

ENTER THE DARKLANDS



A setting for medieval dark fantasy adventures, from lowly criminals and foot soldiers to knights, generals and kings. This setting is inspired by medieval old-world history, the settings of the games *Witcher*, *Battle Brothers*, *Bannerlord*, *Banner Saga* and *Kingdom Come Deliverance*, as well as the *Wheel of Time* and *Black Company* books.

This document will focus on the setting, while the document **Savage Medieval** will focus on rule additions for the **Savage Worlds Adventure Edition** (SWADE) tabletop roleplaying system. The system is designed to be used in any of the native settings listed above as well.

Art is mostly taken from *Battle Brothers*.



The Idea

The world is a cruel, poor place. Overgrown forests teem with dangerous wildlife, dark mountains loom over foggy swamps and still glades. Bandits stalk the highways, soldiers enforce the will of corrupt lords, the city streets are filled with cutpurses and cutthroats. Yet worse things still lurk in dark places.

The setting is relatively low-fantasy, and definitely dark fantasy. Men (old term for all humans, not just males) are the only playable race, and while magical creatures do exist, they do not coexist with men. The core of the setting is the human society of the Darklands, their politics, struggles for power, and its effect on the normal people.

The system (SWADE) supports various types of gameplay;

- All types of battles. Small-scale melee battles, long-range archery fights, medium size skirmishes with each player controlling up to 4 PCs or NPCs, up to full-scale battles and sieges
- Political maneuvering, plotting, scheming and manipulation. Ruling, being ruled, from village councils to local baronies to kingdoms.
- Stealth, subterfuge, forgery, crime and punishment, from local gangs to crime syndicates and robber barons.
- Travel and wilderness survival, foraging and exploration.
- Jarring displays of magical power and dark consequences, terrible monsters (though none can match the cruelty of man) and brutal inhuman societies, if you can find them.

In addition, there are extra rules which make combat a risky prospect, encouraging all kinds of roleplay, tactics and problem solving, not typical heroic two-fisted solutions.



The goal of playing Enter the Darklands is for the players to come to the table with ambitious characters. The characters themselves should have desires and goals to meet and drive the story forward, instead of having the GM spoonfeed them a story.

There are optional rules in Savage Medieval that include players Advancing (leveling up) based on their own characters' goals and proactiveness.

Examples of good character motivations:

"I want to become a noble and own a castle!"

"I want to become a wealthy merchant."

"We want to start a mercenary company!"

"I want to find out why the Old Empire fell!"

"I want to settle the Godlost Swamp and become it's lord."

"Now that I am a noble, I want to conquer my neighbour's land as well, and become a duke."

Examples of bad character motivations:

"I lost my family and don't care what happens to me."

"I am greedy."

"I am looking for adventure."

To this end, the rest of this document provides the setting of the Darklands. Many things are intentionally not defined; it lists *some* nations, not *all* of them. It broadly defines the geography of the land and the people, while allowing players to invent their own to complement what exists.



The World

The main play area, which is also mapped out, is called the Darklands. It a temperate land, where the ruins of an old empire lay scattered in forgotten woods and mountain valleys.

To the north-west is the Bittercold Ocean, an endless expanse of cold sea, and only the whales know what lies behind it.

To the north lie Nordlands, connected by land and by the Nordsee sea, a cold land of tundras, snowy mountains and frozen lakes. It is inhabited by savages who worship old pagan gods, a few prosperous trade cities, and supposedly even bestial half-men, though those are likely just tall tales.

To the east lie the Wildlands, lawless even by Darkland standards, with few settlements, marauding Orruk Klans, and the endless Sea of Grass where nomadic horselord tribes battle nomadic tribes of wolflord goblins.

To the south-east lies the Sweetwarm Ocean, deceptively named, for its storms make it as deadly as the Bittercold Ocean to the north.

To the south-west lie the Lands of the Scorching Sun- a land of dry deserts and rocky badlands, inhabited by rich trade cities on the coast and nomad tribes in the wilds, who contend with thirst, heat and creatures of the desert. Rumors say a land of unimaginably large and wet forests, called jungles lies beyond the desert.

Society

The Darklands were supposedly once the core province of an Empire. But that time is long past. Now, settlements are points of light connected by rivers and roads, some of which might even be patrolled and safe. There is no overarching authority, with most settlements being ruled by feudal nobles or merchant republics.

There are a few rare Cities with tens or even hundreds of thousands of inhabitants. More common are Towns with thousands of residents. Both Cities and Towns are usually owned by feudal nobles or trade republics. But most settlements are little more than villages, with at best hundreds of people, ruled by either local councils or a nearby noble with a castle.

When settlements do form and create unions, it is almost always for defense- the world is a dangerous place, and a village of a few hundred people cannot even fend off a large bandit gang- much less northern raiders or worse things. Cities can sometimes project their power onto nearby settlements, claiming to bring unity and always extracting resources.

Still, there are forces in the Darklands that can claim to be major Geopolitical powers- you might even call some of them Nations.



Religion

In a world where magic really exists, religions more often represent philosophies on life and core beliefs, than they do belief in actual gods.

These are the major religions of this world, though many other of course exist.

The Wheel

The main Darklands religion, it was also the religion of the Old Empire.

It's philosophy that argues that the highest good is civilization and society, and for it to function, everybody must perform the roles to which they are assigned. However, it also acknowledges that every role is important and believes in reincarnation.

It prohibits belief in any other gods and glorifies service for the »greater good«. It is a robust religion for creating stable, robust power structures. It is most favored in cities.

»The wheel must keep on spinning, and for that, all the spokes must be firmly in place.

The Chalice

Since the times of the Old Empire, the Wheel has been opposed by the Chalice.

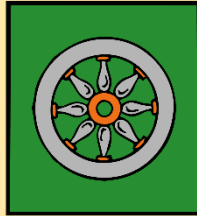
Their symbol is the chalice, because they believe everyone should be ordained with both wine and bread- since in the Wheel, those of noble blood with noble souls, meant to guide others to salvation, are ordained with wine, while those meant to serve are ordained with bread.

They believe that the Wheel is a false metaphor, for it validates and entrenches positions of power which lead to corruption and private interests, which lead to war and harm.

The Burning Wheel

A recent schism of The Wheel occurred at the re-emergence of the Chalice.

This philosophy argues that the Wheel is a delicate balance and must be protected by any means necessary. On their



symbol, the wheel is threatened, it is »on fire«, and they must safeguard it.

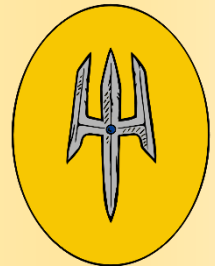
Their symbol comes from the belief that dying in fire means you are burned away from The Wheel, and thus unable to be reincarnated- and they believe that they must cleanse all those who do not fit in the Wheel forever, seeing their souls as impure.

This is a point of contention, as burning anyone is viewed as a grave sin by the Wheel religion itself.

It is an even more xenophobic religion than the Wheel and has Inquisitions and more Knightly orders than the Wheel. It is a militaristic and aggressive philosophy.

The Slavoj

This religion was originally spread to the Darklands by the Horselords and is most prominent in the East.



They believe that all the world is magical in its own way, and that every physical thing has spirit and value. Things with more power have more spirit, and this the right to subjugate those of lesser spirit. They are viewed as Pagan.

This religion respects strength and balance and urges caution over rash deeds. They tend to be very in touch with nature and are the only religion tolerant to anything foreign.

The Gael

This religion is the oldest in the known world and was Pagan already in the times of the Old Empire. In fact, it was at that time almost wiped out, except it was saved by the inhabitants of the Nordlands, who originally hailed from the Darklands.



This religion believes that everything has a price and you must be willing to pay it. Power corrupts but must still be wielded. This leads to much more blood shed in internal struggles, but also a culture of aggressive, experienced warriors.

They are the only religion to not outlaw magic- which also means higher rates of Goethic corruption, but for them, it is naturally a price that must be paid.

The Major Powers

These are the groups in the Darklands that exert the most influence.

They are far from the only powers in the darklands, but they are the most notable ones.

Kingdom of Riva

Inspiration: Spain, Amadicia
Religions: Burning Wheel, Wheel

A rich kingdom of the southern Darklands, spread along the warm south sea. It often contends with Southerners, and has suffered many invasion attempts.

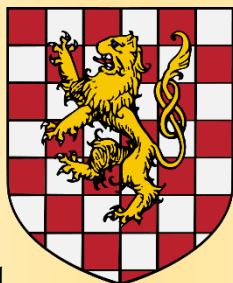
The re-emergence of the Chalice was the last straw, and the Burning Wheel religion emerged rapidly, sweeping most of the kingdom in a crusade which burned away anyone »impure«. Now, they look outwards and prepare to launch crusades and invasions of their own.

Grand Duchy of Morovia

Inspiration: Poland-Lithuania, Bohemia, Tear
Religions: Wheel, Chalice, Slavoj

The core province of the Old Empire, filled with woodlands and impressive castles.

Their rulers, the Grand Dukes, are all successors of actual Grand Dukes, which was a high noble rank in the Old Empire. In way, they see themselves as the rightful successors of the Old Empire.



As they are the easternmost of the great powers, they also contend the most with the Slavoj raiders. However, since they shattered the Great Horde, many of the Slavoj chose to adopt their lifestyle and settle there, creating inner religious turmoil unsolved to this day.

As the Burning Wheel crusade started in Riva, they themselves banned the religion from their land and banished those who kept the Wheel, to avoid meeting the same fate as Riva- deepening the bitter rivalry with their neighbor.

They also have the biggest following of the Chalice of any nation.

Saksenland Confederacy

Inspiration: Denmark, Borderlands
Religions: Burning Wheel, Gael, Slavoj

Saksenland is the hilly-mountainous northernmost part of the Darklands, where winters are cold and Northlander raids are commonplace.



For protection, many of the cities there form a military confederacy- called simply the Saksenland Confederacy.

It is not a centralized power, with a native Gael population, often raided by Gael Northmen, as well as Slavoj exiles from southern kingdoms. With this diversity, it is no wonder that most of the cities who believed in the Wheel have recently converted to the Burning Wheel, threatening the stability of the whole confederacy.

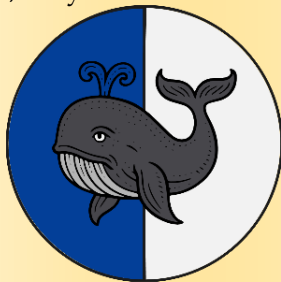




Gaeleatic League

Inspiration: Hanseatic League, Italy
Religions: Chalice, Gael

The Gaeleatic League is a trade-and-military alliance between rich trade cities of the northern coast of the Darklands, spanning most of the Nordsee - some are even in the Nordlands themselves.



They are a relatively new power, and the Darklanders favor the Chalice, as they are more often traders and trade republics than nobles. They expand their trade aggressively, and back it up with soldiers- often Gael mercenaries hired from Northlander warbands or the northern-most cities of the League, some of which boast mercenaries as a main export.

Tengu Horde

Inspiration: Cumans, Cossacks, Saldaea
Religions: Slavoj

To the east of the Darklands lie the Wildlands, part of which is the Great Steppe, an endless sea of grass. The natives of this land are the Slavoj, and it ranges far from the Darklands.



It was once all united under the Great Horde. But the Great Khan was slain and the Great Horde shattered during their invasion of Morovia, and now the largest Horde remaining near the Darklands is the Tengu Horde.

They maintain a nomadic way of life and a pragmatic relationship with their neighbors, trading and raiding and fighting and making peace when it suits them. Like all the Hordes, they see themselves as the true successor of the Great Horde.



The Minor Powers

There are many organizations in the Darklands besides kingdoms, hordes and trade alliances, of course. These are some of them, but certainly countless more can be found or invented.

The Knightly Order of the Midnight Sun is the oldest Knightly Order in existence, with origins in the Old Empire.

They exist for the Wheel, and to make sure all creatures face final judgement and pass from this life into the next one without disturbance (they hunt undead). They claim that the Old Empire fell when the Wheel was disturbed too much.

Inspired: Knights of Morr



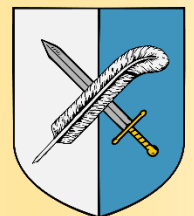
themselves in central and northern Darklands. They are known for pragmatic brutality, and instead of fanaticism, they tend to be motivated by a real desire for power.



The Black Company is a mercenary company said to have been formed during the Age of Pain. It is said that unless you have fought both with them and against them at some point, you are not yet a real power in the world. They have a strict hierarchy, a lengthy chronicle, and sometimes even a reputation as monster slayers.



The Sword and Quill company is a relatively new but successful mercenary company, famed for it's two leaders, a midget priest and a man so huge he is rumored to be half-orruk. He is Kronk. Quill for signing contracts, sword for fulfilling them.



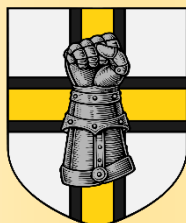
The Order of the Warrior Sons is, in contrast, the youngest Knightly Order created from the most fanatic of the Burning Wheel followers.

Their symbol is a bloody sword before a gravestone, for they believe they are the sword that will cut and burn all unclean souls from the Wheel. Sons and heirs of the Great Warrior, who emerges to purge the Wheel of all unclean souls, and they must now perform this deed.

Inspired: Children of the Light, Knights Templar



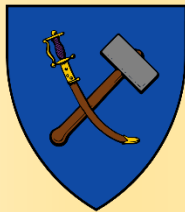
The Order of the Iron Fist is another old Wheel Knightly Order. They converted to the Burning Wheel when it emerged and used it's fanatic beliefs to conquer territories for





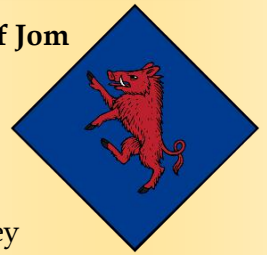
The Hammerhead Brotherhood

(originally spelled Hammerhaed) is a Northlander pirate organization, founded by a delusional Northlander general exiled from the Gaeleatic League, who believed he was a hammerhead shark. Regardless, they are a naval power with outposts on small islands in the Bittercold Ocean and the Nordsee. They are particularly feared for their ramming tactics, which surprises no one given their name and origin.



The Warrior Brotherhood of Jom

are a »Knightly Order« formed by the Gael city of Jom. They are known to be elite northern warriors, though rowdy. Some jest they are more of a Mercenary Order, but none dare say it to their face.



Skilled in both naval combat and land battles, they most often work for the Gaeleatic League, but have even at times worked against them, if the coin was right.



Magic

Magic in this world is an inherently corrupt power, called Goethia. One in thousand is born with the ability to channel, and many are burned at the stake. In fact, only a being corrupted by Goethia may be burned, according to The Wheel- as it is indeed too corrupt and must be expunged and severed from the other souls in the wheel.

Goethic corruption first manifests as madness, then eventually as physical deformation- if indeed the person lives that long. A mad Goeth is such a danger to himself and his surroundings, they barely last long.



The madness is often called »The Serpent«, and the Wheel claims that the original sin of man was stealing the power of Goethia from the Creator when tempted by The Serpent, and for this, they are forced to toil for endless lifetimes in the Wheel, until their souls are purified of this sin. This is also why burning is only tolerated when you are burning the Serpent from the Wheel.

Goethia also affects men and women differently. Men tend to be naturally stronger in it, about the same difference as in physical strength. Women, however, are far less vulnerable to Goethia's corrupting influence.

Male Goeths are only allowed by **some** Gael cultures and are called Warlocks. They always have a unique role in their societies. In the rest of

the world, they are called Brujo or simply Goeth and are hunted down.

The White Tower

Inspiration: Wheel of Time, Banner Saga

It is no wonder then that the only recognized organization of Goeths, the White Tower, only trains female Goeths- the men are either severed from their power through a magic ritual or bonded as Slayers.



Female Goeths trained and ordained by the White Tower are called Valka. Those who are not ordained are called Bruja or Hexen and are hunted down all the same.

The White Tower is a respected faction hailing back to the days of the Old Empire, though they have become sparser and more secretive since the fall of the Old Empire. Normal people fear them, but most nations begrudgingly respect them. Except for the Burning Wheel, who will usually attempt to kill them on sight.

The Tower is responsible for pruning the population of Goeths. They constantly look for them. If they find a child skilled in Goethia, they will be taken to the Tower for training and ordaining. Adults are deemed too harmful and are either severed or killed. When they catch a young boy or a young man, they will be given an option. Severing, or to come to the Tower and train and be Bound to become a Slayer.



Slayers are inspired by both Witchers and Warders (Wheel of Time). A man does not need to be a Goeth to be Bound. A Bound man is magically forced to obey the commands of his Valka. If he is a Goeth, his potential is greatly decreased- but he is also safeguarded from corruption by the Valka he is Bound to. They are trained in the art of war, hunting, Goethia and alchemy. They are used as either elite guards, agents or monster slayers of the Tower.

They are also very important to the Tower, since in order to gain the trust of other nations, the Valka have stopped training and teaching all offensive and destructive spells and powers. Thus, when violence is needed, the Valka often depend on them.

There are also rumors of a Black Tower, an ancient organization of male Goeths who have persevered since the times of the Old Empire, particularly in the Gael north- but such rumors are either dismissed as gossip or put to the sword as propaganda.

The Old Empire

Inspiration: Roman Empire

Also known as the Sun Empire and The Imperium.

In the previous age, the Darklands were the center of a great empire.

They managed to expand it into the Northlands, they built a great series of forts to hold the Wildlands and the Great Horde at bay, and even engaged in battle with the Moon Empire of the Southlanders.



But over the centuries, the empire grew stagnant and their borders grew weak. Not much is known of this time, save that the ruler, known as the Imperator, destroyed his senate and took absolute control. In a mad bid to save his empire from the Orruk destruction, Northlander and Great Horde raids and a failing war with the Moon Empire.



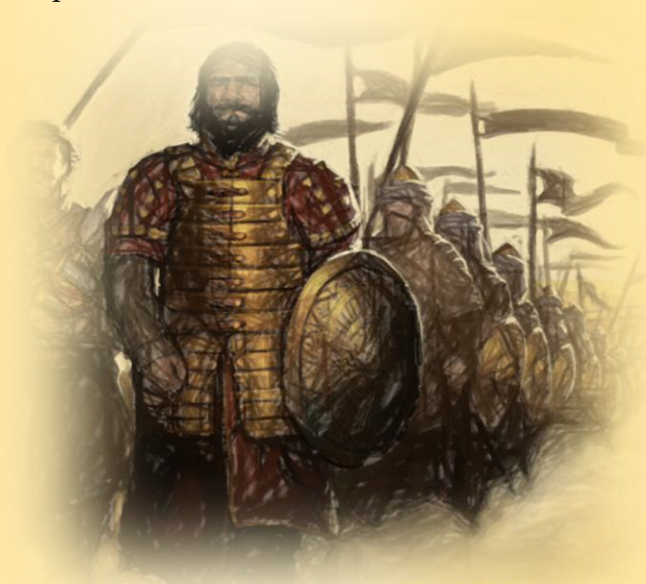
What exactly he did is still hotly debated by scholars and theologians, but The Wheel religion claims it was he who listened to the Serpent and tried to steal the power of the Creator.

The White Tower claims that this is superstition, as they were an organization of Goeths who existed already during that time- but they do claim that it was only after this event that Goethia became corrupted, and that the Imperator being a man is the reason that men are affected worse by the corruption.

This event, 500 years ago, is known as the Night's Day, and it plunged the world into a hundred years of turmoil and chaos, called the Age of Pain. Monsters were said to walk the world freely, mad Goeths shattered mountains and nations, and the dead walked the earth.

It was said to have been ended by the White Tower, but noone really knows how- and the sceptics claim that it was instead caused by the White Tower.

The current civilization of the Darklands is merely the remnants of the Old Empire, the few survivors of the Age of Pain.



At the Darklands' edges

The darklands are mostly a low fantasy world, filled with men. The fantastical beasts that are, resemble those from the Witcher, or perhaps even Lovecraft- rare, very deadly, and often thought as myth by the average inhabitant.

Even then, one in a thousand men is born with the spark to wield Goethia, Orruk Klans populate the Wildlands, the Goblin Wolflords rule swathes of the Great Steppe, Beastmen Warbands roam the Northlands, Aelfinn are said to hide in the deep forests, and beneath the mountains, Dvergr are said to smith miracles no moral can dream of.

Some of these rumors might even be true. Below, we will discuss the some of these- whether they are true or not.

For most of the factions, the coats of arms depicting them are those used for them by Darklanders. They resemble the factions' own coats of arms, but of course, those are many and varied.

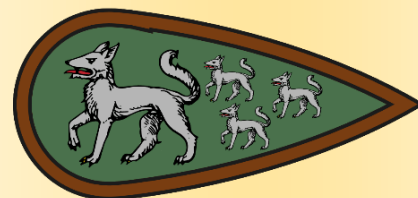
The Orruks

The Southlander »Scholars« spread propaganda amongst people of the Darklands that men were not made as a test of the soul by the Creator, but rather »evolved« from a type of Southlands monkey.



The Goblins

If the Orruks are descendants of gorillas, the Goblins must be descendants of spider monkeys or baboons. Small and wiry creatures of cruel intelligence, they cannot stand up to Men or Orruks in battle, but their mastery of forests and the great Direwolves of the steppes allow them to always meet their foe when and where they want.



Little is known of their society, save that it exists and is more complex than those of Orruks. While the three races of Man, Orruk and Goblin are clearly related to some degree, their languages are incomprehensible. The Slavoj of the Great Steppe have a joke that the greatest threat to the world of Man would be Goblin translators and Orruk diplomats.



The Serpentspawn

While Orruks and Goblins are terrible in their own right, they are at least... natural. Not so the Serpentspawn- these are Men corrupted by Goethia, who see their souls as lost to the Serpent, cursed to exist as a parasite on The Wheel until they break free of it.



Some are born deformed, others become corrupted through exposure to Goethia and some are deformed Goeths themselves. In the places where civilization cannot reach; deep woods or the largely untamed Northlands, however, they gather in Warbands, serving the Serpent in their own ways.

Of all "races", they are by far the most varied- from hyena-like Gnolls that form packs in the south, to cursed Werewolves hunting forests alone on full moons, to the goatlike and bovine Brays of the Northlands.

Certainly, many more variations fill the world.



The Undead

All representatives of the White Tower, as well as Warlocks from the North, claim that Goethia cannot bring back the dead.



However, across all of the Darklands, there are consistent rumors of corpses walking.

Some stories claim they are brought back by mad Goeths to do their bidding. Other stories speak of skeletons, wearing armor and weapons of the Old Empire. All of these are mixed with the usual stories of ghosts and spectres, souls of the undeparted.

Whatever the stories claim, wherever the rumors of them spread too many and far, both the Order of the Midnight Sun and Slayers of the Tower appear, always with claims of "investigating Goethic corruption" - and thus, such claims are rarely made lightly. Most people, however, pray that these are just stories they never find themselves in.

