and ambushes, and few survive.

Greywolf

The chieftain of the Stone Wolves is a man called Greywolf (N Dorn, Wld 3/Brb 10) by his kinsmen. Though he never talks about his past, it is rumored that he is Andreck Orin, direct descendant and true heir to house Orin and Low Rock, believed killed with the rest of house Orin when the warlord Gaalak led 6,000 orcs into the Kaladrunk Mountains in a hunt for the remaining free people out of Low Rock. Stories say that he saw the potential of Dalian Jorgansen, felt the hate and darkness in his own heart, and gave over leadership of his people to the younger man. He then chose voluntary exile in the Kaladrums, where he would live out his days hunting those who had taken everything from him and his people. Rumor also has it that he howls at the moon, and that he eats the flesh of his foes raw.

Whatever the truth, Greywolf has been fighting in the mountains longer than any other human of the Last Age. He has tutored the other Stone Wolves in how to live in the wild,



cold peaks, and how to slay orcs, and they in turn follow him as a father figure. A grim man of few words, he is nevertheless a cunning and responsible leader, and constantly reminds the younger warriors that strength alone is not enough; they must choose their battles carefully, and in the end it is their wits that will win the day. He speaks several dwarven dialects, and has gained the intimate trust and friendship of seasoned dwarven warriors who remember him from when they were young and unblooded themselves. Sporting a great mane of granite-gray hair and matching beard, the warrior's age is uncertain. Some of the Stone Wolves claim that he is as old as the Last Age, born on the day the orcs first took a ram to the walls of Low Rock. One thing is certain: Greywolf is old, and though he never says so, and his own people refuse to see it, his years are starting to wear on him.

Shipwrecked

Years ago, Eldan Norfall (NG Dorn, Ftr [Adapter] 2/Rog 5), the youngest brother of Prince Jaden Norfall, was reaving the sea lanes between Davindale and Erenhead, looking for troop carriers to sink and barges to plunder. He and his men were having a good arc, sinking five carriers and crippling two others, and had seized four barges, one of them laden with weapons and armor bound for Erenhead, when they were caught in a freak storm out of the north. With the raiders scattered across the many seized prizes, they were hard-pressed to survive the storm, and had to ride it south, hoping that it would calm before they reached the coast. It did not: Several of the ships were sunk, and more dashed upon the rocks, breaking ships, spilling cargoes into the water, and killing many.

Eldan's ship, *Howler*, survived relatively intact, carried over a stony beach by a massive wave. Eldan gathered the surviving pirates from that and other ships, salvaged what he could, and began to explore. His primary focus was to gather supplies and material to repair his ship before the Shadow found him and his men. He found civilization, or at least a token example of it, in the form of an isolated farm in the Black Downs. No sooner did they see the homestead than they saw its lonely, axe-wielding farmer fighting off a patrol of hungry orcs who had taken an interest in his family. The raiders fell upon the attackers, slaughtering them without mercy. In return for their aid, the farmer, Farn Goransen, a big old bull of a man, gave them information on the area as well as directions to other nearby homesteads.

Eldan managed to repair his ship and sail back to the Corbrons, but some of his crew chose to stay behind to help the scattered people. From the upturned, broken hulls of their ships they have crafted a roof over a well-hidden, shallow gorge. They have piled these roofs over with stone and sand; so well concealed is their home that you could walk over it and never notice its presence. It is still stacked with gear and provisions taken from the Shadow at sea, and serves as a supply depot for the Pirate Princes whenever their ships range this far east.

The hideout has become a base for insurgent recruitment in the Black Downs. The pirates travel in secrecy across the moorlands, hiring the farmers, fishermen, and their sons for the Norfall fleet in return for goods the common folk cannot obtain themselves. Salt and iron are the most valued of these commodities, and many willingly serve a season for a pound of these commodities. The Norfalls also have no shortage of stolen arms and armor, which they provide to any villagers, free of charge, who are willing to risk possessing them. Some who take to raiding choose to stay aboard, and are welcomed into the fold. The hidden operation is overseen by Delt Hemsfar (CG Erenlander Ftr 2/Wld 4), one of the Norfall princes' most trusted men. A large but stealthy man, originally a refugee of Fallport, Delt has served Jaden for over a dozen years, and he is a shrewd and loyal warrior. Under Delt's command are a dozen other raiders who chose to stay behind. All of them are well known to the communities of the area, and three have even taken wives from among the population. These women still reside in their hamlets, but their husbands visit them whenever they can. Despite the risk, the raiders and the commoners have grown to trust and rely upon one another.

The Eastern Hills

Hidden in the scrub, Maron shivered and waited for dawn. He had been lying there in the cold all night.

Twenty paces, you lazy bastards, he thought to himself. Twenty, and you'd have gotten me.

The wildlander traveled by day when he could, the orcs by night. Large gaps would appear between them during the hours of sun, only to close at night. The trick was to not slow down, even though the pursuers fell far behind. Their trackers would come for you in the dark, no matter how hard you had run the day before.

This chase had been close, and it was only luck that left him alive at the end. Sleeping without a fire, no food in his belly, he had curled up in the foliage and awaited his hunters. They had come hard, and now, aided by the sunlight, he saw how they had been able to come so fast. A shaggy mule accompanied the three orcs and goblin tracker. They had slung their armor on the mule and redistributed the weight of their gear so it hung more easily.

Damn! They're learning!

He hoped this was an example of seasoned orcs taking initiative, and not better training among fresh troops. Still, even these clever hunters had made a mistake. Exhausted from the forced march that had brought them so close, they had bedded down without concern for their defenses. Now they slept, leaving only the sniveling, sleepy-eyed goblin on alert. Maron was downwind, else even the orcs' and mule's stench wouldn't have masked his odor from the sniffer. Quietly, the wildlander drew an arrow from his quiver, and nocked it gently to his bowstring. The mule looked like a promising prize.

Lands and People

When the hordes of Izrador broke the armies of Erenland on the southern shores of the Sea of Pelluria, there was no force in the Eastern Hills that could hope to stem the tide of darkness. The Shadow washed over the land, covering it with blood, fire, and death, as the armies of the Night Kings drove towards Alvedara and the destruction of the Sarcosans. The land was devastated, and its people were given scant time to rebuild, for in the wake of the orcs came the carrion eaters and Fell who preyed upon the scattered and broken humans. For decades, the communities of the Eastern Hills fended for themselves, struggling to hold on to and rebuild their lives, while the Shadow's forces consolidated elsewhere and brought their war to Erethor.

The Eastern Hills were always a backwater, and not even at the height of the Kingdom of Erenland in the latter years of the Second Age did the region see much development. It was a wilderness, its great size isolating the region's widespread hamlets and villages from one another. A few mining towns existed in the Copper Hills, and these supplied most of the kingdom south of the Pelluria with what was needed of the base metal. In the present day many of these settlements are ghost towns, their populations butchered by the Shadow 100 years ago and never repopulated. Those who survived do so behind decaying walls upon stony hills, waiting in isolation for the day when a foe formidable enough to break into their homes arrives. When that day comes, they will have little defense.

As a region, the Eastern Hills had three main exports during the previous ages: copper, boro, and soldiers for the kingdom's armies. The soil was not rich enough for intensive farming, and keeping even a small herd of boro fed required vast tracts of scrubby, hilly, dusty land. Now the mining towns are devastated, their shafts the lairs of horrors out of the north. Proscription on travel leaves herds of wild boro and game to roam the swordgrass-covered hills unherded and unhunted, and soldiering is left to the orcs. The region provides nothing of value to the Shadow, and its denizens struggle to survive much like they always have. A large amount of the surviving population lives along the Carina and Denna Rivers, where the land is farmable if not fertile, and contact with the outside world is possible, if not always preferable.

Governance

It took Jahzir Kamael and his host of darkness almost 50 years to bring the Eastern Hills under the yoke of the dark god. This was not because the army could not do so sooner, but rather simply because they had no need to. The district itself provided few supplies for the Shadow's minions, not even manpower. During this time shadowspawn, Fell, and slavers ravaged the area time and again. The villagers learned to defend themselves with whatever they had at hand and to rely on themselves above all others. They became stoic and proud; self-reliant, but tightly regimented. When soldiers in the Shadow's armies finally made their way up the Carina

and Denna rivers, some communities thought to grudgingly welcome the stability and additional protection they brought, rather than lament them as oppressors. Even so, this second coming of the Shadow led to the deaths of many. Any who had weapons in their homes were strung up and gutted with them as an example to their neighbors, and those few who kept written works were forced to eat the burning ashes of those scrolls and books.

After this onslaught, the people of the Eastern Hills were allowed to retain much of the autonomy and self-rule they had established in the first half of the Last Age. The lands are too vast and the communities too isolated for more direct rule, and the benefits are not worth the bother. Erenlander sheriffs still oversee the defenses and taxation of the district, and the villages have been allowed to keep their moats and fortifications to protect them from the beasts that still roam the land. The Shadow has established checkpoints along the region's few passable roads and continuously flowing rivers, manning them with relatively merciful hobgoblins rather than the brutal and unpredictable orcs. The district is left unmolested as long as it continues to obey the laws of the Shadow and pays sufficient tithes. The Erenlanders, valuing their relatively free existence, strive to appear as law-abiding and unimportant subjects.

The Shadow

Compared to other parts of Erenland, few Shadow forces occupy the Eastern Hills. The compliance of the people, the lack of resources, and the vastness of the region has ensured that the district is governed with a loose grip. The few black mirrors in the region are of pale status. Religious fervor is ensured by the occasional visit from a preaching legate and his heavily armed bodyguard; more often than not he is an unimportant acolyte of the sect of the Voices of Shadow. The villagers, aware of the price of defying the Shadow, strive to appear simple and submissive when occupation forces are present.

Well away from the rivers, the situation is different, and worse. While the hobgoblins and legates have brought stability—for a price—to those lands that can be reached by barge, no safety lies among the Copper Hills or within the vast stretch of land between the rivers and the Kaladrums. Here, slavers and marauding beasts still reign supreme, and with the limitations placed upon the villagers by the occupation forces and the increased amount of Shadow scum that litter the area, they are more hard-pressed than ever to survive. The Erenlanders in this hinterland live in constant danger, and their numbers dwindle every year.

Azogduk

The Eastern Hills, long left alone by the Shadow's warriors, have seen a change for the worse during the past 10 years. The scattered boro of the territory have been slowly gathered by the Shadow's forces to feed the hungry orcs mak-

ing their way down the Spinewall Range, amassed into herds of a size not seen since the Second Age. Preliminary attempts at driving the herds south saw the herders ambushed and killed by freeriders and wildlanders roaming the expanse; the boro dispersed once more. While delaying the effort, their actions also alerted Jahzir to the presence of armed dissidents on the periphery of the district, and have forced him to do something about them.

As against most enemies, the Night King sent orcs. A force over 500 strong marched from Erenhead. They were to provide escort to the herders as they drove the boro across the plains. However, the boro had been scattered by the initial harrying by the insurgents, forcing the herders to separate to gather them; the dispersed herders and their guards were again attacked and decimated by insurgents with bow and horse. Jahzir finally sent Azogduk and the Shattered Hands legion.

Azogduk of the Burnt Skull tribe (LE orc Ftr 8/Wld 2/Orc Commander 1 [see *Hand of Shadow*]), warchief of the Shattered Hands legion, is a methodical and aggressive captain. He learned his craft in the skirmishes between lesser tribes in the Cold Downs, where he established himself as a mighty warrior. He became well known as a champion of the small battles and conflicts in the Downs, and soon marched at the head of a warband bound for Erethor. There he gained Grial's attention for his ability to regroup forces shattered in the fighting, reforming them into new warbands willing and able to take the fight back to the forest. He named one such salvaged fighting force the Legion of Shattered Hands. When Jahzir asked Grial for a chief to lead the diverse and scattered forces of the Eastern Hills, Azogduk was his choice. Though not the brightest commander, Azogduk possesses a gift for making others work together. By enlisting the aid of other Shadow races and cooperating with them, he has always been able to field flexible warbands capable of handling many diverse situations.

For 10 years Azogduk has led his warband in the Eastern Hills with the same tenacity that earned him his reputation. His 2,000 orcs are bolstered by over 100 goblin worg riders and several dozen goblin snifters. He has made contact with the unaligned Shadow forces that roam the territory, ensuring their support. Slavers and traitorous horseclans now coordinate their movements with Azogduk's forces to hem in the insurgents, and they sell information to him in exchange for supplies and occasional support during their raids. The hobgoblins who have garrisoned the rivers and roads for the last 50 years willingly cooperate with the warchief, an orc who treats them with respect. Azogduk's own orcs are mostly survivors from his years in Erethor, and their release from those hated killing grounds have inspired strong loyalty. If he tells them to cooperate with the lesser races, they do so.

The last 10 years have seen a severe decline in resistance activity in the southern reaches of the Eastern Hills, as well as in the foothills of the Kaladrums to the east. Azogduk's forces have ruthlessly purged the land of dissidents, and a few desperate bands have even surrendered to and been forced to

aid his forces, further bolstering Azogduk's flexibility and his knowledge of the area.

His mission for the most part accomplished, Azogduk has been ordered to move into the Spinewalls and aid the upcoming assault there. How his forces will fare in the campaign remains to be seen. The wildlanders he has driven out of the Copper Hills have no doubt passed information on his plans and forces to the resistance bands farther east. Having once driven them out of their normal hunting grounds, Azogduk will now have to face them acting in concert with the rest of the insurgents who will block the Shattered Hands' path to the mountains. With his small but flexible army, he may have unusual success in penetrating difficult mountain passes, but he may have trouble holding them until help arrives. His garrisons and patrols in the Copper Hills will also be depleted, and his supply lines will be stretched quite thin, making them easy targets for any insurgents who sneak back down from the mountains. The loyalty of his human and goblin-kin auxiliaries will also be put to the test, as they will be required to coordinate with the warchief in a stricter manner than before. Ten years of profitable cooperation should ensure their willingness to take orders if the odds stay in Azogduk's favor, but a turn of the tide could undermine their resolve.

Reysur

Once the largest mining town in the Copper Hills, Reysur was the trading hub of the region and the de facto capital of the Eastern Hills. Ore was shipped from the town to gnome barges on the Denna throughout the Second Age and well into the Third. A fort was commissioned for it in the Third Age to ensure the safety of the mines from bandits and rebels, but it was only half-completed when the mines were depleted. When the Shadow's forces came to Reysur it was already a ghost town, and the remaining population was easily butchered as it sought refuge in the inadequately completed fort.

Though Reysur still remains a ruin, its mines have been repopulated. Azogduk, looking for a place to use as his base of operations, found Reysur to be an appropriate solution. The extensive mines are still relatively sturdy thanks to dwarven aid during their engineering, and are capable of housing half his warband should it be necessary. The cool, dry tunnels also provide good storage for the force's supplies. Currently, the Reysur mines house some 300 of Azogduk's orcs who guard the warband's storerooms and prisoners, but that number is rising as the legion has started to reform in order to push into the Kaladrums. Once the warband marches east, the number of guards remaining in Reysur will drop to around 50.

Durstan

Durstan has always been a little-known but important gnome settlement in the Eastern Hills. Located on the banks of the Carina River, Durstan saw plenty of trade with the dwarves of Drumlen. From Durstan, the dwarven craftsman-

ship would make its way downriver to the Ardune, from whence it would go wherever it was in demand.

In the Last Age no trade comes out of Drumlen, but gnome barges still ply the Carina. However, they now struggle up the river loaded with weapons, supplies, and orcs for the upcoming War of Stone. They then journey to Erenhead with empty holds, for no trade goods exit the mountains in these days. It is a long journey, and the gnomes who travel it gain no profit on the return trip. As a result, they are an unusually poor and sour lot. In addition to gnomes, the trading families of the area once had many dwarrow among them, but after 100 years of isolation from the mountain fey those dwarrow who remain and sail are quite old, with fouler dispositions than their smaller cousins. Still, being experienced and tough helps, and the dwarrow who are still hale often end up as leaders for their families.

Most of Durstan's older buildings are low, one-story constructions. Dwarven influence can be seen in the place's stone docks, solid roads, and few fortifications, while the town's public buildings reflect a Sarcosan design. These traits make Durstan one of the few places in the Eastern Hills that must endure a large occupation presence. The 500 or so gnomes and approximately 100 humans who call the place home, or at least moor there regularly, are supervised by nearly half their own number of hobgoblin soldiers. The town used to suffer the presence of large groups of orcs headed for Drumlen or sent to secure shipments as they moved into the mountains. These visitors would leave the town in shambles, and deaths were commonplace. However, the gnomes have slowly won over their hobgoblin wardens by making sure they get the best gear, as well as by going out of their way to obey and serve them. This behavior has instilled a sense of ownership in the hobgoblins, which in turn has given rise to a protective instinct. The little folk are their charge, and woe be to those who would disturb them. Now, whenever Durstan is approached by orcs, the city goes into an almost siege-like state. Guards are tripled, gates are locked, and the entire town goes on alert until the outsiders leave. The gnomes, knowing that whatever cruelties they suffer at the hobgoblins' hands would pale in comparison to those of the hateful orcs, do their utmost to maintain this relationship.

The Barren Forest

Sprawling in the shadow of the Kaladrin Mountains, the Barren Forest has always had a bleak, desolate appearance. Its old, dry trees, covered in pale lichen, try to find purchase in arid soil and among jagged boulders discarded by the Kaladrins. The interior of the woods is cast in a pale glow. The ground is covered by colorless moss and gnarled shrubs, and all the woodlands are flowerless. The entire forest seems forsaken by animals and is strangely silent, save for the faint whispering of the wind. Given to unnatural fogs that seep out of the ground, the forest has been avoided as a cursed place by man and fey throughout the ages, and the halflings believe

The Company of Araban

Erenlander infantry companies were the core of the kingdom's military for almost 2,000 years, and earned great honor and glory in the battles at the end of the Second Age. None were as storied as the Company of Araban which, unaided, held the fortress at Ravensridge, a hundred miles north of Bastion (1924 SA). While defenses all across the northlands were collapsing, this group of at most 500 men stood against an estimated 5,000 foes. The company, drawn from towns throughout the eastern plains and foothills, continued their loyal service throughout the Third Age and in 897 TA marched north to once again man the Fortress Wall. Hopelessly outmatched, the company was overwhelmed just north of Davindale at the fortress of Riversbend, barely slowing the Shadow's advance. With the impending loss of the north, the High King desperately sought men to stand with him at the mouth of the Eren. What little remained of the Company of Araban—soldiers who had been too injured to travel to Riversbend, aged veterans, and boys barely able to wield sword or spear—raised the company's banner and died fighting for the last High King of Erenland. Now all that is left of the Company are the ruins of barracks buildings in the midst of the abandoned plains, and stories passed from father to son.

it is the dying place of *zeedrith*, the spirit-eating demons of the plains.

The forest is now home to a much more tangible threat. During Izrador's invasion of the lands south of the inland sea, his armies quickly suffered from mass desertions, as shadownspawn flooded across the human lands. One of these groups consisted of giant-men, led by a coven of ogre damens. The damens, having lived in hiding among their own people for fear of legates and *kurasatch udareen*, finally saw their chance in the chaos of the rush south. They abandoned the armies and went into hiding in the forest, which was not entirely unlike their old homes in the Withered Wood. For a time, the witches cooperated and hid their servants in the woods, but it was only a matter of time before their corrupted, hateful natures caused them to turn upon each other. In the end, the blood of giant-men ran thick and black throughout the Barren Forest as the witches sent their minions against each other. The savage deaths awakened the malicious spirits of the woods, having long lain dormant in their domain, and first became known to the ogre damen Vagasha. She made a

deal with the spirits, offering the souls of her coven, her former allies, to the spirits. Calling them together in a great meeting to make peace, she trapped the witches and let the spirits devour their souls. But even as they fed, Vagasha betrayed the spirits as well, trapping them in the bodies of those she had let them devour.

Vagasha now rules the forest as its queen. Should she wish, she could command the spirits to animate the corpses to which they have been bound, sending them forth to do her bidding. The paranoid witch is loathe to let them leave her direct control, however, and so the shackled spirits have been for the most part confined to the inanimate bodies, fallen where they died in a copse of trees deep in the forest. There they speak to her of death and vengeance in hollow whispers. Vagasha taps into the power of the spirits and the arcane power of those they devoured, using them to cast powerful rituals to ward her wood and herself. Her minions, empowered by their queen with supernatural stealth, roam the forest as huge but trackless wardens. They raid far into the plains, hunting for food and living sacrifices to keep the ever-hungry spirits, many of which still remain at large in the wood, at bay. Above all else, Vagasha hates Izrador and his chosen, be they orc or legate. Whenever possible, she goes to great lengths to ensure the painful deaths of such creatures, preferably by her own hand.

The Resistance

Resistance activity throughout the Eastern Hills is as limited as Shadow activity. It is more of a refuge than a battleground, and a desperate one at that. Wildlanders and freeriders roam from this area from the Eren to the Kaladrums, but there is little for them to live on, and wild beasts and rogue shadowspawn make travel there dangerous. Though some of the communities boast a warrior or two trained in the way of the defender, most of these are more concerned with the immediate welfare of the villagers, not the war against Izrador. These combat-trained men and women are more likely to use their abilities to chase off or subdue resistance fighters who head their way, knowing that their very presence endangers the villages the defenders have sworn to protect.

Many of Erenland's remaining nomadic halflings range between the Wogren Moor and the Barren Forest, avoiding slavers and beasts alike. These bands sometimes attempt to trade with human communities, if they trust that the tallfolk will not report their presence to the Shadow. The exchanges are often more profitable for the humans, who can gain skins and worked leather goods from the dunni, whereas the halflings receive only jerk and hardtack for the difficult winter, or fresh produce if they're lucky. These meetings are a very risky proposition for the smallfolk, for the humans might decide to turn them over to the Shadow, or take the smallfolk's possessions through force. Initial contact, therefore, is always made with wogren support, and the halflings come as heavily armed as they can.

Irontop

Hidden in the low hills of the heartland of the district is one of the most vital assets of the dunni. Found almost by chance, the place was first discovered when the nomadic halflings were forced to abandon their preferred territories to the Shadow and flee into further-removed regions. Named so by the halflings who found it, Irontop is an abandoned dwarven trading outpost built into a hillside and centered around a single construction which has kept the resistance capable of fighting for 100 years after the Shadow's victory: a dwarven smithy, fully stockpiled with iron ore, the tools of the trade, and prime-quality charcoal.

At first the nomads were unsure of what to do with the place. As their agrarian kin and freed slaves started trickling into the hills, they decided to use the abandoned halls under the hills as a safe haven for the refugees. From that point on progress was rapid. Among the agrarian refugees trickling in were several blacksmiths and other workers of metal, and within 20 years the smithies were running at full capacity. After more than half a century as a free halfling haven, the smithies are now nearly overstuffed





with men and women, all slightly small for their workstations but dedicated to their trade nonetheless. Some 400 halflings call Irontop their home, and have filled up every nook and crevice of the dwarven community, utilizing its hidden hearths to maximum capacity. Nearly half the adult and youth population work in the smithies, while the other half take care of domestic chores such as caring for stock, raising children, and tending the gardens. A few try to mine what little ore is left in the shallow mines dug by the dwarves, but there is hardly any metal left, and it is hard work for the untrained halflings.

The wogren riders keep Irontop hidden and safe, and in return receive completed metal tools and weapons, more than half of it human-sized. Some they keep for themselves, some they trade to local human communities, but much of it is taken to the gnomes, who then pass it on to the resistance throughout central Erenland. After almost 60 years of nearly uninterrupted production, Irontop has become the best, most reliable source of sturdy weapons for rebels in central Erenland. Favored weapons are axes, spears, and arrows, as these require less of the precious iron ore than swords, and an axe-head can be fitted to a proper haft by many outside the community itself, making them easier to transport and smuggle. It is possible that some of the weapons find themselves in traitorous hands, but most of them end up in the guts of orc caravan guards. The supplies taken from the caravans then make their way back along the trade chain and keep the halflings warm and fed. It is a vicious economy based on smuggling and murder, but it works.

However, all is not well in Irontop. The supplies of iron ore and charcoal are running low, and worries are high. Without the raw material to produce the tools and weapons, Irontop might be unable to sustain itself. The community is almost capable of producing enough food for itself, but with the increasing Shadow activity in the south, their hunting and foraging parties have become more and more limited. In addition to the supply problems, an increasing stream of freed slaves must be cared for. Tension is building as the community is about to grow outside of its boundaries and is put under a higher strain than ever before. The council of elders who oversee Irontop is at a loss for what to do. They cannot sustain the ever-increasing stream of desperate refugees, but neither can they refuse to help their poor kinsmen. They could attempt to send the wogren riders to the gnomes in search of raw ore, but the nomads are already taxed, and demanding ore from the riders would limit the medicinal supplies, furs, woven cloth, and charcoal-quality wood that they already gather and trade to them.

Forging Alliances

Though the lack of supplies and long distances has served to keep the resistance warriors of the Eastern Hills apart for almost a century, a new threat now pulls them together. With the Shadow's presence increasing in bursts over the last decades, culminating in the arrival of Azogduk and his coordination of the many scattered traitor groups, many now believe the time has come to make a stand against a common foe. Tired of fighting a running battle against threats that do not matter to the Shadow, and at the same time avoiding the true enemy, the free folk of the district share a growing desire to strike a decisive blow, a desire only fuelled by Azogduk's deeds. The combat-capable men and women of the district are many, and with proper coordination and enough time to prepare they could outnumber the forces under Azogduk. Though the orc legion consists of hardened veterans, the resistance knows the land better than anybody else and has fought marauding beasts and traitors for decades. Together, the human and halfling forces are flexible, sporting powerful cavalry in the form of horseclan warriors and freeriders, skilled wildlander archers and skirmishers, and excellent scouts, spies, and channelers among the halfling nomads.

There are problems facing those who desire to confront the evil that plagues their land and their countrymen. One of the main challenges facing the Erenlanders who desire to fight the orc army is logistics. Used to living off the land, surviving from one day to the next and fighting evil wherever it appears, they have no experience whatsoever in coordinating movements, arranging supply lines, or fighting as a cohesive force. Though skirmish activity and harassment from afar will certainly hamper the orcs' progress, it will not stop them. If the Erenlanders are to make a solid, decisive accounting of themselves they must at some point face the orcs in open battle.

To further complicate the forming of a unified resistance, let alone an army, is the lack of leadership. Though nearly all the groups that roam the hills have their leaders and champions, these have spent their lives in small groups; none of them possess the training necessary to create and administer a proper fighting force. Many leaders believe they could, but none possess the authority to command the other groups. The search for a leader is not a priority of these factions, who would rather see one of their own in the position or simply wait for one to appear. Such attitudes have severely reduced the peoples' belief that an organized resistance is possible, but it has not dampened their will and desire. However, time grows short, and unless a leader is found soon, it will be too late for the resistance to strike an effective blow.

CHAPTER THREE

Hope of Destiny

"Let go, you fool!"

Liam tried to warn the father, but before he could respond, one of the grunts hefted his vardatch, bringing it down across the man's arms. Blood spattered through his visor, blinding him for a second. The man started screaming just as Liam regained his vision. While not severed from the body, the vardatch had torn into the arm's flesh, shredding even the bone beneath it into bloody splinters. An infection would be imminent, unless the limb was amputated.

Swallowing the bile rising in his throat, he turned to the orc. "Not unless I order it!" Even to himself, his voice sounded squeaky, despite the harshness of the words and the Black Tongue he had chosen to utter them in. The orc looked at him and shrugged apologetically, but made no attempt to excuse himself or better the situation. The father had fallen to the floor, and his wife was cradling him, crying as if he were already dead. Liam tried to take a step backward to gain an overview over the chaos. His movement snapped the child he was carrying out of the shock of seeing his father mutilated, and he started kicking and screaming, small arms slapping impotently against the legate's helmeted head.

Sickening by the second, Liam had to get away. Out of this hole. Out of his armor. Small arms kept banging on his helmet, occasionally obscuring his vision. The cold sweat of fear mixed with the hot sweat of strain. His robes seemed to close in on him. The black cloak was trying to choke him. Spinning on his heel, struggling to maintain his balance, he turned and left, trying not to sway. He narrowly missed the door, and almost dropped the squirming child in the process.

Getting onto his horse, he handed the still-screaming boy to one of the grunts. Tearing off his helmet, he could see another orc setting fire to the thatched roof of the home he had just invaded. Had he ordered that? Was it doctrine? His mind was blurred, and he got his horse into a trot, leaving his escort behind with the blood and fire. Every time was just as bad. It never changed. The guilt, the shame. The fear. Again, he made himself the same promise he did every time: Never again.

This chapter presents additional options for game masters and players in a MIDNIGHT campaign. A system allowing for Erenlanders to further specialize or to become even more flexible generalists is provided. Two prestige classes are presented, the Warden of Erenland and the pale legate, each of which defies the Shadow in its own way. Feats and covenant items allow greater flexibility and power to characters and NPCs living and operating in the central plains. Finally, the Soulreaved template shows what exposure to the destructive energies of a black mirror can do to a creature of Shadow.

Variant Erenlander Traits

The rules below represent an alternative to the Erenlanders as described in *MIDNIGHT 2nd Edition (M2E)*. The Erenlanders' way of life is too varied to be categorized. Some live as slaves in the sprawls of Erenhead, while others labor no less desperately in isolated farmsteads. Some travel freely upon the plains, while others have never set foot more than a mile from the places they were born. Yet despite these differences, all Erenlanders have one thing in common: They adapt.

Below is a list of some the base Erenlander racial traits as presented in M2E, and the drawbacks to those traits that a player may take at character creation. For each drawback a player applies to his Erenlander character, he may select one variant trait from Table 3-1. Each variant trait may only be selected once.

- Erenlanders normally gain a +2 bonus on one ability score of the player's choice and suffer a -2 penalty on one other ability score of the player's choice. As a drawback, the player may choose to forego the +2 bonus to an ability score.

- Erenlanders normally gain two extra feats at 1st level. As a drawback, the player may choose to forego one or both feats. Each feat he does not take counts as one drawback.

- Erenlanders normally gain 8 extra skill points at 1st level and 2 extra skill points at each additional level. As a drawback, the player may choose to receive only 4 extra skill points at 1st level and 1 extra skill point at each additional level. This drawback may only be chosen once; the Erenlanders' diverse skills and talents are an ingrained part of their heritage, and cannot be completely foregone.

Animal Whisperer: You have had to depend on animals, both domestic and wild, for survival. As such, you have developed a knack with them; they trust you. Typical domestic animals have starting attitudes of friendly toward you, wild animals have starting attitudes of indifferent, and even animals trained to attack strangers or guard an area have starting attitudes of merely unfriendly, rather than hostile. These

Table 3-1: Variant Erenlander Traits

Trait	Description
Animal Whisperer	Animals tend to trust you.
Beast Slayer	A lifetime of fighting creatures gives you a good idea of their strengths and weaknesses.
Burly	You're bigger than the average Erenlander.
Charm Crafter	In the long hours of the dark of winter, you've perfected the art of charm crafting.
Dorn Heritage	Though you're an Erenlander, your bloodline and family have strong Dorn traits.
Flexible Craftsman	Making do is what you do best.
Intuitive	It doesn't take much for you to apply skill at one task to skill at another task.
Listener to the Land	You know your home territory as well as any elf knows his forest.
Natural Talent	You might not be very intelligent, but you have a knack for certain activities.
Paranoid	It's not survival of the fittest; it's survival of the most skittish.
Rugged	Life on the open plains has toughened you to natural hardships.
Sarcosan Heritage	Though you're an Erenlander, your bloodline and family have strong Sarcosan traits.
Secretive	You've learned to hold your cards close to your chest.
Spirit Speaker	You have a talent for magic akin to that of some fey.
Squalor Dweller	Rubbish is your home, your meal, and your protection, so what's a little disease?
Sturdy	You're hard to distract or to keep down.
Survivor	You're skilled at avoiding mundane dangers.
Weaponry Improvisation	You can handle strange weapons better than most.

starting attitudes assume that the character is not, for instance, waving a weapon at the animal, invading its lair, or attacking its young.

Beast Slayer: You have grown up defending your community against all manner of beasts, both natural and unnatural. You've picked up basic knowledge along the way regarding their habits, preferred prey, and weaknesses. You may make Knowledge checks to identify monsters and their special powers or vulnerabilities (see the Knowledge skill, PHB) without having any ranks in the requisite Knowledge skill. Additionally, regardless of the creature's HD, a natural 20 on this role always results in correct identification of the creature and some useful information about it. This ability may only be used when identifying animals, magical beasts, monstrous humanoids, humanoids, and undead; other creature types are too exotic and otherworldly for you to have any experience with.

Burly: They grow them big out there on the open plains. You are larger than the average Erenlander, and thanks to a life of hard work, you have a strong back and are adept at using leverage and sheer strength to get the upper hand. You gain a +2 size bonus on all Strength checks, including bull rush, overrun, and trip attempts. This bonus does not stack with that gained from the Giantblooded heroic path.

Charm Crafter: Charms are very useful items to Erenlanders, whether for their own use or to trade to others. Erenlanders have so few resources with which to craft mundane items that being able to create something "from nothing" is seen as a blessing from Aryth. Your teacher taught you all the tricks, and during those long winters or while hiding from the tithe-takers, you perfected the craft. You may create charms using half the time and resources normally required; alternatively, you may spend half again as much time when creating a charm, which raises the difficult to identify it to DC 25 rather than DC 15.

Dorn Heritage: Your northern bloodline is purer than most, and your parents taught you to respect your heritage. You gain a +1 racial bonus to attack rolls when fighting with a group of five or more Dorns, and count as a Dorn for that purpose. Additionally, you begin play with Norther as a bonus language and, if need be, can pass as a full-blooded Dorn rather than an Erenlander.

Flexible Craftsman: Making do with little is the Erenlander way of life. When you craft mundane items, you may either take half the normal time to do so or use up only 50% of the normal materials (your choice for each project). Additionally, you suffer no penalty when crafting an item using improvised tools.

Intuitive: It doesn't take much training for you to get the hang of something, and you rapidly learn to apply skill in one area to activities in another. You gain synergy bonuses when you have 4 ranks in the prerequisite skill, rather than 5.

Listener to the Land: Whether the spirits of the land actually speak to you or not is up for debate. The fact is, you seem to know the lay of the land, the ways of the plants and animals, and the events of the past without having to be told about them. You may make untrained Knowledge checks

(including geography, history, local, or nature) relating to any subject having to do with central Erenland, even if you do not have ranks in that Knowledge skill.

Natural Talent: Book-learning does little good among a people who are punished for literacy. Instead, the Erenlanders focus on their natural aptitudes. Choose one ability score. Whenever determining bonus skill points at each level after 1st, you use that ability score instead of Intelligence to determine your character's number of bonus skill points. However, those bonus skill points may only be used on skills that have that ability as a key ability score. For instance, an Erenlander fighter with an 8 Intelligence and a 16 Strength might choose Strength. At 2nd level and each level thereafter, rather than suffering a -1 to his total number of skill points gained that level, he gains an additional 3 skill points. He could only spend those skill points, however, on Climb, Jump, or Swim.

Paranoid: It can be unwise to trust your neighbors, much less outsiders. A life of avoiding overseers' attention and predicting their moods has given you a useful, if skittish, awareness of your surroundings. Once per social encounter, you may re-roll a Sense Motive check. Additionally, any time you make a reactive Spot or Listen check to avoid being surprised, you may re-roll one of those checks. In both cases, you must choose to re-roll after rolling but before learning the results of the check, and you must accept the results of the second roll, even if they are lower than the first.

Rugged: Those who fall under the lashmaster's whip often aren't allowed to rise again, and enduring the elements on the open plains is part and parcel of survival in Erenland. You receive a +4 racial bonus on all Fortitude checks made to resist natural heat, natural cold, or exposure. You also receive a +2 racial bonus on Constitution checks made to resist taking nonlethal damage from forced marches and similar continuing efforts.

Sarcosan Heritage: Your family's Sarcosan bloodline is strong, and your isolated homestead has allowed them some freedom to keep horses. You begin play with a Sarcosan riding horse for free. Additionally, you begin play with Colonial as a bonus language and, if need be, can pass as a full-blooded Sarcosan rather than an Erenlander.

Secretive: When the tithe-takers come, time is of the essence. Whether hiding friends for an ambush or concealing goods from others' eyes, you may always take 10, even when circumstances would normally prevent you from doing so. Additionally, you may hide friends or equipment in half the normal time.

Spirit Speaker: Erenlanders have never been very spiritual, focusing instead on the pragmatic aspects of survival. In this dark age, however, spirituality has become pragmatic; without help from the land around you, your people probably couldn't survive. You gain 1 bonus spell energy point and know one additional first-level spell, but Channeler (spiritual) becomes your favored class. The bonus first-level spell must be a divination or conjuration spell. Only characters that begin with the Magecraft feat may select this variant trait.

Squalor Dweller: Erenlanders are sometimes forced to live in disgusting environments. They can either succumb to the filth and disease therein, or can develop a hardness and natural immunity to such threats. You're one of the lucky ones. Any time you must make a saving throw against a disease, whether natural or supernatural in origin, you roll two dice and take the higher of the two rolls.

Sturdy: Erenlanders must learn to keep working, even when they hear the screams of their peers behind them or they feel the lash of the overseer's whip. You gain 1 bonus hit point at 1st level, and you receive a +2 racial bonus to Concentration checks.

Survivor: Erenlanders may not be as quick as their Sarcosan forebears or as resilient as their Dornish ancestors, but they learn to keep their heads down in the face of mundane difficulties. You receive a +2 racial bonus on all saving throws made against extraordinary attacks and abilities. This bonus does not apply to saving throws made to resist spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural abilities.

Weaponry Improvisation: Many Erenlander communities are isolated enough that they keep caches of scrounged weaponry around to fight off wild beasts and Fell. When you use a weapon with which you are not proficient, you suffer only half the normal penalty.

Variant Erenlander Backgrounds

Some Erenlanders are defined not by their traits and talents, but by their upbringing. Surviving a childhood of the slums of Erenhead is a far different experience than being raised among the free wildlanders of the eastern foothills or the rural folk of the open plains. The four general backgrounds for Erenlanders are urban, rural, free, and favored.

The variant backgrounds presented here and the variant traits presented above are not meant to be intermixed. Although a campaign might allow for characters using either system, an individual character should only use one of the two.

Regardless of an Erenlander's variant background, he still retains the following base traits from *M2E*:

- +2 bonus on one ability score of the player's choice, -2 penalty on one other ability of the player's choice.

- Medium: As Medium creatures, Erenlanders have no special bonuses or penalties due to their size.

- Erenlander base land speed is 30 feet.

- Erenlanders with variant backgrounds gain one extra feat at 1st level (instead of two extra feats, as with other Erenlanders).

- Erenlanders with variant backgrounds gain 4 extra skill points at 1st level, and 1 extra skill point at each additional level (instead of 8 extra skill points at 1st level, and 2 extra skill points at each additional level).

Erenlanders with variant backgrounds do not receive 4 bonus skill points in a Craft or Profession skill, nor do they receive weapon familiarity with a Dorn or Sarcosan racial weapon.

Agrarian Erenlander

These are the Erenlanders who have lived their lives under an illusion of freedom, but who eventually come to learn that their lives can be shattered with no notice. An orc patrol veers left on the rarely used path rather than right, and the village's children die; a tithe-taker decides to visit one more village for the season, and the community's elders starve; a neighboring wildlander chases a pack of shadows-pawn from his own territory, and the land around the village becomes unsafe for years.

To survive under these conditions requires as hardy a mind as it does a body. These Erenlanders are raised on acceptance, and live off of stoicism.

Traits

- +1 racial bonus to Will saves. The constant fear of living in isolated, oppressed communities overseen by dread overlords has strengthened the minds of agrarian Erenlanders.

- +1 dodge bonus to AC until they attack in combat. Knowing that resistance is futile, agrarian Erenlanders have developed a very defensive attitude. The only way to survive is to evade the orcs' blows until their rage is spent.

- +2 to Appraise and Handle Animal checks. Their rural existence requires the Erenlanders to be able to assess the quality of possible trade objects and to keep their livestock under control.

- **Natural Knack:** Agrarian Erenlanders may make Knowledge (nature) checks even if they don't have any ranks in the skill. Additionally, agrarian Erenlanders without the Track feat may use Survival to identify and follow tracks with a DC of 20 or lower, rather than the normal DC of 10 or lower.

- **Favored Region:** Northern Erenland, Central Erenland, or Southern Erenland.

- **Automatic Language:** Erenlander.

- **Bonus Languages:** Any.

Urban Erenlander

Perhaps the most wretched of the humans of Eredane are those who reside in the still vast, if no longer great, cities of the kingdom. They survive somehow amid the squalor and death, not quite slaves but not quite unknown to the Shadow.

Whether they provided needed services, or simply escaped their shackles and disappeared into the alleyways, they grew up learning to live off of the waste of orcs and legates, to serve them as if they were their betters, yet to hate them with all their hearts.

- +1 racial bonus to Fortitude saves. Only those with the strongest immunities and resistances to disease could survive to adulthood in the filth of the kingdom's cities.

- +4 bonus to Hide checks made to blend in (see *M2E*, pg. 118). Sticking to the shadows and acting suspicious is a sure way to be spotted by an astirax or overzealous informer. The best way to hide is to look like one is supposed to be there, to become just a part of the sea of humanity flowing through the streets.

- +2 bonus to Bluff and Sense Motive checks. Erenlanders living in cities have become true urban survivors, lying and scrounging their way out of most hard places. They also boast suspicious and paranoid streaks.

- **Urban Scavengers:** Urban Erenlanders may forage for food (see *PHB*) in urban environments instead of the wilderness, using Search instead of Survival. The DC to do so is 20 for villages, 15 for towns, and 10 for cities.

- **Accidental Linguists:** The cities of Erenland are a chaotic swirl of Northers, Sarcosans, Erenlanders, orcs, legates, and goblin-kin, and the soundscape of these areas reflects that. Urban Erenlanders have glimpsed enough body language and overheard enough interactions that they can get convey their meaning with nearly any language of Eredane. When using a language with which they have no competence, urban Erenlanders suffer only a -10 to applicable skill checks, rather than the normal -30 (see *M2E*, pg. 120)

- **Favored Region:** None; bonuses apply instead to any urban environment. These bonuses apply to urban Erenlanders' scavenging ability (see above).

- **Automatic Language:** Erenlander.

- **Bonus Languages:** Any.

free Erenlander

Though they call themselves free, these Erenlanders are held captive by the lives they have chosen and by their very natures. They are not free to create homes, to raise families, or even to experience friendship. They are ever hunted by the Shadow's minions, and have never known a day without fear or hunger. But they can travel as they choose, answer to no overseer's whip, and pay no tithes. The Shadow can take away their homes, but it cannot take their sense of independence and their will to defy him.

- +2 racial bonus to saves made to resist natural heat, natural cold, or exposure, and a +2 racial bonus on Constitution checks made to resist taking nonlethal damage from forced marches and similar continuing efforts. A life in the wilderness has hardened these brave rebels. Often, the ability to keep traveling past the wall of exhaustion, outpacings patrols, is what separates the free from the captured.

- +4 racial bonus to Survival checks when concealing tracks and evading patrols. The Shadow is always hunting free men, and they have learned to hide their passing masterfully.

- +2 racial bonus to Handle Animal and Ride checks or +2 racial bonus to Climb and Jump checks. There are those among the Free Erenlanders who have taken to horse like their southern kin, and there are those who make do with their own feet.

- **Focus on the Strengths:** Free Erenlanders must learn to use finesse when they are too weakened from hunger to use brawn, use instinct when their senses are dulled from exhaustion, and rely on luck when sheer effort fails them. At first level, and again at 5th, 10th, 15th, and 20th level, a free Erenlander may choose one of the skills listed on Table 3-2. When using that skill, the Erenlander may use the listed ability score as its key ability score, if he wishes.

- **Favored Region:** Northern Erenland, Central Erenland, Southern Erenland, Erethor, Sea of Pelluria, or Kaladrun Mountains.

- **Automatic Language:** Erenlander.

- **Bonus Languages:** Any.

**Table 3-2:
Focus on the Strengths**

Skill	Alternate Ability Score
Balance	Wis
Climb	Dex
Concentration	Int
Diplomacy	Int
Intimidate	Str
Jump	Dex
Hide	Wis
Listen	Int
Swim	Wis
Use Rope	Int

favored Erenlander

The lucky and the cursed, these few are the result of breeding programs initiated by the legates to create new generations devoted to the Order. The goal of this effort is to create children with the best attributes for legates, regardless of their heritage and other traits. Most children that result from these efforts therefore have the blood of both the Dorns and the Sarcosans in them, creating strangely unblended physical appearances that have, in other Erenlanders, been softened by generations of interbreeding.

More so than their bloodlines, however, these children's development is affected by the way they are raised. They never know their parents, being separated from them at an early age so that their only allegiance is to the Order and to the dark god. They are granted the finest in education, housing, and sustenance. The "larva," as they are mockingly called by the orcs, are given until the age of 10 to show evidence of talent at divine spellcasting. Those who do are then given over to the Order for training and further indoctrination. Those who do not shunted off into the system where they seem best inclined. Some become servants to the traitor kings or collaborators. The youths who prove capable with arms and armor are often raised as bodyguards for legates or other important personages. A very few are sent to the front lines to aid the war effort, but these are as likely to be killed and eaten by orcs out of boredom or hunger as they are to meet their ends at an enemy's hands.

Many of these grow up to be as corrupt and merciless as their legate peers. Yet, even these feel some measure of hatred for their former masters, or for those who were chosen for the Order instead of them, or for the orcs and goblin-kin who tormented them...perhaps enough to turn against them and join the resistance. Then there are those who are truly good at heart, and wish to undo the evils that their peers were raised to perform. Either group, being educated, skilled, armed, and yet not indoctrinated heart and soul, are dangers to the dark god's domination, cast-off remnants of the war machine that may yet rise up to haunt him.

- **Exceptional Breeding:** Favored Erenlanders do not suffer the normal -2 penalty to an ability score, and they must apply their +2 ability score bonus to Wisdom. However, for whatever reason, the spark of divine insight is denied them. They may never use Wisdom as a spellcasting ability score, whether it be for divine spells (like those granted to a legate) or channeled spells (such as for a spiritual channeler). If they had had such abilities, they would have been taken into the Order long ago.

- **Well-Educated:** Favored Erenlanders begin play with a single rank in each Knowledge skill without having to spend ranks on them. They also always have Knowledge (Shadow) as a class skill, regardless of which classes they take.

- **Well-Funded:** Favored Erenlanders begin play with twice the normal vp worth of starting equipment for a character of their class.

- **Well-Trained:** The instructors of favored Erenlanders believe that, regardless of whether or not they will evince talent at divine spellcasting, the "larva" can make use of the ability to wield Izrador's favored weapon, the longsword. Training with the weapon therefore begins at an early age, and is often pursued even more diligently by those whose time is not occupied by prayer and spellcasting education. Favored Erenlanders gain weapon familiarity with the longsword.

- **Games of Intrigue:** Favored Erenlanders gain a +2 bonus to Forgery, Intimidate, and Sense Motive checks against servants of the Shadow.

- **Odd Look:** Those who see favored Erenlanders can't quite place their features as belonging to any race in particular, or are thrown off by combinations like the square Dorn chin mixed with high Sarcosan cheekbones. Others can't help but notice their refined mannerisms and odd inflections, which remind common folk of the hated legates. Therefore, favored Erenlanders suffer a -4 penalty to Bluff, Diplomacy, and Gather Information checks against those who do not serve the Shadow.

- **Favored Region:** None. Favored Erenlanders do not have, and do not require to survive, the connection to the land that allows the other races of Eredane to exist in the Last Age.

- **Automatic Languages:** Erenlander, Black Tongue.

- **Bonus Languages:** Any.

Prestige Classes

The simple lives of Erenlanders do not lend themselves to prestige classes; adventuring Erenlanders with levels in the core classes are rare in themselves, much less Erenlanders with specialized careers. This is due to several factors: a lack of the infrastructure necessary for training, a low survival rate of those who do anything other than keep their heads down, and the need to adapt rather than specialize.

Two exceptions to the norm are presented here, however. The first exists in defiance of the normal state of Erenland, and owes its existence to a forgotten order of knights. The second is a prestige class whose members are defined, not by what they have become, but rather by what they once were.

Warden of Erenland

"Gone are the days when we would ride the open plain, our banners tearing through the sky while the hooves of our mounts drummed the earth. No longer can we sound the trumpets, lower our lances, and take our enemy head-on. On the throne to which we swore our allegiance sits an impostor. Our halls are ridden with traitors. Orc boots grind our land to bloodied mud while our people cower under black whips. These are dark days, in a land where honor and justice find no home. But it is in the face of evil that one proves one's virtue."

The order of knights known as the King's Heralds, established in the Second Age, was an organization of warriors from all cultures and social classes, sworn to protect and serve the kingdom. Given the powers of judge, jury and executioner, these knights errant walked the path of the hero, striving to grant peace and protection to the common people in the age of chaos that followed the second war against Izrador. With the fall of the kingdom, those survivors of this

The Warden of Erenland

Base					
Class	Attack	Fort	Ref	Will	
Level	Bonus	Save	Save	Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+0	+0	Spirit Speaker, Mediator 1/day
2nd	+2	+3	+0	+0	Aryth's Blessing 1/day
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+1	Dreams of the Land (<i>commune with nature</i>)
4th	+4	+4	+1	+1	For the King I, Mediator 2/day
5th	+5	+4	+1	+1	Aryth's Blessing 2/day
6th	+6	+5	+2	+2	Dreams of the Land (<i>dream</i>)
7th	+7	+5	+2	+2	For the King II, Mediator 3/day
8th	+8	+6	+2	+2	Aryth's Blessing 3/day
9th	+9	+6	+3	+3	Dreams of the Land (<i>foresight</i>)
10th	+10	+7	+3	+3	For the King III, Mediator 4/day

order wandered the forgotten paths and ruins of Erenland, and over time they found a new purpose to guide them, developing powers never before known to men. This new order of knights, the Wardens of Erenland, have forged a strange bond with the land they guard, a bond which has truly come to manifest itself in the Last Age, in the darkest hour the kingdom has ever seen.

Hit Dice: d10

Requirements

Race: Dorn, Erenlander, or Sarcosan

Base Attack Bonus: +6

Feats: Endurance, Iron Will, Friendly Agent

Skills: Diplomacy 4 ranks, Knowledge (history) 2 ranks, Survival 4 ranks

Special: Must be sponsored and knighted by a Warden and take the knightly vows.

Class Skills

Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (central Erenland) (Int), Knowledge (history), Knowledge (Shadow) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Survival (Wis), Swim (Str).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int Mod.

Class Features

All of the following are features of the Warden of Erenland prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: The Warden is proficient with simple and martial weapons, light and medium armor, and all shields except tower shields.

Warden's Vows: The Warden of Erenland must live according to the vows he takes when he is initiated into the order. This code includes, in order of priority, seeking out the heirs of the King of Erenland, keeping secret any information regarding those heirs or the Wardens, helping all Erenlanders in need, and killing the dark god's minions whenever possible. These goals need not be followed beyond reason. If attacking the Shadow's minions would jeopardize the Warden's quest for the heir, for instance, he need not do it. If the Warden fails to follow his vows, he loses all of his class abilities until the error has been rectified or atoned for.

Many of the Warden's abilities described below only work when the Warden is within central or southern Erenland.

Spirit Speaker (Ex): At 1st level, the Warden gains the Spirit Speaker variant Erenlander trait (see page 44). If he already has this trait, he may add his class level as a bonus to all Knowledge checks and Survival checks having to do with central or southern Erenland.

Mediator (Ex): The Wardens were once heralds and emissaries, judges and enforcers. Now they are forced to act as smugglers, guardians, and messengers, but their skills at communication are no less valuable in those roles. Once per day at 1st level, he can use this ability to automatically shift the initial attitude of any creature or group of creatures (up to a maximum number of five per class level of the Warden) by one step, such as from indifferent to friendly, or from friendly to helpful. Further adjustments to the creatures' attitudes can be attempted as normal, using Diplomacy or Intimidate checks.

At 4th, 7th, and 10th level, the Warden gains one additional use of this ability per day.



Aryth's Blessing (Ex): This is possibly the most versatile and powerful of the Warden's abilities, and some point to it as proof that Aryth herself watches over these guardians of the land. Once per day at 2nd level, the Warden may select a heroic path ability from a path other than the one he possesses (if any). The ability may be any one that is normally gained at a level equal to the Warden's class level, although it cannot be an ability that depends on significant physical qualities (such as the Giantblooded's size alteration or the Beast's vicious assault ability). An ability can be selected at the beginning of each day, or may be chosen in the middle of the day, requiring 10 minutes of uninterrupted concentration. Once this is accomplished, the Warden may then either use that ability once during the day as described under the ability (if it is a one-use effect) or gains its benefits until he next rests.

At 5th and 8th level, the Warden may select one additional ability per day.

Dreams of the Land (Su): The Warden partakes in a special bond with the land, and is perhaps guided by Aryth herself. Each night, if he shares blood with the land (by cutting himself for 1 hp and letting his blood flow onto the soil or waterways of central Erenland), he experiences prophetic dreams. At 3rd level, this takes the form of knowledge like that granted by a *commune with nature* spell, except that the range is 10 miles + 1 per class level of the Warden. Further, this range is doubled for the purposes of detecting the locations of other Wardens of Erenland or direct descendants of

the King of Erenland. At 6th level, the Warden may also send messages to allies via these dreams, exactly like a *dreams* spell. Finally, at 9th level, the Warden receives the benefits of the *foresight* spell upon waking with regards to himself or one person of his choice, except that it lasts 1 hour per level instead of 10 minutes per level. The caster level for all effects are equal to the Warden's class level, and none of the effects radiate magical auras.

Once per arc per spell effect, the Warden may gain the benefits of the aforementioned spells during the day. This requires the spilling of blood as normal, and 1 minute of meditation.

For the King (Ex): At 4th level, the Warden may utter this war cry as a free action. When doing so, he gains a +2 morale bonus on all weapon attack rolls against creatures of Izrador during the round, and inflicts +1d6 damage on each successful hit against such foes. Additionally, this cry gives all allies within 60 feet of the Warden (including the Warden himself) a +2 morale bonus against fear effects for a number of rounds equal to the Warden's class level. The Warden may use this cry for a number of rounds (not necessarily contiguous) equal to his class level every day.

At 7th level, the morale bonuses to attack rolls and against fear effects increase to +3, the bonus damage increases to +1d8, and any allies within 60 feet who are already suffering from a fear effect may immediately make another save (including the +3 bonus) to resist the effects.

At 10th level, the morale bonuses to attack rolls and against fear effects increase to +4, the bonus damage increases to +1d10, and any allies within 60 feet who are already suffering from a fear effect automatically have that effect reduced by one step (from panicked to frightened, from frightened to shaken, or from shaken to normal). Creatures who are still suffering from fear effects after that point may then immediately make another save (including the +4 bonus) to resist the effects.

Pale Legate

"I have walked the shadowed path. I have knelt before evil, and let it embrace me as its son. I have sworn undying loyalty to darkness. I have seen the heart of the Dark God, and he has seen the heart of me. But paths can be left, embraces can be broken, oaths can be forsown, and hearts can be hidden. I have done this, and now I strive to rise from the black pit that has been the home of my rotting soul, and atone for my sins."

Every year, legates are initiated into the Order of Shadow. Every year, legates fall to the daggers of intrigue and the swords of war. Sometimes, a black heart desires light. The few who break out of the embrace of the dark god are hated and feared by both sides. Those who have fought the Shadow seldom trust those who claim to have defected, and the Shadow's minions have no tolerance—or mercy—to spare for traitors. Most of those who have "gone pale" subsist amidst the dregs of society, getting by as best they can. A few exceptional individuals, however, find a way to atone for their pasts. Rather than running, these take up arms against their former fellows. They are some of the Shadow's most dangerous foes, for they have seen the face of the enemy.

Hit Dice: d8

Requirements

Skills: Knowledge (Shadow) 8 ranks

Saves: Will +5

Alignment: Any non-evil

Special: Must have once been able to cast divine spells granted by Izrador, but have renounced his loyalty to Theros Obsidia and the Shadow in the North and atoned for his misdeeds. The manner of this atonement is up to the GM's discretion, but should at the minimum involve a quest and a significant sacrifice. Learning a cleansing ritual from a powerful spirit, dying and being reincarnated by an uncorrupted chanler, or destroying a black mirror (and surviving) are all appropriate ways of meeting this requirement.

Class Skills

Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Knowledge (Shadow) (Int), Knowledge (spirits) (Int), Profession (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), Speak Language (n/a), Spellcraft (Int), Survival (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int Mod.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the pale legate prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: The pale legate gains no additional proficiencies with either weapons or armor.

Gone Pale: The pale legate has forsown his god and his order. He loses all abilities granted to him by his levels in legate or legate prestige classes.

Black Rot (Su): The pale legate may have forsaken Izrador, but the dark god's touch still stains him. Until he has as many levels of pale legate as he has ever had levels in legate or legate prestige classes, his alignment detects as evil and he is affected by spells, weapon enhancements, or special powers (such *holy smite*, the holy weapon enhancement, or the smite evil ability) as if he were evil. However, as long as the rot stays within him, he may use magic items with alignment restrictions as if he was evil, and may use spell completion and spell trigger items as a legate. His effective level for this purpose is equal to his highest-level legate casting level minus his pale legate class level.

If the character's levels in pale legate equal or exceed the character's legate and legate PrC levels, he may choose to shed or keep the black rot. If he sheds it, he can never regain it. The character can chose to shed the black rot every time he gains a new level of this class beyond his legate and legate PrC levels, or if he performs some dramatic, selfless act that the GM deems adequate.

Pale Heart (Ex): The pale legate has forsown Izrador, his power, and all it embodies. He has touched the Shadow and has fought free of it. He gains the listed bonus as an insight bonus to all saves against spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural abilities used by servants of Izrador. For every three levels of legate or legate prestige classes the character possessed before becoming a pale legate, this bonus is increased by +1.

Shadow Speak (Ex): Through his experience with the minions of the Shadow, the pale legate knows jargon, names, speech patterns, and other verbal cues that allow him to more effectively communicate with such creatures and characters. Any time the pale legate uses Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, or Sense Motive against a minion of Izrador, he gains the listed bonus to his check. For every two legate or legate prestige class levels the character possessed before becoming a pale legate, this bonus is increased by +1.

The Pale Legate

Base					
Class	Attack	Fort	Ref	Will	
Level	Bonus	Save	Save	Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+0	+2	Black rot, pale heart +1
2nd	+2	+3	+0	+3	Shadow speak +1
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+3	Sense dark magic, deny Izrador's power 1/day
4th	+4	+4	+1	+4	Pale heart +2
5th	+5	+4	+1	+4	Shadow speak +2
6th	+6	+5	+2	+5	<i>Detect Evil</i> , Deny Izrador's Power 2/day
7th	+7	+5	+2	+5	Pale Heart +3
8th	+8	+6	+2	+6	Shadow Speak +3
9th	+9	+6	+3	+6	Deny Izrador's Power 3/day
10th	+10	+7	+3	+7	Pale Heart +4

Deny Izrador's Power (Su): At 3rd level, the pale legate gains the ability to counter any divine magic cast by a servant of Izrador. Once per day as a free action, even when it is not his turn, the character may make a dispel check against any divine spell being cast or targeted within a 60-foot radius. The bonus to the dispel check equals the character's class level + his Wisdom modifier. For every level of legate or legate prestige class the character possessed before becoming a pale legate, the bonus to the check is increased by +1.

At 6th and 9th levels the pale legate gains another use of this ability per day.

Sense Dark Magic (Sp): After being regularly bathed in the divine power of Izrador, and then experiencing a life free of its taint, the scent of the dark god's magic is very noticeable to the pale legate. At will, the pale legate can use this ability to *detect magic* as the spell, except that this ability only reveals the presence of the divine magic of Izrador, such as a legate's spells or items created by divine magic. This ability has a caster level equal to the character's divine spellcasting class levels + his pale legate levels.

Detect Evil (Sp): Having spent years first amongst the Shadow's minions, then among the common folk of Eredane, the pale legate learns to differentiate between pure souls and those that are twisted. At will, he may use *detect evil* as the spell. This ability has a caster level equal to the character's divine spellcasting class levels + his pale legate levels.

Covenant Items

Of all the realms of Eredane, Erenland may be home to the greatest number of undiscovered covenant items. In the north, ancestral relics are passed down with honor, their histories and capabilities always known. In the south, so educated are the sages that powerful items are easily identified. And

in the fey wars to the east and west, when every weapon and tool sees use in the war effort, covenant item abilities are discovered on the battlefield.

But in the simple, sometimes uneventful world of the central plains, such items can rest upon mantelpieces for decades, undiscovered. Weapon caches remain buried for fear of the punishment that would be delivered upon their owners; whole families are killed and their belongings left to rot, with no neighbors to mark their passing; and education is so nonexistent that an item's age and place of origin, whether it be dwarven or elven, centuries old or merely created within the last decade, is inconsequential. All that matters is if the item in question will help its finder survive for one more day.

Yet, for all that, some of the covenant items of this land cannot be mistaken for anything but powerful relics of a shattered kingdom. The crown, the cloak, and the standard of Erenland are all items of great history and renown. All are thought lost, but may in fact be merely hiding, biding their time, waiting for the true heirs and heroes of Erenland to return and wield them.

The Crown of the King

After the humans of Eredane rebelled and fought their way out of the grasp of Pelluria, forging the Kingdom of Eredane, the fey foresaw a time of peace with the newcomers. In recognition of their new sovereignty, and as an offering of peace and trust between the realms of men and fey, a crown was gifted for the kings of Erenland. Commissioned by Aradil—even crafted by her hand with the aid of dwarven smiths, some rumors say—the crown of the king is one of the greatest artifacts ever to come into the possession of humankind on Eredane.

It has decorated the brow of every monarch ever to sit the throne in Alvedara save one: Jahzir. The Night King covets

Upon the Brow of the King

When worn by a direct heir of the king of Erenland, the crown of the king grants SR 20 + HD of the character wearing the crown against all spells granted by evil deities, as well as against spells with the evil descriptor. Additionally, the bearer receives a +6 divine bonus to AC, saving throws, attack rolls, and to his Charisma score.

The crown also serves to smite the creatures of darkness. At will and as a free action, the wearer of the crown can cause it to shine with brilliant light, bathing an area up to 80 feet around him in brilliant, true daylight. When it shines like this, any evil creatures within its radius suffer from an effect identical to the *sunburst* spell, except that the save to avoid blindness and for half damage is Will (DC 10 + $\frac{1}{2}$ wearer's HD + Cha modifier) rather than Reflex. Evil undead suffer additional damage and effects as described under the spell's entry. This effect may be maintained for a number of rounds per day equal to the bearer's HD + Cha modifier.

Finally, evil creatures struck in melee by the crown's wearer must make an even more difficult Will save (DC 10 + wearer's HD + Cha modifier) or be panicked for 1 minute per HD of the wearer. Creatures must save each time they are struck by the wearer, regardless of whether or not they have successfully saved against the effect earlier in the day.

the item greatly, for he knows the power and prestige it holds. When worn by anyone with the bloodline, spirit, and mettle to truly lead the kingdom, the crown shines brilliantly and provides the powers listed under "Upon the Brow of the King," above. Should it fall upon any other head, as it has done all too often, it holds powers more appropriate for a normal covenant item. Still, even in such an instance, the crown signifies something special to the people, and as long as it remains out of Jahzir's hands, hope still lingers.

The golden crown was crafted from the sword of a celestial, the metal having been blessed by the Lords of Light before the sundering. The primal force of good that now inhabits the item recognizes true potential, and it is that which imbues the crown with its greatest powers. Should it fall into the hands of the right man, the two—crown and hero—could become the undoing of even a Night King. Should it be corrupted to the Shadow, it could become an artifact for which those dark lieutenants would slay one another.

The crown only provides the listed benefits when worn by a creature worthy to lead the fight for the old Kingdom of Erenland.

1st level: The symbol of the true lord and master of the Kingdom of Erenland, the crown grants its wearer a +4 bonus to Intimidate checks against evil creatures, and a +4 bonus to Diplomacy checks when dealing with good-aligned creatures.

4th level: Whenever the wielder of the crown is in combat, he may invoke the power of a *daylight* spell at will and as a free action, surrounding himself with a brilliant halo of ancient light.

6th level: The wearer of the crown gains a +4 bonus on his Leadership score if he has the Leadership feat, as long as he wears the crown in front of his followers at least once per week.

7th level: The wearer of the crown gains a +1 divine bonus to AC.

10th level: The crown grants its wearer SR 10 + $\frac{1}{2}$ the wearer's HD against all spells granted by evil deities, as well as against spells with the evil descriptor.

12th level: Any evil creature struck in melee by the bearer of the crown must make a Will save (DC 10 + $\frac{1}{2}$ the wearer's HD + Cha modifier) or suffer as if from a *fear* spell. If the creature saves against the effect, it is immune to it for the next 24 hours.

14th level: The crown grants a +2 divine bonus to AC.

The Standard of Erenland

The griffon is the symbol of the King of Erenland, and this griffon banner was the standard of the monarch-at-war for centuries. During the dark days of the second coming of Izrador, it flew across many of the greatest battlefields, rallying men, inspiring hope and courage, and sending the forces of Shadow reeling. Jahzir personally captured the banner in the battle for Alvedara, but could not bring himself to destroy it. Instead, he has hidden it in his personal chambers, and the symbol of the griffon has been banned under penalty of death.

The banner only provides the listed benefits when carried by a creature loyal to the old Kingdom of Erenland.

1st level: All allies within 60 feet of the banner gain a +4 morale bonus on saves vs. fear effects.

4th level: Once per day, the standard bearer may use a standard action that does not provoke attacks of opportunity to imbue the weapons of all allied, good-aligned characters within 60 feet with the *align weapon (good)* and *magic weapon* spells for 20 minutes.

7th level: When the standard bearer charges, all allies within 60 feet of the banner who charge with it, or who charge on the same turn, gain a +2 morale bonus to damage rolls.

11th level: Whenever the bearer of the banner and any allies within 60 feet are outnumbered at least two to one, they gain a +1 morale bonus to attack rolls and armor class for every multiplier they are outnumbered by (two to one is a +1 bonus, three to one is a +2 bonus, etc.) and may react to hit point loss as if they possessed the Diehard feat.

15th level: Once per day, the standard bearer may use a standard action that does not provoke attacks of opportunity to cast *repulsion*, with a caster level equal to the wielder's character level.

The Staff of the Elder Tree

This ebon branch is rumored to be a limb taken from one of the timeless, sentient trees that grew in the ancient forests of the elthedar ages ago. The limb stands the height of a man, and is made of a dark, dull wood, smooth and without knot-hole or scar. It was last born by the sheriff of the small town of Mithlen. When grasped by one seeking to defend his community or homeland, this ancient branch takes on the heft and feel of a quarterstaff, and imparts the following abilities.

1st level: The staff seems to act in harmony with its wielder, providing additional defense in combat. The staff bearer gains a +1 deflection bonus.

3rd level: The wood of the staff exhibits the durability of the ancient tree from whence it came. When used to strike an object or weapon, the weapon imparts the Improved Sunder feat to its bearer.

6th level: The weapon gains a +1 enhancement bonus.

9th level: The mysterious ebon wood manifests its true strength and resilience. The staff becomes incredibly resistant to damage, gaining hardness 15 and 40 hit points, and when used to sunder a weapon or object it ignores hardness less than 15.

12th level: The weapon gains a +2 enhancement bonus.

15th level: The spirit of the elder tree awakens within the staff. Once per day, a creature struck by the staff may receive the benefits of a break enchantment spell with a caster level equal to the wielder's HD.

Storm

This mighty axe was given to the dwarves of Calador as a gift from the lords of house Orin during the first rise of Izrador. It is a beautiful, long and slim-bearded greataxe, single-bladed and with a curved spike balancing the head. Its blade bears the message "A Storm Shall Strike My Foes" in both Old Dwarven and Norther runes.

1st level: The axe is made from mithral, and as such possesses a hardness of 13, 40 hit points, ignores hardness of less than 20, and weights 6 lbs. It is also a masterwork item.

5th level: The axe gains a +1 enhancement bonus.

8th level: A number of times per arc equal to the wielder's HD, the wielder of the axe may call down a bolt of lightning as the *call lightning* spell upon any creature struck with the axe. As with the spell, the damage dice from these lightning strikes are increased in bad weather. Initiating this effect is a free action, but can be done only once per round. Caster level is equal to the wielder's HD, and the Reflex save DC is 13 + the wielder's Str modifier.

11th level: The axe gains a +2 enhancement bonus.

In the Hands of the Herald

If a young Erenlander (under the age of 20) who has sworn fealty and blood oath to the old kingdom carries the standard of Erenland, he is considered one of the king's heralds, and the standard gains additional abilities. A youth who has joined the Wardens of Erenland is considered to have sworn fealty for this purpose.

First of all, the griffon standard normally requires two hands to carry, preventing the bearer from using weapons or shields. However, when carried by the herald, the standard may either be wielded in two hands as if it were a quarterstaff or it may be carried in the off-hand as a non-weapon object that inflicts no penalties to the bearer's attack rolls with his primary weapon. Any of the banner's abilities that affect allies also affect the herald himself.

Second, all of the covenant item abilities of the banner act as normal, and all of them may be used, regardless of the herald's actual level. Additionally, all of those benefits now extend to any ally who can see the banner and who has taken an oath of loyalty to the old Kingdom of Erenland.

Finally, the banner gains the following additional powers:

- The herald and all allies within 60 feet of the banner become immune to fear.
- The herald and all allies within 60 feet may ignore a number of points of damage reduction equal to the HD of the herald.
- The two covenant item abilities that may normally be used once per day may now be used three times per day.

13th level: A number of times per arc equal to the wielder's HD, the wielder of the axe may cast *shatter* as a free action upon an object held or worn by a creature struck with the axe. Unlike the normal use of the *shatter* spell, this effect has a chance of affecting magical items. Caster level is equal to the wielder's HD, and the Will save DC is 12 + the wielder's Str modifier.

Come of the Teacher

Kimbal Carter was a simple wagon driver who stumbled upon an old buried box one afternoon while resting his draft horses on the Road of Woe. The legate whose goods he was carrying was off praying, the orcs who accompanied him hid from the light of the sun in the shade of a nearby copse of

trees. That left Kimbal free to poke around the ruins of an outpost by the road. In doing so, he uncovered the box, and within the box were sheaves of paper.

Hiding those sheaves within his clothes was the bravest thing that the heretofore subdued and acquiescent wagon driver had ever done. For the rest of the journey, the crinkling of the dusty sheets against his skin, the telltale rustling they made against his clothes, haunted him. He imagined that the legate could hear every sound, knew exactly what the Kimbal was trying to do. But he was a young legate, self-involved, and suspected nothing.

Upon his return home, Kimbal tediously and persistently read the notes. It took him five years to puzzle out the meaning of 10 pages...because he did not know how to read.

Yet, through studying old scratchings, questioning village elders, and begging aid from passing channelers, the man slowly learned, teaching himself the written language of his fathers. He then became obsessed with his kingdom's history, and with writing as the path to sharing that history with others. He gathered old tales everywhere he went, in every brutally controlled village at which his legate masters forced him to stop. He even convinced the over-educated legates who traveled with him to share what they knew of the history of their land, winnowing out the stories from them on the long, boring journeys through the open plains.

Eventually the book was completed, and Kimbal began his most dangerous task yet. He began to teach the children in his village to read. It wasn't more than a few months before one of the villagers betrayed him to a passing legate, hoping to spare himself from the upcoming tithe or perhaps gain a boon for his family. Kimbal was killed trying to prevent the orcs from searching his house. Yet, when the place was thoroughly turned over, no book was found. As punishment for the false lead, and for causing the death of a skilled wagon driver, the collaborator who betrayed Kimbal was also killed...but was then reanimated as a zombie, forced for the rest of his undeath to pull the local legate's cart. The book, meanwhile, is passed on from community to community, empowered by Kimbal's devotion and his sacrifice.

1st level: The tome, which is written in Erenlander, allows anyone who is not literate in the tongue to read the book anyway. Only those who are not already literate can read the book; those who are not good see nothing but scrawls and scribbles, as if a child had used the precious pages of the book as a sketchpad. In this way, the book is often viewed and passed over by legates who think it to be worthless. Good-aligned Erenlanders may read the book regardless.

Those who can read the book have the opportunity to learn about their kingdom's origin, history, laws, and traditions. While not magical in and of themselves, these tales tend to inspire the Erenlanders who read and share them. Those who learn the tales directly from the book gain a single +5 morale bonus to any one d20 roll, useable at any point within the next 10 years, so long as it is applied to an action taken for the greater good of the old kingdom or the descendants of its residents. The character may decide to use the benefit after he has learned the outcome of his roll. Each character only gains this benefit once.

2nd level: Each day, by perusing the book for 10 minutes, the book's bearer may gain the benefits of either the foe specialty or knowledge specialty hermetic channeler abilities (see M2E, pg. 79). If the character is a hermetic channeler with these abilities, he may apply the ability to an additional creature type or Knowledge skill. This benefit may only be granted to a single person each day.

5th level: The bearer of the book becomes a skilled teacher and teller of tales. So long as he uses the book as a teaching tool, he may grant any student a fluent level of literacy in Erenlander, along with the potential for lower-level literacy in related languages like Colonial, Courtier, and Norther (see M2E, pg. 160). Teaching a single individual using the book requires 20 hours of study, either continuous or broken up



over several days. For each additional student being taught at the same time, add 2 hours to this amount of time, up to a maximum number of students equal to the HD of the teacher (who must also be the book's bearer).

8th level: The bearer of the book is considered literate in all written tongues, including the sundered tongues. This ability does not allow the bearer to decipher codes.

11th level: The bearer of the book unlocks the clues deep within its tales and histories—clues that Kimbal himself did not recognize as he wrote them. Together, these clues point to the location of the heirs of the Kingdom of Erenland, as well as to the tools that they might use to reclaim their kingdom: the crown of the king, the standard of Erenland, and the wings of the griffon.

While undertaking missions to find and unite these pieces of destiny, the book's bearer can find within its pages any spell of a level he can normally cast. Casting a spell from the book is similar to casting a spell from a scroll, except that it uses the bearer's spell energy points. Casting from the book is at least a full-round action, or the normal casting time of the spell, which is greater. Once a spell is cast from the book, it disappears, and may not be used again on the quest to reunite the true heirs of Erenland with the covenant items that are their birthright.

Bearers who do not have any spellcasting abilities are instead granted the Magecraft feat for as long as they are on the mission, with their key spellcasting ability score being whichever mental ability score is highest. In addition to the three 0-level spells and one 1st-level spell known via the feat, the bearer may cast each 1st-level spell from the book once while on the quest.

The Wings of the Griffon

This item, which is actually a cloak, had protected messengers of the king for centuries, having come all the way from Pelluria with the first Sarcosans. Once an incredibly powerful magic item, perhaps even of artifact status, its powers seemed to slowly wane after the rebellion of the colony from the old empire. Eventually, it became ceremonial garb only, worn as a badge of office for the king's messengers and knights. He who wore the blood-red cloak spoke with the voice of the king. The cloak gained its name because the messenger and emissary who wore it was known as the king's griffon, and the cloak was imagined to be a figurative set of wings that sped him on his many and important missions. Many kings of Erenland chose one such representative to act as their advisor and friend throughout their reigns.

No one knows where the cloak now rests, as the last king's griffon appeared upon the field of battle without it, standing and dying beside his liege. Yet it is said that, as the Queen of Erenland rode south from Alvedara with the kingdom's heir, her babe was wrapped in a cloth so deep red as to be nearly black. If this were the griffon's wings, then perhaps

Worn by the Griffon

If the character who wears this cloak is on a mission for the true King of Erenland or on his direct behalf, he is considered the king's griffon. He may speak for the king to any he meets, and so long as they are descended from those who lived in the old kingdom, they will know that he speaks truly. The griffon is magically prevented from saying anything in the king's name that he believes would be untrue.

When worn by the griffon, all of the covenant item abilities of the cloak act as normal, regardless of the griffon's actual level. Additionally, the cloak gains the following additional powers:

- The griffon constantly gains the benefits of a *freedom of movement* spell at caster level 20.
- The cloak, the griffon, and all of the griffon's belongings are invisible to all forms of divination, whether it be magic detection, scrying, or spells that involve asking questions of a deity.
- The griffon gains the hide in plain sight ability, as per the ranger ability of the same name (see *PHB*), if he is anywhere within the boundaries of the old Kingdom of Erenland.

its magic has returned, empowered by the collective agony of a people who watched their kingdom destroyed.

The wings only provide the listed benefits when worn by a creature on a mission for those who seek to restore the old Kingdom of Erenland.

2nd level: The cloak provides a +5 bonus to Hide checks, Move Silently checks, and Survival checks made to evade patrols.

5th level: The cloak and all magic auras on the cloak's bearer (whether spell effects or carried magic items) are considered to have caster levels 10 lower for the purposes of astral detection, detect magic, and similar spells. If this would bring the items' effective caster level to 0, then the items do not detect as magic at all.

8th level: The wearer of the cloak gains the woodland stride and trackless step abilities, as per the druid abilities of the same name (see *PHB*). This power extends to any mount ridden by the wearer of the cloak.

12th level: The wearer of the cloak gains the special power of the freedom cleric domain (see *PHB*). This ability activates and deactivates automatically, and may be used for a total number of rounds per day equal to the wearer's HD.

New Feats

Clear-Eyed

Survival in rural Erenland often depends on spotting the dust cloud of an approach orc patrol sooner, rather than later. In the hectic moments between a village's free existence and its subjugation by tyrants, the more time one has to hide contraband, children, and tithes, the more likely one is to survive the visit.

Prerequisites: Erenlander, must be taken at character creation

Benefit: When you roll a Spot check in bright light to determine at what distance you notice approaching creatures, you suffer half the normal penalties for distance. Additionally, when on the open plains, you are considered to have low-light vision. Finally, Spot is always a class skill for you, regardless of what character classes you choose.

Defiant

The legates cast spells that affect a person's mind, the shadowspawn are surrounded by nauseating odors, and sometimes even the food of the land has been poisoned by supernatural means. And yet, there are those who spit in fate's eye when they're told that they have lost, and simply refuse to let themselves fall prey to such dangers until they've done what needs to be done.

Prerequisites: Erenlander

Benefit: When you fail a Fortitude or Will saving throw against something that will have some negative or incapacitating effect on you other than hit point damage (such as an enchantment effect, fear effect, sickening effect, or poison), you may ignore the negative effects of the attack for long enough to perform a single round's worth of actions. As soon as your turn is finished, however, you are subjected to the effect, but it has become even stronger. If it inflicted numerical penalties to ability scores, checks, attack rolls, or the like, those penalties are doubled. If the attack has some non-numerical effect, such as causing you to become dominated or panicked, the duration of the effect instead doubles. Either the numerical penalties or the duration are doubled, but not both. The GM is the final arbiter of which occurs.

This feat does not stave off the effects of an attack that instantly kills you, such as a death effect.

Normal: The effects of an attack occur immediately upon the failure of the saving throw.

Fanatic

In the dismal existence of the Last Age, many humans have turned to Izrador as a last, desperate means of obtaining a purpose in life. Many of these depraved individuals become faithful worshipers, as fanatical as any orc.

Prerequisites: Must worship Izrador, but be unable to cast divine spells

Benefit: You gain a +1 morale bonus to attack rolls while you are within 60 feet of a legate or other holy servant of Izrador. Also, when you receive bonuses from beneficial divine spells, the numerical bonuses from those spell are increased by one point.

Hardy

After 100 years of occupation, many of the lands of Erenland are despoiled, desolate, and barren. Fields have fallen into disarray, livestock starves, and the Shadow claims steep tithes. People must often make do with far less of what they need than they would in a time of peace, both in the form of sustenance and rest.

Prerequisites: Con 13+, Endurance

Benefit: You only need half as much food as a normal character of your size category, and only four hours of sleep every day in order to become rested. If you have spell energy, you only recover half of your spell energy points if you rest for four hours.

Huntsman

With extensive experience from tracking and hunting, you are able to determine the traits and weaknesses of your foes by studying the trails they leaves behind.

Prerequisites: Survival 5 ranks, Track

Benefit: If you exceed the Survival check DC to track a creature or group of creatures by 5 or more, and have been tracking the creatures for at least five miles, you discover some defining trait about your prey. This discovery grants you a +1 insight bonus to attack and damage rolls against the tracked creature for one day. If you are tracking multiple creatures, for every 5 points past the first by which you exceed the Survival check DC, you gain the attack and damage bonus against an additional creature in the group.

Pikeman

The Erenlanders of the Fortress Wall rivaled the dwarves in their ability to stand together against foes. Rather than relying on heavy armor and shields to ward off blows, however, they held their opponents at bay with walls of pikes and spears.

Prerequisites: Proficiency with a hafted reach weapon.

Benefit: When wielding a hafted reach weapon that can be set against a charge, you may set to receive a charge as a move action rather than as a ready action. This only allows you to attack charging foes that provoke attacks of opportunity by moving out of one of your threatened squares, however, since you did not ready an actual attack. For instance, if you are Medium and wielding a longspear, you would gain an attack (and inflict double damage, if you hit) against an orc that charges through your reach to attack you with a vardatch,

but not against an ogre that charges and attacks you from 10 feet away.

Normal: You must use a ready action to set to receive a charge in order to deal double damage against him on a successful hit.

Slow Learner

While Erenlanders as a whole tend to be versatile and talented, not all of them learn at the same rate. Some plod along, slowly but surely, eventually becoming as skilled (and perhaps more focused) than their fellows.

Prerequisites: Erenlander, must be taken at character creation

Benefit: This feat takes the place of one of the bonus feats you would otherwise take at character creation, and is effectively an “empty feat slot” that you may fill at any time you wish. For instance, a character may start out with a Dexterity of 12 but eventually wish to learn the Dodge feat; by taking this feat, the character may hold off on using one of his bonus feat slots until 4th level, when his ability score increase gives him a Dexterity of 13, allowing him to take the Dodge feat.

This feat may only be taken once.

Normal: You must use bonus feats as soon as they become available.

Stalwart

Even death recoils in the face of your resilience...for a short time, at least.

Prerequisites: Erenlander, Defiant

Benefit: Any time you reach -1 hit points or lower, or any time you would die, you may choose to act normally for long enough to perform one round’s worth of actions before succumbing to unconsciousness or death. The soon-to-occur state may be due to hit point loss, a death effect, level loss, and so on. Regardless, once your turn is complete, you succumb to the effect as normal.

Between the moment that you would normally fall unconscious or die and the moment that you actually fall unconscious or die, no beneficial effects may prevent your fate. Healing spells, dispel magic effects, and the like are all useless, only coming into effect after you perform your actions and subsequently fall. Characters who use this feat and are reduced to -1 to -9 hit points can be healed or revived, but require twice the normal healing until they reach 0 hit points. For instance, a character who was at -4 hit points would require 8 points of healing to reach 0 hit points, at which point healing begins to affect him normally.

Characters may choose not to use the benefits of this feat at the moment they reach -1 hit points or lower, or at the moment of their death.

Stealthy Rider

Avoiding detection is as important to mounted raiders as it is to thieves, assassins, and spies. The horsemen who have realized this often train for hours with their steeds to make man and beast’s movement as undetected as possible.

Prerequisites: Ride 1 rank

Benefit: Your mount may use your skill ranks in Hide and Move Silently checks instead of your own. The mount still uses its own Dex modifier, armor check penalties, size modifier, and so on. This feat may be used even when you are leading your mount on foot and are not actually mounted.

The Soulreaved

When a black mirror is destroyed, the release of energy is devastating. Ordinarily, everything in the area is annihilated, but under exceptional circumstances those servants of the Shadow in the immediate vicinity who are particularly evil might be transformed into soulreaved. The creatures’ beings are infused with the foul essence of undeath and the dark, siphoning power of a black mirror, and their only goal becomes to destroy all life within their domain.

Creating a Soulreaved

“Soulreaved” is a template that can be added to any creature (referred to hereafter as the base creature). A soulreaved uses all the base creature’s statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Size and Type: The creature’s type changes to undead. Size is unchanged, as are most features (base attack bonus, saves, skill points per Hit Die, etc.).

Hit Dice: Increase to d12.

Speed: A soulreaved has a base land speed of 40 feet or the base creature’s land speed, whichever is better.

Armor Class: A soulreaved has a +5 natural armor bonus or the base creature’s natural armor bonus, whichever is better.

Attack: A soulreaved retains all the attacks of the base creature and also gains a slam attack if it didn’t already have one. If the base creature can use weapons, the soulreaved does not retain this ability. A creature with natural weapons retains those natural weapons.

Damage: Soulreaved have slam attacks. If the base creature does not have this attack form, use the appropriate damage value from the table below according to the creature’s size. Creatures that have other kinds of natural weapons retain their old damage values or use the appropriate value from the table below, whichever is better.

Size	Damage	Size	Damage
Fine	1	Large	1d8
Diminutive	1d2	Huge	2d6
Tiny	1d3	Gargantuan	2d8
Small	1d4	Colossal	4d6
Medium	1d6		



Special Attacks: A soulreaved retains all the special attacks of the base creature, as well as those detailed below. All special attacks have a DC of 10 + the soulreaved's HD + Cha modifier.

Drain Vitality (Su). Living creatures near a soulreaved suffer damage as their life force is siphoned away. Each round an individual stays within 100 feet of the soulreaved, it suffers 1 point of damage per HD of the undead. A successful Fortitude save halves the damage. This is a negative energy effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Siphon Magic (Su). The soulreaved is like a mobile, half-strength pale mirror (see M2E, pg. 271) with regards to channeled magic: Within a 1-mile radius, channeled spells require +1 spell energy point to cast, and both channeled magic items and ongoing channeled spell effects are subject to a *greater dispel magic* cast at 5th level.

Spells: A soulreaved has no ability to cast spells. Creatures that cast spells or use spell-like abilities lose those abilities when they become soulreaved.

Special Qualities: The soulreaved has all the special qualities of the base creature, plus the following.

Bound: The soulreaved cannot venture beyond the original dispelling radius of the now-destroyed black mirror that created it.

Damage Reduction (Su): The soulreaved has DR 5/silver and magic.

Dampen Light (Su): All light, natural or magical, within 60 feet of a soulreaved becomes damped. The area around it is considered shadowy illumination.

Sunlight Weakness (Ex): Soulreaved are weakened in natural sunlight (not merely a *daylight* spell). A soulreaved

operating in sunlight suffers a -6 penalty to Strength and Dexterity and has its movement halved.

Lifescient (Ex): The soulreaved has an uncanny ability to track living creatures within its territory. It feels the presence of any living beings within a 1-mile radius, and will pursue them unceasingly until they are destroyed.

Unnatural Aura (Su): Animals, whether wild or domesticated, can sense the unnatural presence of a soulreaved at a distance of 100 feet. They do not willingly approach nearer than that and panic if forced to do so; they remain panicked as long as they are within that range.

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +4, Dex +4, Chr +2. Intelligence drops to 2 as the creature reverts to a bestial state. As an undead, a soulreaved has no Constitution score.

Skills: Soulreaved have a +4 bonus on Hide and Search checks, and a +4 to Survival checks (+8 when tracking living creatures). Otherwise same as base creature, except that the soulreaved cannot use any skills that an animal could not use (such as Use Magic Device or Knowledge).

Feats: The soulreaved gains Improved Initiative and Power Attack, assuming the base creature meets the prerequisites and doesn't already have these feats.

Environment: Only within the blast area of a destroyed black mirror.

Organization: Always solitary.

Challenge Rating: Same as the base creature +2. Creatures whose spellcasting abilities were a significant part of their power may have much lower CRs.

Treasure: None.

Alignment: Always neutral evil.



Appendix

The Coming Storm

The men stood in a loose semicircle, heads bowed, eyes half-lidded. Whether in the prime of life or of advanced age, all wore somber countenances, mingled with wisdom. Their gilded mail and the silvered hilts of their longswords reflected the warm, golden light suffusing the waters of the font before them. Within its still surface danced a thousand images. A lifetime of experiences and impressions flickered and wavered along their courses.

Soon the images began to blur, and the soft light within the font dimmed, then faded entirely. Blinking, the men of the circle turned their gazes upward from the sacred pool, then looked from one to another, the light of hope dawning in their faces. They then turned to the wizened figure in their midst; his eyes were still focused upon the waters. As they looked upon him, he slowly raised his head, considering each of his brothers through the snowy strands covering his weathered face. The light within his steel-blue irises glittered and danced fiercely, belying his ancient mien.

Drawing himself upright, he broke the tense silence. "It is as we have guessed. The message for our ears and eyes is the same, whether heard upon the whistling wind or seen in the roiling waves of the rushing river. Aryth speaks to us: The time has come. The time for our people, our kingdom, our future has arrived. Wardens, we leave the shadows behind us now. Let the Shadow we face tremble at our wrath."

Hope Held

As the Last Age grinds its way into history over the blood and bone of fey, human, and orc, the people living in the central plains of Erenland do what they must to survive. Outsiders see a land under complete, unwavering control by the Shadow; its people live in slavery, stagnation, and fear, with no hope of salvation. The Erenlanders bowed their heads when the armies of the dark god swept through their heartland; now in this, the darkest age of Aryth, as Izrador presses his pogrom against the defiant fey, the Erenlanders do nothing. Without hope, they accept their lot of dominion.

Or do they? It is true that within the occupied heartland of Erenland, there is tyranny, slavery, and slaughter. Cruelty and evil may dictate the pace of days; mere survival can be a difficult prospect. Yet in the center of the dark god's new kingdom, the attention of the overseers wanes. The simple laborers of the land are perceived as pathetic, inconsequential, harmless. Yet, the control of the Shadow over these people is based on potential retribution, on future pain and destruction, rather than on any true strength of arms to bring

against them. For every oppressed human thrall under a legate's watchful gaze, there are 10 farmers or herders or fishermen who live most of their lives outside of the reach or even notice of harsh taskmasters. They work the land, they pay their tribute, and they are left alone.

Gnome rivermen carry out the tasks set before them, performing the dictates of the Shadow's servants. Halflings wander the plains, struggling for survival instead of rising up to free their people. Yet, members of both groups fight the occupation, unseen and unheard. The gnomes are the lifeline of the resistance, smuggling everything from weapons and magic to freed slaves and disguised books. Halflings have become the messengers via which elves communicate with freeriders, or from whom raiders purchase herbs and charms. If the smallfolk quietly contribute to the resistance, could not the passive farm folk do the same?

The appearance of acceptance and subservience practiced so well by the gnomes and halflings, and perhaps by the Erenlanders as well, masks what burns inside many of the people of the heartland: the hope that something is about to change. For, throughout the last decade of this Age, the people have noted changes throughout the lands of the old kingdom. Naturally, the land has recovered from the damaging footsteps of orc armies and the fires they set upon the plains; nature always reacquires her course. However, the qualities and characteristics of the life of these lands have taken on a new intensity, as if with purpose. Aryth's expressions and ways have always been apparent to the fey, being tied as they are to nature. Yet even the humans, who for centuries either raised their eyes upward toward empire and glory, or looked downward upon the menial tasks before them, are beginning to take notice of the nuances of the living world around them. Phenomena that might before have been accepted with a shrug—the scent of health about the trees of a secluded glade, the pureness of water of a still pond, the warmth upon the wind blowing in from the Pelluria—now carry a hint of passion, an air of excitement, as if in anticipation of some long-sought event. All the peoples can feel it: Something of crucial importance is about to happen.

Strength of the People

Though they have been dominated for 100 years, there is still great potential within the people of central Erenland. Both human and fey have survived the Last Age by developing their strengths, putting to best use those skills they have mastered, and adapting their talents for new endeavors and

purposes. None would argue that each race has its own unique gifts, but when allowed to combine their efforts, the races might accomplish something far more than mere survival. They could become a force to be reckoned with.

The Smallfolk

The gnomes have been the undisputed masters of Aryth's rivers since the youth of their race. No people equal their skill at plying the waters or have achieved such communion with its elemental spirits. These sailors, in all of the times of war and peace over the ages, have employed their skills of seacraft for any and all who have needed them. In the Last Age, this has made them indispensable to the Shadow's military. The food supplies necessary on the burning line, the transportation of troops across the Ardune and down the Eren, the wine and other fine goods that keep the traitor princes in line...the gnomes control all of these. What would happen to the Shadow's lumbering war machine, to its fragile and fickle infrastructure, if the arteries that fed it suddenly stopped?

Meanwhile, those nomadic dunni who roam the tall grasses of Erenland find little solace in the silent beauty of the wind-blown grasses of the savannah. Ages of dominance, displacement, and death at the hands of invading humans and the occupying orcs have served to temper each halfling's defiant spirit. To survive in this age, the fey have extended their ties with the spirits of nature, and deepened the bond with their willing protectors, the wogren. Channeling the innate magic within them, they draw sustenance from the land itself.

The halflings have also learned to turn their small statures, thought by many of the larger races as a weakness, into a subtle strength. They move nearly undetected among grasses twice their height, avoiding the eyes of predators and Shadow servants; entire camps of the smallfolk have been overlooked by the sweeps of slaver bands. Those groups of nomadic halflings seeking an active role in fighting the Shadow have taken to offering their services to other resistance groups in the Eastern Hills and along the foothills of the Kaladrums. They make excellent scouts, and they put their skill with growing things to excellent use, trading herbs and medicines to their human allies for the protection of their strong arms. In addition to their continued survival, the free halflings seek the liberation of their enslaved brothers. As long as they continue to lend their aid to the humans of the central plains, this goal comes closer to fruition.

The Common folk

The Erenlanders have always been a capable people. Blessed with numerous skills, adaptable in many circumstances, they formed the resilient backbone of the former kingdom. The greatness of Erenland was established largely through the efforts of the people of its heartland. Now, many years after the fall of the kingdom, the Erenlanders are no less adaptable. Always sturdy and gifted farmers, they continue to

toil and bring forth the bounty of the land. However, the veneer of the simple, unassuming farmer hides layers of complexity and capability. Each villager may have a specific role he fulfills for his settlement and for which he is best known, but he also possesses numerous unique skills and aptitudes that others may not see. The average Erenlander is a gifted individual with above-average flexibility and talent.

Whereas the pride of a people has served to blind the Dorns to their self-destructive stubbornness, and to corrupt the caste system of the Sarcosans, the growing pride of the Erenlanders is something altogether different. It stems not only from the past glory of the kingdom they helped to create, but from the everyday feats they accomplish in the present day. It could be said that theirs is a pride born of humility. The people believe in their own strengths, and they count on the strengths of those with whom they toil each day. There is suspicion, betrayal, and small-mindedness, true. But the farther adrift the Shadow's overseers wander, the fewer orc troops who patrol the Erenlanders' domain, the more these folk begin to govern and police themselves. Collaborators may have their rewards and their praise from the legate, but when the dark priest and his orc retinue have left, the traitors are left to the mercy of the friends and families of those they betrayed. The selfish, the fearful, and the weak-willed are cast out, forced to fend for themselves without a community, because they refused to see its value when they had it.

The attitudes of the Erenlanders' chosen leaders reflect this pragmatic, community-minded attitude. The people of a settlement elevate those with the most promise, the greatest wisdom, the most renowned resilience. Yet these leaders are not elevated to enjoy the praise and greatness of their peers, but to best see to the protection of the community. The best Erenlander sheriffs have an understanding of the disparate talents of all of the people within a settlement. They work closely with their council of elders to ensure that each person in the community contributes his skills in the most effective manner possible.

However, perhaps the most important role of the sheriffs is that of protectors of their villages. Every sheriff organizes a core group of protectors for his people. Their responsibility is vigilance against the many threats stalking the plains: grass leopards, bands of brigands, shadowspawn, and the Fell. Decades of little to no protection provided by the Shadow occupiers have required the sheriffs and their chosen protectors to develop their own martial abilities. After so many years of self-preservation, the Erenlanders have developed considerable skills in this regard. Across the plains, the tightly knit defense of a typical village can be summoned and readied mere moments after the alarm has been raised.

This reliance upon oneself first of all, but upon one's neighbor if necessary, has served to carry the Erenlanders through the trials of the Last Age. They persevere against the hardships thrust upon them, and in some cases they are made stronger by them. Yet for the minor good the average person finds in everyday existence, many go to their beds knowing



the taste of bile and bitterness. The Shadow spurns the gifts of the land, mars its beauty, destroys its wildlife, and enslaves its people. The Erenlanders have avoided wholesale slaughter, but only by capitulating. They have survived by biding their time, making themselves strong, and developing their talents against the day when the Shadow weakens its grip on their lands. Yet 100 years of subjugation has worn the patience of the people down to the quick. The fires of rebellion are beginning to smolder in the hearts and minds of the common folk.

The Unbowed

Though the Erenlanders are derided by the other races for refusing to fight, the people as a whole are not yoked by the Shadow. In all regions of the heartland, Erenlanders defy the occupation both through force and by more subtle means. The goals and methods of these groups may differ, but all are inspired by an indomitable will and an unexplained passion. Though most humans today cannot put their finger on its source, a few long-lived elves might recognize it. It is the same fire that was in the eyes of the colonists, Dorn and Sarcosan alike, as they rallied together to shake off the oppression of the old empire across the sea. It is a desire for freedom, a longing that seems to spontaneously grip the staid, subdued masses of humanity and give them a resilience unmatched by any dwarf, a passion unequalled by any elf.

Those infected by this flame become rebels and freedom fighters. They live in danger every day, yet the risks they take and the sacrifices they make bring hope to the oppressed people of the lands. For each that falls, 10 more take up his cause.

Defenders

The need for protection among a people forbidden to bear weapons gave rise to the ranks of the defenders. In outlawing weapons and armor, Izrador may have unwittingly trained a new generation of foes.

For years, these men and women have protected their communities from dangers that would give pause to fully equipped men-at-arms, and they have done so with their bare hands. However, their focus is by definition and necessity local. They are trained by their communities to protect them, and leaving home to join the resistance leaves those same people in danger. It would take a focused effort, a leader, to show the defenders of the land that their charges deserve more than just daily survival.

A few defenders, whether they left of their own accord, their villages were destroyed, or they were cast out, now travel across the heartland, trying to rekindle the fighting spirit in their fellow countrymen. These insurgent organizers are among the most wanted criminals of Erenland. They move from region to region in defiance of the Shadow's law proscribing travel, gathering new conscripts in the areas they visit, and planting the seeds of rebellion among those who

refuse to leave their homes. Though not yet an army, the ranks of these fighters swell with the passing of every arc. Soon the defenders will represent a significant threat to the forces of Shadow in the central plains.

Horseclans

Spread as they are across the vast grasslands, from the Eastern Hills to the far Westlands, the many groups of Erenlander horsemen are considered a nuisance to the Shadow rather than a true threat. The personal goals and interests of these mercurial raiders differ wildly from group to group, and alliances among them are loose and short-lived. However, many of the petty lords policing their petty fiefdoms share the same fears. If communications were improved among the horseclans, if they could be united under one banner, they would form a cavalry force thousands strong. Indeed, a few canny leaders of the larger clans have taken notice of the hint of changes in the air, and have begun discussing terms of a long-term alliance.

Wildlanders

These former hunters and scouts have remained active since the fall of the kingdom, using their wilderness skills to protect those under their care and striking against the Shadow when given the chance. Some are descended from the first wildlanders who fled from the coming of the dark god, and now seek to atone for their fathers' and mothers' cowardice. Others have become hunters and trappers by necessity, whether because they were exiled from their home villages or because they committed crimes against the Shadow's forces and fled to escape justice.

Wildlanders by their very nature cannot be organized into large groups. If they were to be gathered together and led as a force, it would only endanger them, hampering their mobility and stealth, which are their greatest offense and defense. Yet if someone were able to create a communication network among them, allowing them operate far from one another but in concert, they would become extremely dangerous. Such a network would allow them to strike where most needed, to harry forces and patrols that would otherwise overwhelm unprepared or weakened allies, to find the ideal routes to avoid enemy detection. They would become a devout guerilla group, never staying in one place long enough for their small numbers or lighter armaments to be overcome by the numerous and heavily-armed enemy. In short, they would become as effective and as dangerous as the elves in their forest or the dwarves in their caves, but they would be striking from within the very heart of the enemy's kingdom.

The creation of this network would require a means for the wildlanders to communicate and a purpose under which they might unite. The method might be magical, using spells like *animal messenger* or *whispering wind*, along with rituals to mask their magical auras or increase their ranges. Channelers' familiars and trained animal companions would



also be ideal messengers. Yet the purpose is another matter entirely. By their very nature independent and strong-willed, pragmatic and paranoid, nothing short of the death of a Night King, or the return of an heir to the Kingdom of Erenland, could unite these men and women.

For now, the disparate wildlander bands in the central plains do their best to hunt down or distract the monsters and Fell who prey upon the settlements. In the Westlands, they harry orc patrols where they can, aiding the elves who so often aid them. In the eastern hills, they disrupt the activities of bands of slavers and brigands. Recently, larger groups have timed their raids against orc warbands active in the remote areas approaching the Kaladrunk mountains. If they can continue to work together without attracting undue attention, they might create a safe haven for resistance forces in the heart of Shadow-occupied Erenland.

The Wardens of Erenland

As the Third Age drew to a painful close, those warriors of Erenland who could not bear to sit idle as their kingdom died reissued their oaths to their King, shouldered their

swords, and marched to meet the onslaught of the Shadow head-on. Many of these knights met their end in selfless sacrifice, defending their countrymen against the overwhelming forces arrayed against them. However, a few of these elite warriors saw the wisdom of carrying the fight into the dark years ahead. Honoring their oaths as best they could, laden with guilt over temporarily breaking the vows they had taken up, holding the virtues they embraced, they traveled the forgotten paths of the fallen kingdom, never giving up the battle against Izrador. As the years of the Last Age brought a dark age to the heartland, this order of forgotten knights, the Wardens of Erenland, has kept the hopes of past glory alive.

For years these knights wandered the land, avoiding undue attention. As they brought their fight against agents of the Shadow in remote parts of the land, many were involved with their own inner conflicts. When a kingdom has fallen, when there is no heir to protect and no banner to rally to, how can a knight serve his people? The Wardens spent years in contemplation and soul-searching, fighting despair, seeking the strength to go on. At first they meditated in their own isolation, seeking wisdom within themselves. However, over years of solitude the knights began to extend their perception outward, studying the force and power of nature in all parts of the land. As they wandered, they began to hear the silent sighs and whispers of the world around them, and developed a form of communion with the lands through which they trod. They were awakened to the natural world as no humans



before them had ever been. A heretofore unknown connection between man and nature formed, similar to that between fey and the spirits of Aryth, yet unique to these men.

With their newfound awareness, the Wardens became determined they must learn to strengthen this bond with their world, and with each other. In order to better realize the needs of the lands and its people, the knights developed a sacred ritual. This would allow them to commune with the spirits of nature, while at the same time melding their own experiences, thoughts, and memories, sharing them with one another. To aid themselves, and future generations, the Wardens met at a secret location and constructed the focus of their ritual, the Font of Dreams. The metal of the font was melted down from their own ceremonial silver weapons. The water of the font was drawn from a pure, clear spring, and merged with their own tears. This font became the focus of their dream link: When a Warden shares his blood in pure water, wherever he may be, he strengthens his bond with nature, and with his brothers. His experiences are passed on to the font, adding to the accumulated wisdom the Order has shared over the years.

Through their increasing bond with the land they have become aware of its unique expressions. They know that the land despises the corruption of the Shadow, and that it seeks to aid all of its children—the long-lived, native fey, and the younger humans—in ejecting this evil. Over years of contact, they realize that the land speaks to them, though without words. Now, one hundred years after the Shadow fell upon Erenland, the land is preparing the Wardens, and all of its children, for something to come. For through listening to the wind and the rush of churning rivers, the knights have heard curious tidings. They have related to each other their accounts and perceptions, and all have come to the same conclusion: The heir to the throne of Erenland and his servants survived the darkness. They believe the land has embraced the King in exile, and keeps him safe. To defend him, it hides him from all eyes, those of the Shadow as well as all other beings. When the land is ready, when the time is right, the King will be revealed; his return will herald a new age for the people of Erenland. The land supports this heir and his followers, and cares about the people of the kingdom to be; they are the hope to end the darkness. So the Wardens search for signs of their King and their destiny, aided by the nuances they feel. They seek old maps and records for clues, but they are also guided by their own hunches and instincts. They explore ruins for artifacts, but they also follow the subtle signs and portents of the natural world. Theirs is a search for the salvation of their kingdom, but also an exploration of their own hearts and souls. As their wisdom and knowledge grow, so too does their hope for the future.

While often traveling alone, and reflecting in solitude, the Wardens have also maintained careful contact with the common people over these many years. They visit Erenlander settlements throughout the heartlands and upon the fringes of the old kingdom. They act as did the old Heralds, preserving the legends of past glory, and spreading tales of new and

heroic exploits. They provide a light in the darkness, bringing hope where there is none to be found. The Wardens do what they can to resurrect and maintain the pride that once burned in the breasts of all Erenlanders. Yet these warriors never identify themselves as knights of the old kingdom. The impressions they leave among the people are simply of brave, wise men, those who remember what was good and right, and have fought the corruption prevalent in these times.

The Wardens have also begun to uphold their oaths once more, protecting their wards and combating all evils. They engage foul shadowspawn and twisted beasts wherever they find them. They protect refugees in the wilderness, escorting them to safe havens. Also, in many instances where resistance forces have organized or had success, a Warden has had played a role. The knights have fought side-by-side with wildlanders raiding orc patrols. They have traveled with groups of defenders and their insurgent commanders, using their diplomatic skills to convince particularly reluctant or obstinate villagers to stand up to their oppressors. They have defeated bands of slavers, liberating their human and halfling charges. And with each selfless action, the Wardens share their tales and experiences with their fellow knights, keeping them apprised of the state of the lands and its people.

After a century of dominion of the Shadow, and years of acting in anonymity, the Wardens feel the winds of change beginning to blow. They believe, perhaps accurately, perhaps not, that the King's return is imminent, and they are preparing for his arrival. They have worked unceasingly, in all corners of Erenland, to establish contacts among freeriders and horseclans, defenders and wildlanders, and many other resistance groups. At this moment, alliances are being forged among groups who have been out of touch since the Third Age. The knights have spread their influence among many settlements of the central plains, with all of its peoples. The farmers and herders, fishermen and craftsmen, are beginning to learn that servants of the old kingdom still walk the land, and are fighting for its rebirth. Forces are beginning to gather. All of the pieces needed to build a new army of Erenland, outmanned and undersupplied, but strong of heart and keen of purpose, are there. For the Erenlanders are assembled, and are slowly being brought together. And the land has awakened, voicing her approval of the light flickering within the hearts of her children.

The Shadow prepares to press its wars against the fey, marching its strength to lands far to the west and the east. The heart of Erenland is to be left undefended; the petty warlords and Shadow servants, confident in their dominion, do not suspect the enormity of their weakness. And the people, oppressed and beaten down for a century, are beginning to feel hope.

The lands speak. The hearts of the people stir. The King awaits.

Destiny is at hand.

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MIDNIGHT

DESTINY AND SHADOW

The Erenlanders.

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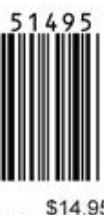
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