

# Campaign Primer – The Summer Isles of Meropis

## 1 Foreword

In the campaign one primer, for the Arklan setting, I defined D&D as “improvisational collaborative story telling” and I mentioned the stylistic differences between a “railroaded” campaign, where players have little agency over their ultimate story direction, and a “sandboxed” style. For campaign two, I want to double down on *collaborative sandboxing*. The Meropis setting – even more than the Arklan setting – will allow you to go in any direction you want. With a campaign under your belt, I want you all to take on more agency in choosing your path forward.

In Arklan, major NPCs like Alura were involved in the direction of the party *a little too much*. This was partly because of party backstories (Alura was closely affiliated with Travis), partly because everyone was new at D&D, partly because the party had less strong feelings about following up on other threads (Pantaghion’s father being connected to the clasp, visiting other major cities, further investigating the Yan-C-Bin situation, etc), and later in the campaign because of increasing levels of ‘epicness’ and time pressure from prior choices.

In the new campaign, there will still be major factions with different interests and goals, major NPCs the party can meet and align themselves with, if they want, but remember – it is your party, and you are free agents to do what you want. Don’t worry about the “sunk-cost fallacy” – you will drive the story forward based on your choices, even if you want to drop a thread and take up another. The people and organizations you choose to work with, and those you choose to spurn, will definitely affect the narrative, but always remember you can hop on a ship and do something entirely different, if that is your jam.

The last note, I want to mention before getting into the meat of the primer, is that I’d like to make our Meropis campaign a bit more episodic. This setting should lend itself to a more ‘vignette’ style of storytelling. We can introduce time gapping to allow the party to take on less action oriented tasks or to allow characters to pursue some individual downtime. Some adventures and story aspects will, of course, continue to build on themselves to create narrative arcs, but I want more adventures to be a little more self-contained.

## 2 Getting started: Creating a Character

I’ve created a new campaign on D&D beyond for you to enter your character details. You can access the new campaign space here: <https://ddb.ac/campaigns/join/2409669417393835>

I’d like everyone to spend some time working on their character backstory. A backstory can be mundane or dramatic, but it helps me ground your characters in the world and flesh out some details in the world that allows you to tell the story you want about your characters as part of our larger narrative.

### 2.1 Mechanics

The following rules govern mechanics.

#### 2.1.1 Rolling up attribute stats

We will roll attribute stats at the table using the following technique:

Roll 4d6, sum the top 3 rolls and record the number. Do this 6 times, writing the ‘attribute array’ down. Now roll a second set. Choose the first or second set of 6 numbers. I recommend keeping either the set with the greatest total modifier (the largest sum across all numbers) or the set with the greatest single score (e.g. if you roll a set with an 18). These 6 numbers are your starting attribute scores, you can assign any of the numbers to any attribute in your character sheet

## **2.1.2 Starting level**

Everyone may start at level 2 OR start at level 1 with a randomly rolled magic item from my random magical loot charts.

## **2.1.3 Starting equipment**

You may take the default equipment for your character class/background. Just click the ‘starting equipment’ button on D&D Beyond in the inventory.

In addition to your class/background equipment, you will start with 50 Gold that you can spend however you wish (or not at all). If you have questions about equipment pricing let me know.

Finally, everyone gets to roll on my chart of random starting items. Some of these might be valuable, magical, or related to a possible future quest. Who knows?

## **2.1.4 Homebrew rules**

### **2.1.4.1 The Gunpowder era**

Due to technological innovations in the world, flintlock pistols and musket rifles are increasingly available in the world of Álfheimr. You may swap any (non-simple) weapon proficiency for proficiency with pistols or rifles.

### **2.1.4.2 Zero HP Exhaustion**

A new variant rule in 5E deals with “boomeranging” where people get repeatedly knocked down to 0 hp and then healed up. I’d like to try it this campaign. The rule says that anytime a character is knocked down to 0 hp and goes unconscious, they suffer a level of exhaustion.

### **2.1.4.3 Rule of cool**

The rule of cool is fairly simple – it allows the DM to let the players bend the rules as written occasionally if they have a creative/fun idea that is just too cool not to do. If you want to use an item, spell, or ability in a creative way, I may just let it happen if it sounds cool.

### **2.1.4.4 Resurrection Rituals**

I’ll still be using the Matt Mercer resurrection ritual system for all forms of resurrection except revivify. Hopefully we don’t need it!

### **2.1.4.5 Use a medicine check to heal a player**

Anyone proficient in medicine, with a medical kit, can use a full-round action to heal a creature, with a successful medicine check DC15 for conscious creature, or DC 20 for an unconscious creature. Medical kits consist of bandages and a standard array of tinctures and anti-toxins. A kit has 5 uses and can be bought for 35 gold pieces at most adventuring shops. One use of a medical kit heals a creature  $1d6+1$  hp.

### **2.1.4.6 Defense Rolls**

I want to try a variant rule that gives players more rolls to make. Basically, instead of me rolling for monsters to hit, players roll to defend. The rules are simple, instead of me making attack rolls, players roll a d20 and add their AC-10 to the roll. Monsters auto-hit unless players beat the defensive DC check. A defensive check is DC 12 plus the creature’s attack modifier. A player defense roll of natural 20 is a fumble for the creature (equivalent to the creature rolling a natural 1). A natural 1 defense roll is a crit (equivalent to the creature rolling a natural 20). If the creature has disadvantage on the attack, the player has advantage on the defense roll. If the creature has advantage on the attack, the player has disadvantage on the defense roll.

Example.

An abyssal chicken uses its bite attack against a fighter with a 16 armor class.

The abyssal chicken has a +4 to hit. The fighter rolls a D20 and adds 6. Lets say the roll is a 12. They get a 18 to defend. The DC is 16 (12+4), so the player succeeds on the DC and the attack misses.

Example 2:

A zombie attacks the same fighter with its slam attack (+3 to hit). The fighter rolls a D20 and adds 6. Lets say the roll was a 7, for a total roll of 13. The DC is 15 (12+3), so the attack hits.

The math to show the attacks/defenses are the same is below:

Normal rules, zombie attacks against ac 16:

Miss rolls: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,

Hit rolls: 13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20

12/20 % =60% miss (1-12)

8/20% =40% hit (13+)

Zombie with attack DC = 15 against AC 16 (+6 to defense rolls):

Hit rolls: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

Defense check: 7, 8, 9,10,11,12,13,14,

Miss rolls: 9, 10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20

Defense check: 15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26

8/20 % = 40% hit (1-8)

12/20% =60% miss(9+)

To make this work easily, we can modify the armor class value that is shown in the D&D beyond character sheet to be the normal value minus 10. I can set it up for you.

## 2.2 Forming a backstory

When I create a character, I think about them as a multi-dimensional person. I try to imagine what gets them up in the morning. What major life events have helped shape and define their personality? What cultural and societal pressures have influenced them? What goals and aspirations do they have? Who do they want to be? What prevents them from getting there? What flaws do they have? What is the sense of humor? What ideology do they subscribe to? Do they worship a god? If so which one(s)?

To help with your backstory, D&D has many different character archetypes listed here (<https://www.dndbeyond.com/backgrounds>), but feel free to come up with your own backstory. I've included some information about the world below to help you think about how your character will fit into the world. I'd love to also help iterate on your backstory so I can make some recommendations about how to fit it into the world.

## 2.3 Stumped? Need help with a backstory?

Here are a few tips to generate a character.

### Interview them... try asking the following questions

- Who are the 3-5 most important people or things in your life?
- Where did you grow up?
- What is the biggest mistake you ever made?

- When you think about society and culture, what comes to mind? What emotions do you have?
- How would other people describe you? Are you empathetic? Aloof? Self-interested? Altruistic? Quick to anger? Patient? Loving?
- What is your most prized possession?
- How do you dress?
- What do other people notice first about you?
- What do you do for fun?
- Are you religious or spiritual?
- Do you have a family? Do you like your family?
- Does money matter to you? Why do you want it?
- When did you start adventuring? Why?

(some of these taken from this article: <https://www.writingbeginner.com/how-to-write-a-dd-backstory/>)

### Create a timeline of life events for your character

#### Give them a voice.

A voice can go a long way to help give some texture to a character. You don't need an accent or anything fancy. Take a look at these videos if you don't have a clue how you might do that.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6xI0m7TuEc>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVmAEezr6ao>

## 3 The setting

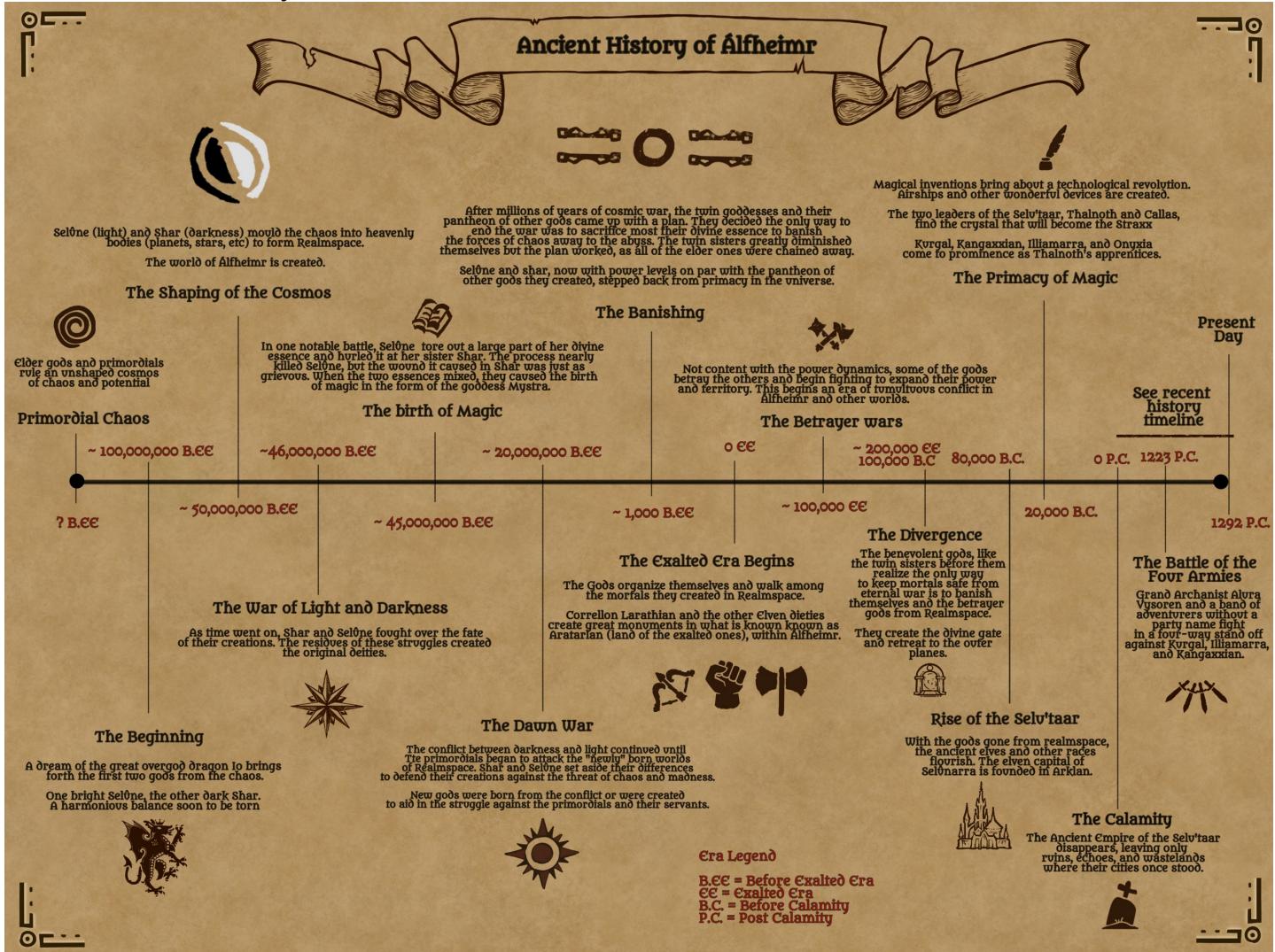
It is useful to know a little bit about the world you will be playing in, so you can make some informed decisions about the backstories you choose. Once again we will be adventuring in the homebrew world of Álfheimr (a Norse word that means land of the elves). The following sections will provide some details about my world, in case you want to use them in your character descriptions. If you don't want to read about the setting and instead would rather make a character without this information, I can help you fit them in later.

Also, below I have included some information about the pantheon of gods and goddesses and some overview of the historical background of the setting.

### 3.1 The world (Álfheimr)

The world is said to be the favored realm of the principle elven god Corellon Larethian. It is said the realm rests within the crest of his ever-waxing crescent moon.

### 3.1.1 Ancient History of Álfheimr

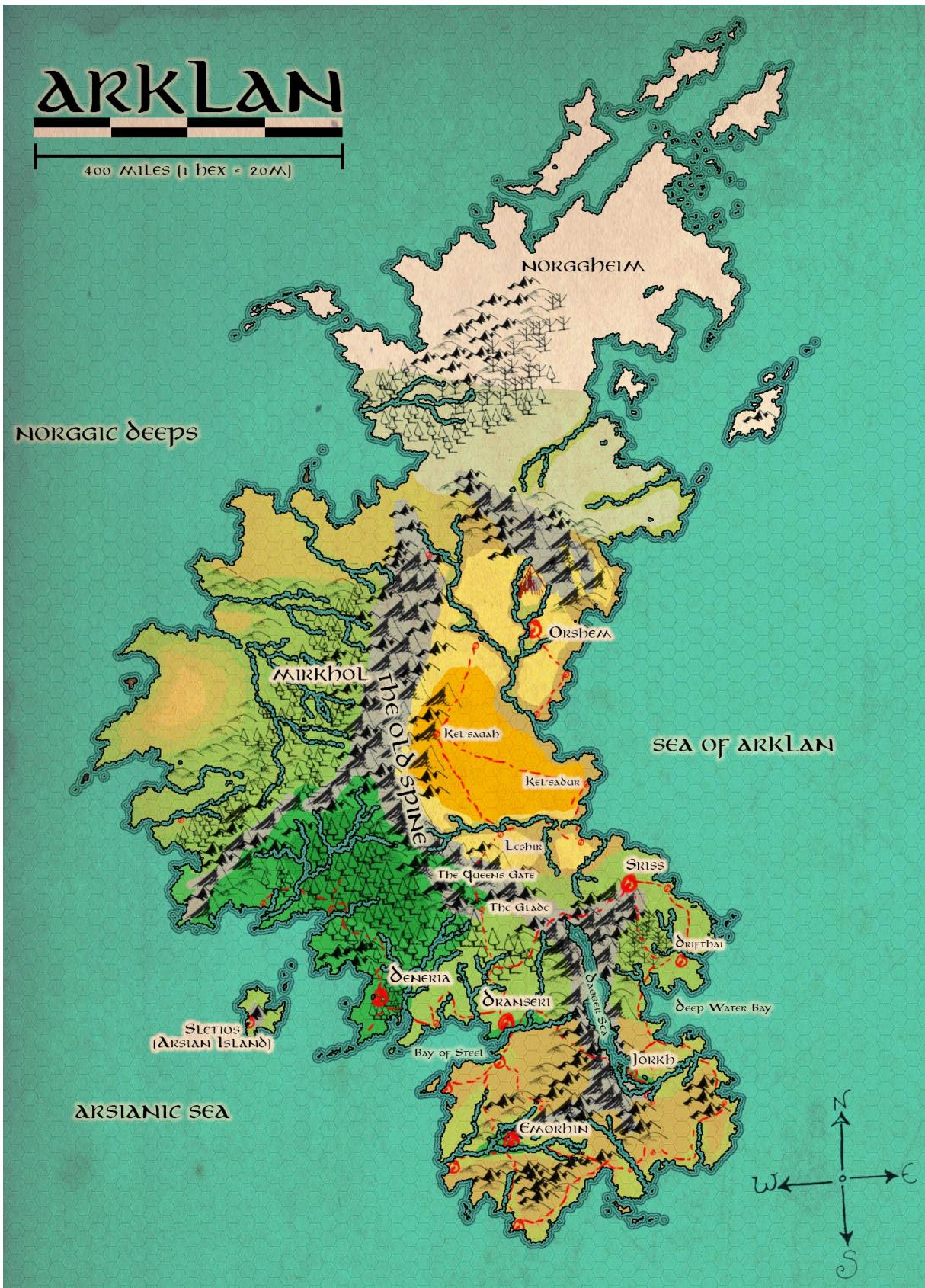


### 3.1.2 Continent of Arkian

Arkan is quite distant from the other areas in Álfheimr. Arkian has a long and storied history that goes back to the times when gods walked among mortals. After the time of the gods, a great civilization of high-elven mages, known as the Selu'taar, built a society that lasted for thousands of years. The ruins of their civilization lie scattered around Arkian – including extreme places of power that are studied by the arcanists of today.

After the fall of the Selu'taar, there was a time of anarchy before several city states emerged and asserted themselves politically under different governance structures. There was

- an elven city state named Deneria, which sat in the deep ancient woods south of the old spine mountains,
- the industrious human-led city state Dranseri that had a burgeoning navy, large trade port, and strategic centrally located terrain features,
- the “jewel of the south” named Emorhin, which advertised itself as “the free city” - a melting pot of different peoples and ideas
- the isolationist gnome-led city of Jorkh that existed on the southern tip of the Dagger Sea,
- the human-led society and mortal enemies of Dranseri named Sriss-khrif,
- the dragonborn island nation of Sletios,
- and the underground dwarven society of Orshem.



1: Map of Arklan

The city states warred for hundreds of years, before uniting under Queen Dranseri in 804 PC (post calamity). Under the united Dranseri leadership, each city state retained its distinct culture features, but also began to become more culturally diverse through collective trade and prosperity.

In addition to the city states of the south, Arklan also contains vast areas of dangerous wildlands. The Mirkhol to the northwest is said to be the epicenter of the calamity. Few adventures tread into this area due to the many dangerous creatures and spirits that are said to still reside there. The Norggheim is similarly inhospitable. Many stories tell of ancient evils that lie dormant in the snows. Finally, the Dry expanse is a large desert area that was once said to be green and verdant. Now it is a lawless area where outlaws and various goblins, orcs, and other creatures roam.

### 3.1.2.1 History of Arklan and Álfheimr since Campaign 1

Campaign 1 took place from 1222 to 1223 PC, 418 years after the Dranser unification, as several, seemingly unrelated, existential threats began to emerge and threaten the relative peace that the city states had enjoyed for a few hundred years.

In 1222, an ancient primordial evil known as Yan-C-Bin was released when cultists in the Dessarin Valley of Dranseri opened some sort of rift to the outer planes. Historians claim that a band of nameless heroes affiliated with the Arcana Pansophical and Grand Arcanist Alura Vysoren prevented the release of several of the evil primordial's siblings. The release of the Yan-C-Bin began a year and half long war with a demonic horde.

Later that year, the Temple of Selune, in Dranseri's temple district, was attacked by a mysterious drow secret society. While not part of the public record, the official Dranseri council accounts credited the attack to an ancient Selu'taar lich named Illiamarra. The same heroes involved in preventing further calamity in the Dessarin Valley tracked the drow to an underground ziggurat surrounded by a flowing river of animated undead bodies. The heroes discovered the lich was part of a triumvirate of secretive entities that had existed for thousands of years.

The council records and contemporary intelligence reports gathered by the Master of Information, Seeker Assum Emring, showed that the liches were all preparing for the arrival of the enigmatic Straxx monolith above the ancient selu'taar capital Selûnarra. The heroes of the Dessarin Valley were hired by the council to investigate. They traveled to the monastically neutral Anfoor Observatory and learned that the liches were spying on and plotting against one another. There they located their phylacteries and began a quest to remove the liches from the world. The heroes encountered all three at what became known in the queendom as The Battle of Four Armies. There, they defeated the evil Kangaxxian and what remained of the drow leader Illiamarra. The heroes also formed a pact with Kurgal, whom later became Grand Emperor of the New Arklan Imperium.

With the defeat of Kangaxxian, and the destruction of his phylactery during his reformation process, the floating city of Elyveshara was captured by Kurgal. The orcish horde threatening Sriss disbands after the mind-control devices used on the Orcish chieftains cease to function. Without central coordination, the Orcish armies begin to bicker. Infighting and disorganization is observed from the walls of Sri'ss and a counter-offensive organized by Chief Councilor Maria Renoir, leader of the Matriarchal Orden de la Sri'ss easily repels the orcish forces. The horde disbands into their original tribes and they retreat to their ancestral homes in the Dry Expanse – particularly Kel'sadah and the nomadic routes along the coast of the Sea of Arklan.

With Kangaxxian's defeat, Queen Dranser and the Dranseri Council turn their attention to the demonic incursion in the Dessarin Valley. A large tower of flesh is constructed by the demons in the valley. History never discovers its purpose. Nearly a year into the no-mans-land style conflict with the demons, the Straxx materializes above the capital city of Dranseri in Corellon of 1224. Airships launch from the structure and form up into a holding pattern – weapons aimed at key areas of the city. The Dranseri wyvernriders and prototype flying beasts of the gnomish Lofty Ambitions guild launch air units, but before a battle ensues, Kurgal requests a formal parley with the Queen and her council. Confidently, Kurgal goes alone into the Sky District of Dranseri and meets with the Queen and council in Castle Dranser. Kurgal asks for Dranseri to surrender. They claim that the Straxx can be used as a weapon, if the Queen chooses to resist. Initially, the queen declines to surrender, so Kurgal teleports it to a small nearby village called Conyberry, just outside the demonic incursion perimeter in the Dessarin Valley, within view of Dranseri. The queen watches at a distance, as the large crystalline Straxx begins to brighten and the 2<sup>nd</sup> moon

(Selune) grows brighter until a beam of light shoots from it, hits the crystalline structure of the Straxx and is focused down as a massive laser beam, destroying the Dranseri forward staging base against the demons at Conyberry. Minutes later, the Straxx rematerializes above Dranseri and another parley is requested.

Faced with a no-win situation from the superior technology of a mile-high megastructure death machine and a fleet of well-armed airships, the queen formally surrenders to Kurgal without any further bloodshed. As part of the terms of surrender, Kurgal leaves the Queen in charge of Dranseri and offers to deal with the demonic horde. In return, Dranseri becomes the first of several city-states in Arklan to join the New Arklan Imperium in 1224.

Word of the power of the Straxx travels fast. Over time, Kurgal presents the same offer to all of the city-states of Arklan. One by one, they surrender to Kurgal and become part of the Imperium. Like the Romans, Kurgal proves to be a reasonable, largely absent, Emperor.

A few laws change, some new Imperially-dictated mining and other resource gathering operations begin, but for most residents of Arklan and beyond, the day-to-day doesn't really change much. The common person's experience actually improves slightly during this time, as the Imperium begins a new universal compensation plan to keep people off the streets and happy with their system of governance.

Among the new laws, one notable one legalizes necromantic "preservation". New 'long life' clinics, run by state-licensed necromancers, give those with the means to pay a new outlook on life in cases of terminal illness or advanced age.

The floating city of Nelheserin, the city Kurgal lived in the recesses of Norggheim for so many years becomes the seat of central governance of the Imperium. While mobile, it stations itself above the city of Dranseri, where it can be found today. A large elevator, constructed in 1231, routinely takes Imperium-collected resources and taxes to Nelhessarin. The other Selu'taar floating cities, Elyveshara (Kangaxxian's former home) and Elaenagoth (Illiamrra's former home) are sent abroad to the capital cities of Arterlan and Meropis, to extend Imperial control to those areas.

In 1233, a new state-sanctioned airship services opens a route between all capital cities in Arklan and the seats of imperial control in the Araterlan capital Concordia and the Meropian city of Acheron.

For nearly 25 years after the birth of the New Arklan Imperium, there are rebel movements that seek to overthrow the Imperium. In 1255, forces organize against Nelheserin. Using the elevator as a means of attack, they attempt to storm the seat of imperial power. The rebellion is violently quashed and an example is made of the ring leaders. Few major rebellions have emerged since.

In 1257, the peoples of Alfheimr watch as the moons surrounding the planet begin to slow. For every year after, into the common time, Io takes 40 days to complete its cycle, while Selune takes 80. The planet rotates slower around the Sun. No one is quite sure why. Many theories run wild, but even astronomers are puzzled by the phenomena. It is this same year that people begin to notice that when people die their bodies begin to naturally zombify. These zombie bodies live on as shells of their former selves – still retaining some intelligence, but gradually losing it over. Unlike propagandic stereotypes of flesh-eating monsters promoted by some groups, most zombies manage to contribute to society as manual laborers for 5-7 years after death. Most zombie bodies fully decay within 10 years of their death, although some families meticulously maintain the dead out of some sort of duty for their lost loved ones. In some places, the living begin to create zombie retirement communities for the (un)dead to live out what remains of their time on the planet.

In 1285, the gnomes invent a new type of gunpowder device, improving on the gunpowder cannon commonly equipped on ships. Their new flintlock pistols and musket-loaded rifles begin to proliferate over the next few years.

The current time is 1292 P.C. the people of Arklan live in relative harmony under the banner of the new Imperium. Sometimes people grumble about taxes or the need to harvest resources that seem to disappear into the city of Nelheserin above Dranseri, but most people live contented lives not unlike their ancestors two generations prior.

No one in Álfheimr has seen Kurgal or the Straxx in over 60 years, but they abide by the Imperial laws because the price of rebellion is severe, and...as the slogan goes, the Imperium provides.

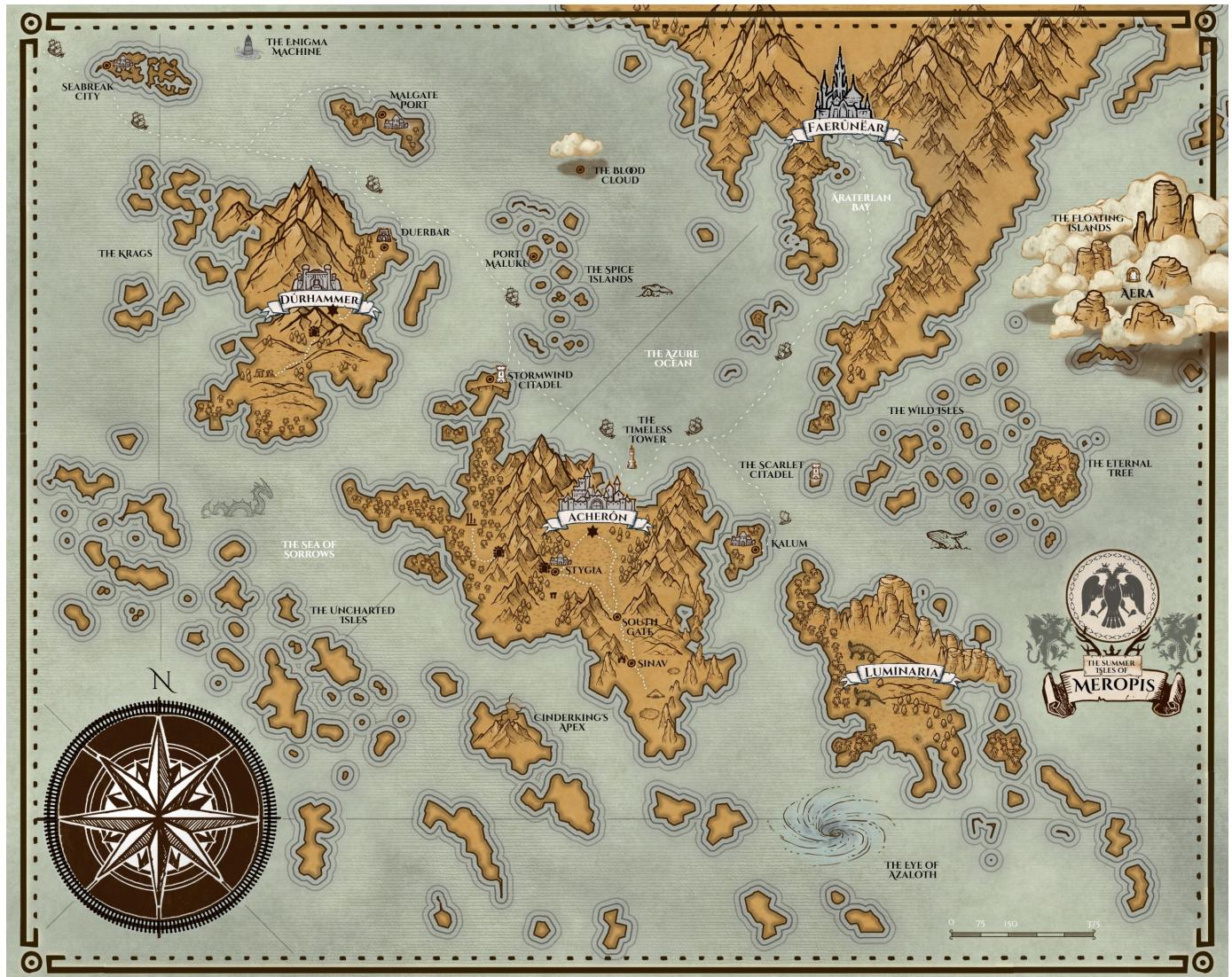
### 3.1.3 Continent of Aratarlan

Aratarlan is the largest landmass in Álfheimr and home to a number of countries, wild untamed areas, and unexplored regions. Aratarlan is said to be the land where Corellon Larethian first created the Elven race. The exact location of the creation has been lost to time and legend.

Valance is the largest country in Aratarlan. It extends along the western seaboard and into parts of the central and northern regions of the landmass. The capital city of Valance is a large coastal city named Concordia.

### 3.1.4 Meropis Isles

Meropis is a collection of islands to the south west of Aratarlan and south east of Arklan. The area has been lawless except in waters protected by the Acheronian hegemony, named the Chronos Concord – now affiliated with the New Arklan Imperium. The area has attracted inhabitants that are mostly pirates, criminals, and outcasts. It is said that a lost city of the Selu'taar exists within Meropis – possibly at the bottom of the ocean.



The Meropis region is made up of several island chains as well as three large mini-continents roughly the size of the Iceland, the UK, and New Zealand.

The three mini-continents, by order of size are: Acherôn – Translates from celestial as the “Gateway to the depths of the under realms”, Dûrhammer – Translates from Dwarven as “Darkhammer”, and Luminaria – translates from Elven as the “The land of light”.

The northern reaches of Meropis are the southern gateway to the continent of Araterlan. In the Arterlan Bay is the city of Faerûnëar – Translates from elven as “One land of elves meets the sea.”

In addition to the large continental land masses, there are several large port cities that include Seabreak city, which connects directly to the long overseas trade route leading to Arkalan, Malgate port, a large plantation island known for producing sugar cane, and Port Maluku, known as the gateway to the Spice Islands.

In addition the port cities, there are several large island chains. The lucrative Spice Islands are known for the rare regional spice farms and plantations. The Wild isles are a mostly undeveloped chain of islands that abut the massive 1000 foot tall Eternal tree that towers over the nearby area. The Uncharted Isles are a cluster of islands said to house the ruins of a long dead society. The area around them, the Sea of Sorrows, is very dangerous to navigate and plagued by pirates – so few venture forth to investigate them. Even the few that have explored the uncharted isles have gone missing or come to terrible misfortune later in life, leading to popular theories that the islands are cursed. The Cinderking’s Apex is the largest of the Uncharted Isles and is dominated by a towering volcano that reaches into the clouds.

The floating islands of Aera are oddly self-levitating bodies of stone past the eternal tree and the wild isles. Few travel the waters beneath them as some say areas of the ocean are often sucked into the clouds.

Within the Acheronian Continent are the cities of Stygia (gateway to the under realms), South gate (a small city in a mountain pass), and Sinav (the recently built city of the dead). A large pyramid sits in the middle of the desert south of Sinav. Around Acheron is the port city of Kalum, the city of a thousand verses and two citadels that allow for regional control – the Scarlet Citadel and Stormwind Citadel. A mysterious tower, known as the timeless tower, juts out of the water about 80 miles from the coast of Acheron.

Within the Dûrhammer continent, there is the port city of Duerbar known to be the primary gateway to the underdark as goods pass into and out of the port before heading towards the city of Dûrhammer and downward into the underdark trade routes to drow cities and duergar cities beneath the earth.

On the continent of Luminaria, there are no permanent settlements. This area characterized by massive jungles and inland grassland highlands is known as the land of the dinosaurs. The few settlements of people in Luminaria roam the continent on the backs of the massive Yggdrasuars – friendly dinosaurs nearly a mile long from head to toe.

### 3.2 Calendar and Celestial Bodies

The world of Álfheimr has two moons named after prominent deities: Io, and Selûne. Prior to 1257 P.C. Io had a 25-day lunar cycle and Selûne has a 50-day cycle. Now, Io has a 40 day cycle and Selûne an 80 day cycle. There are 8 months in the calendar. The cycle of Io marks each month and the cycle of Selûne marks the changing season. The months, named after deities are: Auril (Winter), Raven Queen (Winter), Melora (Spring), Correllon (Spring), Silvanus (Summer), Pelor (Summer), Mielikki (Autumn), and Sehanine (Autumn).

### 3.3 Lore

Every good world has its backstories. Every “learned” person from Arkalan knows about the divergence and the calamity. Some may have even read about the time before or after the divergence. Before the divergence, during

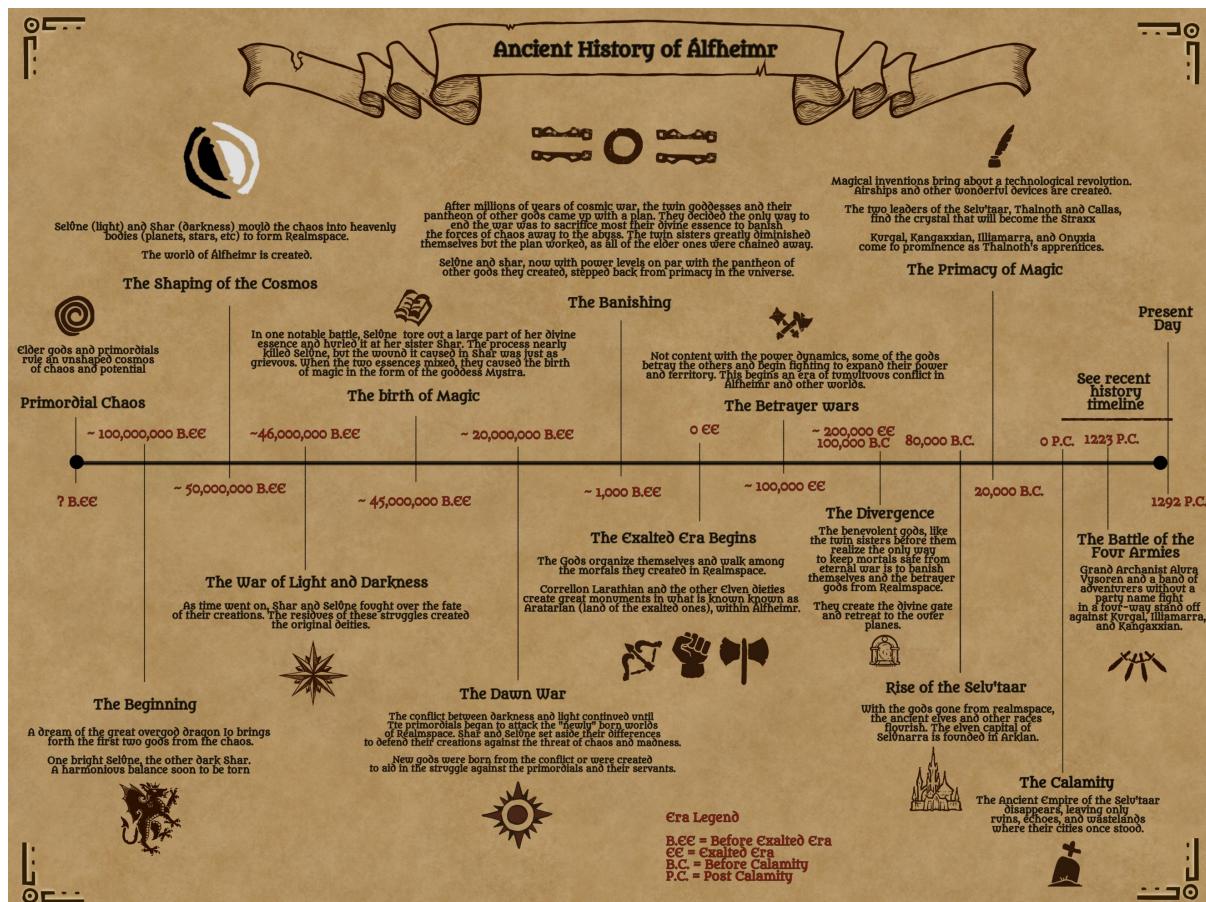
the exalted era, the gods were said to have walked on the planets of the prime materium and created the many races of the world today. After, during the Age of Arcanum, mageocracies ruled the day during a period of scientific and arcane studies. Some select few researchers may even have studied the time before the Exalted Era when primordial chaotic eldritch entities existed before the cosmos had even been formed.

### 3.3.1 The Divergence

In the beginning of the world, it is said that gods and goddesses walked among the peoples of Álfheimr. This time is known as the “pre-divergence” (PD). During the gods created the various races of the world and lived among their chosen. Over time conflicts arose among the gods and led to a time of strife that culminated in the divergence. During the time of strife, the good-aligned gods came together to fight the forces of chaos and destruction, known as the “betrayer gods.” The good-aligned gods defeated the betrayers and constructed a celestial creation known as the “divine gate.” As part of its design, the gate separated the mortal world (known as the material plane) from the divine. Each god created their own divine plane and the good-aligned deities banished the betrayer gods to the abyss and the nine hells. The separation of mortal and divine realms is known as the Divergence.

### 3.3.2 The Calamity

In the years after the divergence, the world was largely ruled by the elves. The elves constructed a grand society that rivaled the beauty and majesty of the societies controlled by the gods before them. As time went on, powerful high-elven mages, known as Selu’taar in elven, constructed artifacts by manipulating primal forces of the world. Initially, they used their powers to create artifacts that protected their people and built floating cities. It was the pinnacle of the fusion of the sciences and arcane arts and the Selu’taar rose to prominence as the leaders of the elven nation. This age stretched on for millenia. As the saying goes, absolute power corrupts absolutely. Eventually some of the Selu’taar aspired to be gods themselves. The specific details of the fall are lost to time, but ultimately a great cataclysm destroyed the Selu’taar nation. This time of upheaval is known as the calamity. The modern dating system is in years post-calamity (PC).



### 3.4 Gods and Goddesses (the Pantheon)

There are a lot of different pantheons in D&D. The following list contains the primary gods in my world. You can goggle the names to find out more about them. They are standard D&D gods.

#### Prime Dieties:

- Corellon Larethian
- Moradin (The Allhammer)
- Avandra
- Pelor (The Dawnfather)
- Sarenrae (The Everlight)
- Ioun (The Knowing Mistress)
- Erathis (The Lawbearer)
- The Raven Queen
- Selûne
- Bahamut (The Platinum Dragon)
- Kord (The Stormlord)
- Melora (The Wildmother)

#### Betrayer Gods:

- Tharizdun (The Chained Oblivion)
- Zehir (The Cloaked Serpent)
- Torog (The Crawling King)
- Asmodeus (Lord of the nine hells)
- Gruumsh
- Lolth
- Bane
- Tiamat

Also all of the Seldarine (Elven Pantheon) exists within my world. Read more here:

<https://forgottenrealms.fandom.com/wiki/Seldarine>

## 4 Story Details

Anyone that builds a character with the “sailor” background or similar equivalent will get access to a book of port cities that provide background about all of the commonly used ports in Meropis. Otherwise, you will get access to the regional details of the city/area you are from and the city that we will start in (Seabreak city).

Below, I have listed the prominent factions that most people in the area of Meropis are aware of.

### 4.1 Prominent factions

#### 4.1.1 Chronos Concord

Sometime during the Age of Arcanum, a lost magocracy built grand monuments and cities within the Meropian Isles. Ruins of their civilization can be found throughout the region. The largest, and best preserved, was a grand city named Acheron. Historians aren't sure why, but the civilization disappeared hundreds of years before the calamity, leaving the islands largely uncolonized. Many regional and single-island civilizations flourished during this time.

Nearly nine hundred years ago (392 P.C.) traders from Emorin, in Arklan, founded a new nation in the ruined city of Acheron, returning it to some of its former glory of the next 50 years. They allied themselves with the Keke'huna, the people in what would become known as the Spice islands. Establishing a federation they named

the Chronos Concord, in honor of the Keke'hunan word for time, the Emorian traders created a democratic nation modeled after their own city-state. The Concord was established to enforce law and order and regulated commerce in the area. Over the next 100 years, several other areas were colonized by the peoples of Áraterlan.

In the present day, the Chronos concord is comprised of five independent city-states, each ruled by its own marquis. The city-states operate as one union under the banner of the Chronos Concord. This arrangement ensures uniform laws, regulation of trade, and mutual protection between the city-states. The five cities are Seabreak City, Malgate Port, Port Maluku, Acheron, and Kalum. Port Maluku is the former capital of the Keke'huna people and is considered to be the gateway to the spice islands.

Open shipping lanes and inviting tropical scenery have made the domain of the Chronos Concord a cultural melting pot and a popular place to live or visit. Knowing this, the respective marquises uphold a long tradition of welcoming all weary travelers and providing an atmosphere of color and delight. If there is gold to be spent, the concord is eager for you to spend it within their cities. Between the venues for entertainment and vice, and the ample business opportunities, the concord hopes to convince those with wealth to spend it here, outside the more tightly controlled governments in Arklan or Áraterlan.

Internally, each marquis of the Chronos Concord keeps a tight grip on the shipping and trade that comes through their cities, overseeing all guilds that organize imports and exports and managing a handful of guildmasters that form the backbone of local commerce. When a marquis dies or is impeached by the other members of the concord, the remaining members choose a successor.

Warriors who prove their might through gladiatorial bouts during times of celebration and ceremony are asked to join the Acero Militar (translates as "Steel Guard" from the Emorin regional tongue), a well-paid guard force that works for the governing marquis to enforce the laws. Cities have one or more magistrates that oversee judgment on legal matters and criminal punishment.

While the cities do work together for the good of the concord, they are also each in silent competition with each other, flaunting their affluence and clientele at every opportunity. When a prominent figure from the far reaches of Álfheimr finds their way to Meropis, it's not uncommon for them to be courted by multiple marquises in an attempt to convince the personage to stay as a guest of their city.

In recent times, the Legion has subtly infiltrated the Chronos Concord, often with the unwitting aid of greedy local politicians. Rumors of criminal collusion have raised suspicion amid members of the concord. Sooner or later, the tension will have to break — and the fallout won't be pretty.

Since 1231 P.C. when the floating city named Elaenagoth arrived above Acheron with a fleet of heavily-armed airships, the Chronos Concord has paid tribute to the New Arklan Imperium and abided by its laws. In return the Imperium lets the Concord operate as it has for as long as its been around. The Imperial presence is seen, but not really felt in the area. Most of the Marquis stay in line and contribute their share of the tribute without question ever since 1262 when the Acheronian Marquis Francisco Durán conspired to rebel against the Imperium. Before any rebellious actions were taken, Durán along with his entire family and closest confidants were found in their homes drained of all of their blood.

Despite the concord's cordial relationship with the dwarves of Dûrhammer, the proximity to the dwarven continent along with its military and trade might is a lingering source of unease. Currently, the concord maintains a standing military of 7,800 Sea Wardens (naval soldiers), a nautical fleet of 370 ships, and 5,200 Acero Militar divided between the cities. Some of the Sea Wardens are posted inland, where they maintain forts and citadels that provide the Concord with geographic strongholds.

#### **4.1.1.1 Laws of the Chronos Concord**

All who are found by the esteemed Acero Militar to have broken the fair laws of the Chronos Concord are judged and sentenced by the local magistrate and are subject to punishments befitting the crime. All fines and punishments for crimes against a Acero Militar official or a noble are doubled. All fines and punishments for crimes against a Chronos Concord official are tripled.

Permits must be purchased and owned to do business for more than 15 days in Chronos Concord cities. Permits are approved, purchased, and logged at any temple to Erathis in the region.

All religions are legal to practice in private, but public worship of Betrayer Gods is considered dangerous to public discourse and is strictly forbidden.

**Theft:** 3–10 days incarceration and/or a fine of twice the worth stolen.

**Public worship of Betrayer Gods:** 10 days incarceration and/or a fine of 300 gp.

**Ownership of another intelligent humanoid creature:** 6–12 months incarceration and/or a fine of 1,000 gp.

**Trespassing:** 7 days incarceration, and/or a fine of 100 gp.

**Failure to pay taxes to the Chronos Concord:** 3–15 days incarceration and a repossession of property equal to the amount owed.

**Damage to private property:** 5–15 days incarceration or a fine of twice the worth of property destroyed.

**Damage to concord property:** 30–60 days incarceration and a fine of twice the worth of property destroyed.

**Kidnapping:** 30 days incarceration and/or a fine of 500 gp.

**Assault with intent to injure:** 15 days incarceration and/or a fine of 250 gp.

**Assault with intent to kill:** 170 days incarceration and/or a fine of 1,000 gp.

**Murder:** 5–10 years incarceration and/or a fine of 5,000 gp.

#### **4.1.1.2 Goals and opportunities for adventurers**

The Chronos Concord is concerned with maintaining the trade and commerce that ensures their continued influence, both in Meropis and the rest of Álfheimr. Anything that might jeopardize business is viewed as a major threat to the sanctity of life in the region. Faced with the hazards of dangerous creatures that lurk in the nearby jungles and beneath the waves, as well as piracy on the open waters, the concord is employing substantial numbers of adventurers and mercenaries.

Four hundred years ago, when the concord worked to enforce rising taxation on independent merchant companies operating within the Meropis region, the outrage led a small union of angry enterprises to turn to piracy. Over time these groups formed into a collective known as the Bloody Corsairs. These pirates have claimed the island of Darktide's wake and terrorized the shipping lanes for hundreds of years, all while deftly avoiding pursuit and naval retribution. The concord is eager to destroy the Corsairs and have put massive bounties on the heads of the so-called "scourges of the ocean".

#### 4.1.2 Bloody Corsairs

Meropian historians will tell you that the Bloody Corsairs's turned to piracy because of the excessive taxes and unjust laws imposed by the Chronos Concord nearly 400 years ago. What started as public dissent in 912 P.C. turned to lawful protests over the better part of decade (913-923). In 924, a group of disenfranchised salvage ships and trade vessels organized a public blockade of Ascheron's port, the Triwell Piers. The demonstration turned violent when one of the captains fired at a Chronos Concord nautical patrol that was maneuvering between ships in the blockage. An brief skirmish left 5 Concord frigates and a dozen of the protestors' ships sunken in the harbor. The protestors fled the city towards Port Maluku. Their they captured the key port city and raised the Jolly Roger flag to identify the port as free from tyranny.

The loosely organize group of captains named themselves the Maluku Corsairs. For a little less than a year, they governed the spice isles and controlled the seas allowing for passage through the Arklan trade route. Not known to suffer challenges to their authority, The Chronos Concord responded with overwhelming force nearly 9 months after the Triwell Pier event. Attacking Maluku, the Concord sank most of the Maluku Corsair vessels and killed the ringleader captains they could find. Most of Port Maluku burned down in the process.

The survivors, mostly at sea at the time, returned to Maluku to find themselves without a port to call home. They left the known routes and charted a course south into the Uncharted Isles, knowing the Concord would not follow them into the dangerous waters of the Sea of Sorrows. Few traveled to the uncharted isles because they were thought to be cursed, the remnants of some calamity related to an old lost civilization. In the Uncharted Isles, the corsairs found an island with a system of sea caves that leads a large harbor-sized tidal pool. Surrounded by kraggy rocks and shallow waters with a port accessible only at night, they named the island Darktide's wake. Their they established a lawless base of operations. It has proved extremely defensible over time.

After establishing a base, the pirates began stalking the well-known shipping routes to harry, intimidate, steal from, and destroy passing ships that flew under the concord's banner. Over time the Maluku Corsairs became known as The Bloody Corsairs. These "free folk of the sea" have now spent over three hundred years terrorizing the Azure Ocean. Any time the Concord has sought to squash the pirate movement their fleets have been battered by the Sea of Sorrows, met with unexpected weather phenomena, or when a few managed to get close to Darktide's wake, they were destroyed by cannons from the superior defensible position provided by the island.

With loose morals and a twisted code of honor, the corsairs take what they want from less protected targets while living a life of debauchery in the well-guarded haven of Darktide's wake. The Corsairs long ago abandoned a uniform symbol, instead changing the colors and symbols of its banner regularly to avoid counterfeiting and infiltration.

The Corsairs are governed by a collective of captains, all of whom defer to the final word of the Plank King, a capricious monarch who never leaves Darktide's wake. While the original Plank King, an elf named Orist Liaro, ran the organization for nearly 200 years, the leadership since has turned over ever twenty or thirty years. The latest Plank King, a massive goliath named Gharok Bravebreaker, has led the Bloody Corsairs for the last 11 years. He is known not just for his brutality, but also for his increasingly risky plays for large haul piracy operations. While once it was safe to travel on large, well guarded vessels, now everyone is on edge when passing outside of the protective narrows near the Stormwind Citadel.

Each member of the Corsairs known to the Chronos Concord is considered a major criminal, amassing an ever-growing bounty with each infraction they commit and every ship they raid. Those arrested are generally executed and strapped to the rocks outside Concord-controlled ports as a warning.

Word on the street is that some of the more affluent merchant guilds from Acheron that have little investment in concord shipments use back-channels to pay off the Corsairs and fly specific colors when crossing their territory to avoid being boarded.

#### **4.1.2.1 Goals and opportunities for adventurers**

The corsairs have a fairly open membership model, but mostly respect people that pay the price of iron for what they take. While the Corsairs's original goal was to scare the concord into revoking their soaring taxes, its charter has changed. The Chronos Concord refused to change its laws, and the pirates found a certain dark joy in theft and murder on the waves. The original members of the Corsairs (and now their children) have no plans to return to their former lives as legitimate traders. They intend to maintain and grow their operations across the Azure Ocean, while continuing to defend and improve their fortress in Darktide's Wake, finding intricate ways of reinforcing the reefs with dangerous traps and impassable barriers.

The Corsairs has since expanded their interests beyond mere piracy. Relics and secrets dating back to the Age of Arcanum and beyond are rumored to be scattered all across Meropis. Some scavengers have returned to Darktide's Wake with proof of such artifacts, and a new kind of aspiring treasure seeker has emerged within the Corsairs: one who seeks to plunder from the dead rather than the living. The drive to outdo their fellow sailors has already placed several ships in serious danger. For this reason, the corsairs have employed adventurers that value coin over moral compasses to delve into the regions dungeons and seek out treasures. Adventurers be warned, dealing with pirates is a fickle business.

#### **4.1.3 The Houses of Dûrhammer**

Established within Mount Dûrglander (dwarven for dark gems), the largest of the Iron Mountains, following the divergence, this subterranean fortress city is the pinnacle of dwarven society. Five great houses rule Dûrhammer; they have maintained power since the city was original established. The ruling families are House Flinstword, House Icebeard, House Steelgrip, House Bronzeguard, and House Opalbrand. These great houses elect an official known as the "Ironkeeper" every 20 years to keep the alliances between houses just and healthy for the good of all the dwarves of Dûrhammer.

When lesser family houses have attempted to overthrow one of the ruling five through the centuries, they other great houses put aside their differences to maintain the sanctity of the traditional rule. Even when tensions boil into bloodshed between the houses – occasionally when a new Ironkeeper is to be elected – the Ironkeeper will call upon the city guard, known as the Etchers, to end the violence and maintain peace.

Dûrhammer is known for its legendary master-forged weaponry and armor, as well as the many raw materials it mines from the Iron Mountains. It is also known as one of the few "safe" entry points into the underdark. The dwarves of Dûrhammer have peaceful, but tense diplomatic connections to nearby drow and duergar settlements in the underdark. This makes Dûrhammer the exclusive trade gateway from surface dwellers to underdwellers.

##### **4.1.3.1 Goals and opportunities for adventurers**

Each ruling house has a speciality and holds responsibility over that domain within Dûrhammer. House Flinstword maintains the largest mine under Dûrhammer. House Icebeard trains the chief architects of the city and most masonry and building projects are organized by or through them. House Steelgrip funds the smithing guilds and maintains the Steelgrip Metalworks, Dûrhammer's largest blast furnace and ore refinery. It is here that the legendary arts of the dwarves usually come. House Bronzeguard prides itself on training Dûrhammer's foremost scholars and premiere arcanists. House Opalbrand maintains the law and delivers punishment, though a recent scandal that uncovered corruption between House Opalbrand and sects of the Etchers has seen them fall from grace, throwing Dûrhammer's judicial system into chaos.

Dûrhammer culture fosters distrust of most non-dwarves, especially among the Dwarven elite. The greed of the Dûrhammer dwarves is almost as legendary as their works of art. This greed is what enables them to see past their doubts and set aside their prejudice to trade with the rest of the world. The dwarves are always looking for adventurers to delve into the underdark in areas they wish not to send their own people. They also routinely hire mercenaries to help protect their trade caravans. Duerbar, which translates from Dwarven as the "Shield of the Dwarves", is a large port city built partially above ground and partially below. Duerbar acts as a dwarven trading

hub allowing Dûrhammer to export its goods and raw materials to Arklan, Áraterlan, and Acheron via the lucrative nearby shipping lanes. Brave adventurers seeking work from the dwarves can find it in Duerbar.

#### 4.1.4 The Wardens of Faerûnëar

Faerûnëar, which translates from elven as “One land of elves meets the sea”, is the southernmost tip of the Áraterlan continent. It acts as a trading hub for the wood elf nation of Valance. The elven city was established in the lush expanse by the sorceress Yelora, the wood elves’ first leader after the Divergence because she knew of the rich resources in the Meropis area and desired to have trade and open dialogue with the foreign magocracy in the area. Today, Faerûnëar is safeguarded by the three offices of elders called “wardens” and are united by the High Warden Tirelda, who has held the office for at least the past 300 years. These four keep the city and the surrounding lands safe from intrusion, but also manage a port quarter open to outsiders that allow for lucrative trade with the concord, the houses of Dûrhammer, and with the city states of Arklan.

##### 4.1.4.1 Goals and opportunities for adventurers

Maintaining the prosperity and safety of Faerûnëar and the broader elven nation of Valance is of the utmost importance. The wardens believe that the elven lives they have sworn to protect are worth more than the lives of outsiders. For this reason, the Wardens and other elven nobles in the city often employ outside adventuring parties as mercenary guards to protect their caravans and ships or as dungeon delvers in search of artifacts from the Age of Arcanum throughout the many ruins of Meropis.

#### 4.1.5 The Manifold

Any civilized society will turn the people it has failed into criminals, and the societies of Meropis are no exception. The area's, currently, largest criminal organization took shape about two hundred years ago, when a shipping company in Malgate Port turned to smuggling contraband to make ends meet. This tightknit group of clever smugglers soon began to bargain with their competitors, employing blackmail and offering membership to their organization as an alternative to elimination.

The syndicate grew with alarming speed, infiltrating the criminal underbelly of every major city in the area. Masquerading as purveyors of antiquities and foreign textiles, the Manifold focuses on providing their clients with exotic goods, such as illicit substances and magical beasts, or supplying hired muscle to intimidate their clients' rivals. The worst of the Manifold even deal in human merchandise.

Originally centered in Malgate Port, the Manifold now operates across the area as a loose network of gang bosses who run their own local sects without direct oversight from the mysterious heads of the syndicate. Each satellite group is expected to regularly deliver information and a cut of their profits to the leadership. Those who fail to pay up receive quiet threats of enslavement or assassination — and the Manifold always makes good on its threats.

Members of the Manifold are sworn to keep their syndicate secret by pretending that their chapter is still just another local gang. This has given the Manifold a sinister and enigmatic reputation, which further obfuscates its activities from the authorities. Since members of the the Manifold prefer coercion to public displays of violence, officers of the law often fail to recognize Manifold activity until it's too late.

The Chronos Concord scored a major victory fifteen years ago when they discovered and raided the central Manifold stronghold in Malgate Port, forcing the surviving leadership to scatter across the area. The Manifold has emphasized the narrative of its own fall in order to keep a low profile, though in fact it has retained most of its power. Its influence has stretched to the distant corners of Meropis as it bides its time and waits to reinstate its control within the area. Shifting tactics, the Manifold has now begun seeding major factions with double agents, who turn the most foolish or corrupt of their colleagues into the Manifold’s unwitting pawns.

Recent rumors are that Malgate Port is back within Manifold shadow control.

#### 4.1.5.1 Goals and opportunities for adventurers

The loss of their headquarters taught the surviving Manifold leaders to temper their arrogance with caution. Now a decentralized network of allies and informants, the Manifold is reconnecting with their temporarily dormant contacts, not all of whom are happy to see their cruel masters return.

Beyond the borders of the Chronos Concord, the Manifold has deftly utilized the chaos of the Corsairs centuries-long reign of piracy to infiltrate the guilds of the Chronos Concord.

Merely mentioning Manifold activity within the Chronos Concord, Dûrhammer, or Faerûnëar is enough to draw unwanted attention; members of the local law enforcement might investigate the rumors — and the person who started them. Those involved with the Manifold are often convicted of crimes and vanish into the darkest prisons. Though the Manifold has apparently scattered since the raid on their base in Malgate port, the authorities still keep an eye open for cell activity.

Many years ago, the Manifold established satellite cells in the distant land of Arklan, working closely with the local thieving organization there known as the Clasp. Since their headquarters in Malgate Port was destroyed, some have suggested sending agents across the oceans to reinforce their foreign operatives. If the network can quickly regain its former strength, there will eventually be little chance of stopping the spread of its power and influence.

The manifold operatives are happy to employ adventureres that value coin over questions. Smuggling operations, particularly of illicit and stolen goods are commonplace. Occasionally, the Manifold also involve outsiders in certain kidnapping or shakedown operations.

## 4.2 Starting city – Seabreak City

We will start our campaign on the north western edge of Meropis in the port of Seabreak City, see map below.



#### **4.2.1 Background**

Seabreak city is the ‘last stop’ before long-distance sailing vessels head out into the open Arklan ocean and travel for nearly 9,000 miles to make the trip to Arklan. Numerous smaller trade vessels deposit their goods in storehouses in Seabreak city. Larger vessels then pick up the goods, travel to Dranseri or Emorin, and return with loads of imports from Arklan. The trip across the ocean takes about 90 days (8640 miles at 96 miles per day) for the average 130ft zombie/sail-powered galley, or about 72 days (8640 at 120miles per day) with a smaller 100 ft vessel. The largest vessels on the oceans (about a 160ft length) take about 100 days to reach Arklan with an average speed of 87 miles per day.

In any case, Seabreak city is a popular port destination because of its strategic location, large number of storehouses, and the network of natural seaways that span the city in an almost venetian style.

#### **4.2.2 Key points of interest listed on the map are below:**

1. River delta. The Andafo River splits into a delta before meeting the ocean. While the river is very wide, the current is not strong. There are a few buildings on the islands in the delta outside of the city walls. Most of them are owned by local fishing operations and are used as curing or chilling locations to process the regional catch. Some use magical devices to freeze the fish for later consumption.
2. Cliff top forests. The cliffs that surround the Andafo River are around 100-feet-high. Twin forests crown both sides of the city. There are a few treacherous trails that lead up to the forests. The cliffs are favored by outgoing ship crews, as they provide the last non-oceanic experiences before long haul cross-ocean journeys. Small shrines to various deities, especially those devoted to the sea, travel, or luck, can be found in the forests.
3. Seabreak Lighthouse. The lighthouse is located on the westernmost part of the northern cliff. Due to its height, the light from its magical lamp can be seen 20 miles away, farther than most lighthouses. The magical lamp functions by itself so the lighthouse is often empty and alone. Only when the light malfunctions does anyone visit it.
4. Outer wall. The wall is 30-feet-high. The only gate in the middle is just a barred portcullis over the only river entrance. It regulates the entrance of ships, rafts, and other water vehicles. On most days, the river entrance is open to commerce from 4am until 10pm.
5. Goldwin Inn. The owner of the inn is a disgruntled half-orc called Urkut. The inn proper is a three-storied rectangular building with 45 rooms for lease. The inn grounds includes a walled courtyard and a squat tower which is mostly used as a granary.
6. Seabreak Castle. Home to Seabreak’s Marquis, the castle is located in the middle of the inner wall and serves as a giant gatehouse that oversees the river. The security officers in the crossing are careful to inspect incoming ships bound for the protected storehouses in the walled city proper. The Castle features a lowerable ‘wetdock’ that can be lowered next to a ship so that inspectors can board incoming vessels. Once a ship’s credentials are verified, the grand gate is raised and they are permitted entrance into the city.
7. Overstock Merchant District. Three islets on the northern side of the river delta form a merchant district where travelers, particularly importers and exporters, are known to sell all manner of goods. Most of the goods sold are overstocked items that either can’t be sold quickly or don’t fit within the holds of soon-to-be-departing vessels.
8. Armada Barracks. Despite the relative peace of the Meropis region, Seabreak City maintains a moderately sizable armada of Chronos Concord ships, since its western side is open to a hypothetical ocean attack or siege from the Corsairs or other threats. The barracks have large docks where new recruits are trained in the art of shipwright, sailing, and combat.

#### **4.2.3 Current ruling Marquis**

Seabreak City is currently ruled by Portcaller Yoshiro “Fat Fish” Fiero, a male tabaxi. See picture below.



Tough as nails and quick to bite back, Yoshiro is an honorable tabaxi and dependable leader in times of trouble. This led to his rise as the Portcaller of the island. Though the village is small, Yoshiro deals with a perpetual string of smugglers and pirates while also organizing the incoming and outgoing shipping lanes for much of the Concord. Even so, Yoshiro is rarely included in major concord business, to his obvious and public frustration.

#### 4.2.4 Precipitating Party formation

Somehow all of your characters have arrived in Seabreak city at some point or another. While some of you may be from Seabreak, it is much more likely you are from elsewhere and this is just a port stop in your travels. You all have been hired onto a ship named *The Hydrangea* to transport a shipment of dwarven blue tea, recently arrived from the Dwarven city of Terra via the port of Dranseri in Arklan, to Duerbar. The short 750 trip from Seabreak to Duerbar should take a little less than 7 days.

Our story will pick up a week (5 days) before you are set to ship out, as you wait in the Goldwin Inn. ‘Session 0’ will flesh out who knows who before you get on the ship and give you some exposure to the world.