Idrasia: The Blasted Reach

# The Markarskan Giants

## Description

The giants of this region separated into two ideological camps. The Markarskans favored ruling over the lesser races more directly. From their perch in Markarska, they terrorize the whole of the plains. Besides demanding a large amount of food and consuming much of the groundwater, they also force the plainsmen to work in their mines.

#### Tithe

Every month, the under races of the city must provide the giants with ten working age individuals as well as a significant amount of food. These goods are left on the tall steps that are inside the massive mesa. Anyone other than the offering at the doors when they open is killed on sight.

## Affiliation

Giants obviously.

### Naming Conventions

Russian and eastern european.

## Interactions

#### With G:

The rift between the two sets of giants now goes back several decades and stems from their goals and way they seek to interact with the lesser races, one paternal, the other with a fist of iron. Communication has always been possible with magic. Occasionally, envoys visit one another. In this era of breaking barriers, perhaps the two sides will be forced into more cooperation.

## Cities

#### Markarska

*Description*

By far the most advanced city on the continent, high above the clouds, its marble spires and towers of magic cast dark shadows, both literal and metaphoric, over the center of the plain if not the whole continent. The giants of Markarska are the most powerful magic users in the continent and have used the intervening years since the war with the dragons to discover and explore many deep secrets. It would not be surprising if they have or *fabricated* a dragon sphere.

Some of the offered lesser races are used in the mines which lie deep below the mesa, accessible only through magic. Others are used in unspeakable experiments into life and death.

*Seat of Power*

Markarska is ruled by an uneasy council of mage-giants. It is something between a gerontocracy and a meritocracy.

*Trade*

Markarska does not trade usually with other cities or factions, except to consume massive amounts of natural resources. The most sought after resources are reagents for magical spells, rare gems, exotic minerals, and metals of all kinds. The magical items and information created by its labs stay in the city. On rare occasion, they might trade some of their items or artifacts with other giant factions both on the continent and off it.

*Races*

Markarska is almost completely made of giants. However, they do have a sizable slave population as noted below. Certain lesser race collaborators who are of great use to the gaints may be invited to live in the city as well, but it is rare.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| A mix of cloud and storm giants | 70% |
| Assorted slaves (mix of lesser races) | 25% |
| Collaborator Goliaths | 4% |
| Dominated Earth Genasi and constructs (for mining) | 1% |

#### Koprivina

*Description*

Koprivina one of the larger cities on the continent and by far the largest in the plains. Its inhabitants are ruled over by the giants and their collaborators who stifle any rebellious intentions. It is built into the side of the mesa, as if constantly looking up at the splendor of Markarska which it can never hope to equal. The buildings are made of clay and are usually stacked on top of one another forming a twisted three dimensional maze of star-corridors.

There is an internal staircase up to Markarska, but none are allowed through the gates at the top. There are massive water pipes powered by magic which supply Markarska. This is not common knowledge.

It takes a good fourth of a day to climb the many stairs from the plains floor up to the city, and because of such, many inhabitants choose never to leave.

*Seat of power*

The city is ruled over by a Goliath Overseer and his guard of loyal goliaths. He also employs some spies to find dissenters. Overseers are chosen by the ruler of Markarska.

*Trade*

Koprivina's main trade resource is livestock which are used as food for Markarska, and the inhabitants themselves, who the giants above use as slaves. Mercenaries are easy to find here. A large amount of ore and ingots comes into Koprivina, some of which gets smelted. They are therefore better at metalworking than one might assume.

*Races*

Koprivina is a motley mix of lesser races, but mostly Aarakocra, who have the dubious honor of having lived in the area for centuries. Legend spoken in hushed tones says that they once lived at the top of the massive mesa.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Aarakocra | 70% |
| Humans | 10% |
| Minotaur | 10% |
| Goliath Collaborators | 7% |
| Dwarven metalworking experts | 3% |

#### Tymnozavod

*Description*

One of the few floating cities left in Idrasia. This massive smoke belching monstrosity survived the fall through its non-standard propulsion mechanism. Tymnozavod was designed as a mobile war factory. Its arcane semi-automated workshops constructed at the high point of giant knowledge are capable of constructing hundreds of constructs a day, that is, if anyone can remember or figure out how to work the thing.

Visually it is a bulbous metal plated blob the size of a small mountain. From its top are smoke stacks pointing in every direction, half of them emit a noxious black smoke which causes respiratory problems if inhaled for too long. During the night it gleams red from cavernous openings, hinting at the raw elemental power that was required to be harnessed to aid its construction and levitation.

Because of its unique purpose, it weighs even more than a typical floating city, being made almost entirely of metal. The anti-gravity engines at its bottom are palpable as the city flies overhead, increasing gravity almost three fold for those underneath. Thus, the city also has a secondary role in being a morale weapon against the giants enemies. They are know to park the city atop misbehaving settlements to great effect.

However, the engines come with an advantage, it can lift objects and materials no other force on Idrasia could hope to budge. Because of this feature, it is now being used as an ore transport between the Markarskans and the Silver Circle. Every month or so, huge amounts of raw ore containing gems and magical cluster rocks travels from the Canticle to the slopes of Markarska.

*Secret Stuff:*

The engine of Tymnozavod requires a captured elder fire elemental plucked from the searing center of the plane of fire. Needless to say, this is not an easy task and the few giants who know this fact use whatever substitute they can.

Perhaps the heart of a fire dragon would work, but where are they going to find something like that?

# B) The Adisan Collective

## Description

If you want a clear sign of the giant's decaying hegemony you don't need to look father than the Collective. Once a fractured and subjected group of witless mountain and forest dwellers, mostly genasi, these tribes have consolidated in recent years and now a small but present challenge to giant power.

Because they are in fact a collective, their purpose, goals, and actions are sporadic when viewed as an outsider. There are no less than twenty main tribes all with their own systems of internal government and place of origin. They are together only in their hatred of the giants and their underlings.

The Adisan are close to nature, but mostly to the type of surrounding the tribe is from. For instance, those that come from the forest are masters in camouflage and the bow. Those from the river are some of the best fisherman on the continent.

## Affiliation

Fey. The force behind the tribes cohesion is unknown. It might just be mutual interest. Or perhaps there might be someone or a group of someone pulling the strings?

## Naming Conventions

Native American, but with liberty as to the source tribe to reflect the fractured nature of the tribes themseves.

## Interactions

#### With A:

Historically staying on “their” side of the river, they have gotten brash as of late and will raid Markarskan cattle and dwelling located far from the city. The Markarskans will less frequently retaliate or undertake raids of their own, but these are unsupported by the ruling giants.

#### With L:

Although they don't nessesaril share a real border with the Circle, the death zone represents a constant threat to their northern lands. Heroic braves often put together adhoc groups of other warriors to battle the scourge.

Actual diplomatic interaction with the Circle is limited, although the Adisan will occasionally trade wood, ore and beasts of burden. Some more unscrupulous braves work as mercenaries or scouts for the Circle.

#### With P:

Although the mountains prohibit mass trade between the two peoples, the Adisan, especially the mountain tribes maintain good relations with their neighbors, and will trade for dried fish especially in harsh summers when the crops wilt.

## Cities

The majority of Adisan do not live in permanent cities and instead move around between seasonal hunting grounds.

#### Dulbovnin

If you thought this name didn't sound like a Adisan city, you would be right. Dulbovnin was either an outpost town taken through relentless raids or simply abandoned by the Markarskans, depending on who you believe.

The town is situated right on the edge of a canyon. Steep steps take one down to the red stone fracture, through which a mighty river flows. Often times rope bridges span the canyon at this point, but it is just as common for them to require a toll or be destroyed by the elements or angry towns people.

The town itself is a motley collection of mostly one to two story wooden houses. Most houses will have a basement used for living and a sub basement for storage. Some of the houses closer to the canyon edge have their own tunnels down to the river.

Dulbovnin is a chaotic place ruled by no one in particular. Law seems to be only enforced when killings happens and is an adhoc mob response.

*The Trees of Dulbovnin*

One of the most important features of Dulbovnin are its mighty trees which ring the town. It is not allowed to cut them down because they were planted with the express purpose of protecting the city from wind storms. Anyone who cuts down a tree must plant a thousand trees to replace it, and either pay a thousand gold or maintain these trees themselves for perpetuity. If they do no meet with this request, they are strung up on another of the trees until dead and all their possessions are used to pay the cost of replanting.

*Seat of Power*

Because the very existence of a centralized city is counter to the sensibilities of the Adisan, this is not in fact their capital. Instead, the tribes meet every month and a time picked in the previous meeting, but usually falling on natural days like solstices and harvest festivals. The actual process of discerning direction for the collection is an anarchic mash of yelling on all sides between the tribes. However, honor and respect for nature lore plays a large part in convincing course of action.

*Trade*

Dulbovnin exists solely for trade between the various tribes, since it is part of none of them. Therefore, a large amount of fish, crops, cattle, wood, and a small but valuable amount of finished goods and weapons crosses its storefronts.

Of special note is its large mercenary contingent. Merchants from many nations, even those far away know about Dulbovnin's prestige when it comes to these wild men. Mercenaries in this city are not usually part of any larger company and must be hired individually, usually as guards or scouts.

Some mercenaries are have no bounds and simply know the town as a good place to find work, but others have houses and lives in the lawless village that they return to when their contract is done.

*Races*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Genasi of all types | 50% |
| Humans (mostly farmers or mercenaries) | 20% |
| Aarakocra (some of the original inhabitants stayed, mostly ranchers and merchants) | 15% |
| Minotaurs | 10% |
| Other (Mercenaries) | 5% |

# C) The Everlasting Kingdom of Basilia

## Description

#### Early Years

In recent years, it is fair to say Basilia is now the second power on the continent, and by far the most active. The kingdom was born from three great city states who in eons past had safely been under giant hegemony. However, almost a hundred years ago, when the schism between the giants emerged, they gained defacto independence. They then engaged in almost a century of intense warfare where they bloodied the ground with dead between themselves. With some help from the dragonborn to the south, the leaders of the three cities signed into affect a peace agreement.

This agreement was not born of pragmatism, but of fear. The **G** had, shortly after the walls come down, engaged on a very militaristic and expansionist course of action, especially their southernmost city.

After a short but furious counter insurgency, again aided by the dragonborn and also by fellow cities D and E, managed to drive the northerners back to the river which marked a natural bottleneck in their expansion.

This situation lasted a few decades, but in the meantime, the elected king consolidated his power, declaring the south one nation. Not everyone in the cities was very happy about this, but because of the continuing threat of war, they viewed it as militarily expedient, at least for the time being. Most would regret their decision.

#### Recent War

Almost ten years ago peace was threatened once again. This time there was fear on both sides. The south had received a great deal of help from their dragonborn and very indirectly, dragon backed friends. Some of the giants in the north but especially their Goliath lieutenants suddenly felt quite worried about their state in local power.

Concerned that the weakening of the barriers had shifted the balance of power, and convinced that every moment they waited only increased the consolidation of the southern powerhouse, the north attacked.

Nor did they attack alone. For one of the first times in the history of Idrasia, there was close to a continent spanning war whose sides defined their current geopolitical status. One one side was the Heartfire Alliance, which included Basilia, D,E and nominally the dragonborn. They were backed financially by the Goldwater Assemblage, but they did not take place in the actual fighting. On the other was the Defense of Order comprising **G,** indirectly **M,** who violated the nominal neutrality of **J;** in addition, for the first time in recorded history, the ice paladins **T** cast off their own neutrality, and joined as well, mostly for reasons of preserving the status quo.

The attack was well planned but was ultimately a monumental failure. The first action was a first strike against the dragonborn in their citadel of cindernost through the use of Triton auxiliaries which attacked from the sea. The goal of this attack was to prevent their coming to the kingdom's aid.

The second attack came across the river which for years now had signified the uneasy border between the two kingdoms. In what would be recognized in hindsight as a disastrous military decision, this attack was split in two, one group attacking Crucible to the east, the other going southward, hoping to cut off Telmasus from the rest of the fighting and so directly engage the kingdom.

Unfortunately, due the efforts of the king and his group of well trained counselors, the north's plans were learned of partially in advance. Spies and saboteurs were slipped into the column heading east, who at the time of fighting, assassinated the head leader and later were able to bring down a landslide on the beleaguered forces.

The southern column didn't fare much better. Despite initial success, they were met at the river and the crossing was successfully contested. The help of the paladins was countered by a group of powerful mages from Crucible, and a sweeping Calvary charge snuck around through the swamps of Telmasus finished the fighting.

#### Outcomes

Two fate defining actions happened in addition to the victory. One was the near death of the elected king of Basilia. The second was the success of the death clerics and their agents. Both would have long reaching effects in the years to come.

Near death, the king was due to pass away, even in victory. However, his closest counselors had discovered a very powerful artifact from unknown origins (The Circle). Using it, they returned him back to life, but not as a human. He was now the Immortal Sovereign, a powerful undead.

The death clerics, seeing their winning hand, encouraged him to destroy the rest of the north. Even as he did so, they attempted to sink their agents into ever part of the fledgling bureaucracy.

However, the king would not be so easy a target. He did take a vast amount of northern land, and one of its cities (Sverograd, the most responsible for the war). However, he stopped well short of the capital, and did not besiege the monastery of the Ice Paladins as was expected. He met the defeated parties by himself and came to terms, much to the dismay of the death clerics. It is thought he feared that if he pressed to hard, the giants themselves would come to the aid of the northerners.

Furthermore, he announced that the gift of unlife would not be one solely for the king. With his announcement, he raised two recently killed ministers, the start of what would become a strange tradition. He also declared the bureaucracy a meritocracy, effectively sidelining the entire former political elite...

#### Current Day

As one could be expected, many of the parties who had once been allies of the kingdom were repulsed by this announcement. In particular, the dragonborn were particularly put off. They felt like the change was a hard turn towards neutrality in the dragon/giant conflict, and felt like the years of help they had given the kingdom had been in vain.

A cult like religion that worships the eternal king has grown up despite his efforts to squash it. Perhaps to got give them any political ammo, he has been seen only rarely outside his closest circles.

#### Ok, sure, history is a thing, but what about the actual description?

Fine, Gosh!

Basilia is a kingdom focused on rule of law. The treaty between the three cities was very important to the inhabitants and laid the foundation for modern culture. In that sense its pretty much a typical lawful good kingdom. There are guards, laws are enacted usually fairly.

Despite having a knowledge of machinery and an entrepreneurial drive, most commoners are still farmers. Getting a job in the bureaucracy is seen as a patriotic action, but one that is hard to achieve. Acheiving the rank nessesary to be bestowed the gift of immortality is only granted to the select few.

*Basilian Undead*

Ever sinc ethe king rose again, he has open the path to immortality for the select few who distinguish themselves in the Kingdom. The actual process is shrouded in secrecy. Necromancy is state-sanctioned only. Performing unlawful necromancy is similarly to forgery only much more severe.

Sentient undead not of the kingdom (The Circle) must carry special papers. Non Sentient undead are still looked down on but not illegal. They too must have papers carried by whoever controls them.

The undeath process is socially disruptive. Although some stay with their families, most leave in order to stay in government provided living spaces.

One last important note is that these beurocrats are not paper pushers. Think instead of investigators and inquisitors. They root out corruption, serve as emmesaries, devise military and economic plans.

There is a military wing of the undead as well. These are the Kingdom's greatest warriors and generals brought back from death.

*Basilian Undead: The Secret Stuff:*

Although the king and the first couple undead are tied to the Silver Horn, the King soon discovered that the horn in some sense is the only thing tying them to the world. Its tied to the Circle in some horrible ways and irrevocably evil. Fearful that the destruction of it would destroy the kingdom, he had the Death Clerics and a group of powerful sorcerors from Crucible and one master alchemist from the Khanate create a new method of undeath:

They made a spell similar to raise dead:

***Eternal Bond of Basilia***

*6th Level Necromancy (ritual)*

*Casting Time: 6 Months. Divided by two for every person contributing to the spell*

*Range: 66m*

*Components: A soul sphere\**

*Duration: Permanent*

*You return a dead humanoid to life. There is no restriciton on how long it has been dead, however it must be a willing target. You must have the body or the soul of the target. The soul can then be sent to any humanoid body, including non-organic ones(!) If the soul is sent to its original body, missing limbs are restored. This spell cleanses any remaining flesh from the body and can only create skeletons.*

*\*The casting of this spell requires a device not unlike a dragon sphere which actually houses the soul of the undead. Creating such a sphere requires 100,000 gold and a solid crystal sphere with no imperfections.*

*Because the soul is actually in the sphere, a fact which is not apparent to the target, destroying the body has little effect in the long term. The process can be repeated. Souls can freely move from sphere to sphere if they know how to (Only the creators are aware of this fact). Destroying the sphere kills those inside it and makes them impossible to re-ressurrect except individually via wish due to the experiemental nature of this spell (Although this efect is unknown to the creators, as it has never happened)*

At massive cost to the kingdom, the king had four of these spheres made, the first one being an actual modified dragonsphere. There is one in each of the major Basilian cities and one buried nearly a mile underneath the capitol in a solid iron room with no door. It is specifically warded against the Grey Mages.

### Ancias Lucenus I “The Eternal Soveriegn”

Born in a small mountain pass village, Ancias departed his home at a young age, joining the military of Olyntheos before the cities had pledged peace. During campaigns against the other cities, he showed his leadership and military brilliance, quickly rising through the ranks.

He had a good connection with the dragonborn, knowing someof them personally as friends. He has traveled to Cindernost several times.

After defeating a Triton expedition against Telmasus, he gained even more renown. He was also instrumental in sabotaguing the power of the old aristocracy, subtly disgracing them, or at times, killing them in duels. He has survived many, many assasination attempts mostly due to a small cadre of very talented advisors who grew up around him in his military years.

When the cities negotiated peace, he was the spokesman for Olyntheos and was instrumental in getting Parintium to agree. In a very unclear process, he somehow emerged as the elected king of the united cities, possibly due to subterfuge and possibly beauase of his military prowess.

After leading the South to victory, rising as undead and finishing the campaign, he has withdrawn somewhat from the public eye.

He controls the south with a fair if absolute rule.

*Secret Stuff:*

The raising process of the horn was neither pleasant nor without harm. He was deeply distrubed by the process. Although he still is Ancias, there was a distinct distancing after his ressurrection from even his closest allies. He would now be almost one hundred and ten. Secretly, the horn does not prevent the mental degeneration due to aging, only the physical (The Circle knew this).

The kingdom has no sucession plan and he himself has not chosen a successor. It is not clear the cities or the people would even support whoever he chose. Secretly, in truth, he hesitates because he doesn't believe anyone is worthy enough to take over for him. If he were forced to choose, he would choose one of the high ranking non-undead investigators in his beurocracy for political reasons.

As his condition worsens, he loses more and more of his political power to four sources: The military and the beurocracy (both undead and alive), the death clerics, and the old aristorcracy. These four groups, along with a small delegation from the dragonborn make up the ruling counsel which advises the king.

He was a powerful force for justice and good for so long, who would dare speak ill of him now?

## Affiliation

Formerly with the dragons. Now still anti-giant, but less so than prior. Think pragmatically neutralish.

## Naming Conventions

Byzantine.

## Interactions

There are few state level groups that Basilia *doesn't* have interactions with.

#### With H:

The dragonborn of Cindernost have a long history with the kingdom even from before it was a kingdom. They always viewed themselves as mentors and advisers to what they consider lesser races. They have in the past helped Basilia both economically, in providing smelting and mining techniques and in military affairs.

Now that the kingdom of Basilia is truly everlasting, the dragonborn feel like their investment in the humans was unrequited. They are on neutral terms now.

#### With D:

Telmasus's history is intertwined with Basilia. Racially and ethnically the inhabitants are the same. If not for the cloying swamps which the Temasians took refuse in during the giant occupation, they might be one whole today.

Telmasus sent forth an even larger contingent of men percentage wise than the kingdom in the last war, and were rewarded with everlasting safety, as they are now surrounded by the kingdom. However, the undeath and tendency towards rule of law is contrary to the more chaotic and libertarian sensibilities of the swamp people. They are on neutral terms now, but Telmasus is somewhat afraid of being forcibly integrated with the kingdom.

#### With E:

Crucible's beginning was also similar to Basilia's establishing their own city state. Like Telmasus, the artists and musicians of Crucible are fundamentally incompatible with the strict yet parental attitude of both the northerners and the kingdom.

Unlike Telmasus, Crucible as a whole very rarely acts as a whole, being a very anarchic place. Therefore, it has no formal embassies, but its mages, musicians and artists are well known in Basilian cities. There is much trade with the city especially in art and magical supplies.

#### With G:

For the first time in centuries, it looks like the Basilians and the Northerners see eye to eye, although many still are ashamed from their defeat. That being said, they understand that Basilia's advantage could have been pressed much stronger than they did.

The Goliaths are somewhere between passively hostile and neutral now towards the kingdom.

#### With F:

The deep shelf supported the Defense of Order during the war, but when the giants failed, the deep ones found themselves again without allies in the area. Rather than reach out to the newly strengthened kingdom, the Tritons seem to be avoiding it at all cost.

#### With J:

The war was a very profitable venture for the Goldwater Assembly; many merchant families made fortunes off of loans and financing. They remain very good friends of the Basilians. Although its likely that most individuals in the Assembly are wary of the Kingdom's new turn towards undeath, they know an opportunity when they see one. For once, North-South trade can continue relatively uninhibited.

#### With S:

The Basalian's have never traded much with the firbolg, but recenlty conflict has broken out over the Basilian's use of some older mountain pass forests for fuel in their industry.

#### With L:

There is no official interaction with the Circle, but not even the king can silence critics pointing out that the artifact the king used was made by the Circle. The king *did* in fact meet with one of the highest Princes after his undeath, but relations soured quickly after that. The Circle is decidedly mercenary, much more so than the law abiding Kingdom.

It is not known, but perhaps suspected that the death clerics are being funded by the Circle. It seems that the Circle has decided that there is not enough room for two immortal nations in Idrasia.

## Cities

#### Parintium

Located at the mouth of a river, Parintum even in its past was a major trading destination. Constructed from grey granite, it has a large curtain wall and barracks. Its port is the largest in the southwest. In recent years it is also the heart of Basilia's new industrial center. Weapons and armor are produced here for the whole kingdom. Its people are practical, down to earth, and dubious of religion and superstition.

Seeking to retain their lucritive trade position, they are currently building an airship center as well.

*Seat of Power*

The city is controled by the King. Local rule is decided by bureocratic rank. There is a sort of mayor who is actually a high ranking federal appointment. Actual representation is nonexistant, but concerns are dealt with by the government (mostly benevolent absolute monarcy and all)

*Trade*

Grain and crops come from upstream as well as ore from the capitol and the hills surrounding it. Fish and other seafood from the tritons. Art comes in, indirectly from the Goldwater Assembly and Crucible. More interestingly, alchemical and mage supplies which are hard to get in the kingdom, come in from here all the way from the Khanate.

*Races*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Humans | 90% |
| Dwarves (metalworking experts) | 5% |
| Minotaur (dockworkers and farmers) | 2% |
| Misc. other races | 2% |
| Undead Margraves (human) | 1% |

#### Idatrea

A medium height wooden wall surrounds only half of this sprawling city. It is a hub for grain and crops. Its buildings are likewise well made from wood and can range all the way to four floors. At its heart is a square for its vaunted agriculture market.

Idatrea's legacy is one of privlidge. The lands surrounding it were and are very fertile. Most of the old aristocracy live here, mostly on overly-large vinyards.

*Races*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Human | 95% |
| Earth Genasi (Farmers) | 5% |
| Undead Margraves (human) | <1% |

#### Olyntheos (The shining city)

The towering capital of the South. Once threatened by war, it is now free to build towards the heavens. Massive white stone buildings reach 3-6 stories tall. It is surrounded by a perfectly circle two story high stone wall.

Its roads are all completely paved. There is a fee to simply enter the city to satisfy the upkeep of all of it.

Theivery is especially looked down upon in this city: theives guild beware. Many are in its large underground jail.

Olyntheos is a city of art and culture as well as a economic powerhouse. It is the home of the beurocracy and many trade houses. The king lives here in a only slightly ostentatious keep on the outskirts of town.

*The sanctum of Basilia*

At the center of the city is a large half dome that takes up nearly a whole city block. At its top is a nearly eight story white marble spire which is used as a lookout post, a time keeping device (it serves as a massive sundial) and a place for observing the stars.

The building itself is the house of the beurocracy. The inner areas are for hearing the voices (or most likley, the complaints) of the citizenry.

Its shape is a architectural wonder, but unknwon to most people, it was built like this for magical reasons. The frescos and stained class built into its sides also are lines with many protection spells. This is the safest bulding besides Cindernost, and the giant strongholds, in the whole continent.

Below the floors are offfices. Below these are living areas for both dead and undead officials. Below these are restricted vaults and private meeting areas. Somewhere on this level the Death Clerics have their center of worship. Below even these are massive food and supply stores extending almost three stories downward. Below these are secret military bunkers. And finally, almost a mile down is a secret iron lined room with no entrace which stores the fourth soulsphere.

*Trade*

There is little that doesn't pass through its walls. You can bscially find anything here. Stone working is common. Unlike the other cities it is even possible to find religious and magical artifacts here, either found or created. The Grey Mages have a local headquarters here which sometimes teaches pupils.

*Races*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Humans | 80% |
| Aarakocra | 5% |
| Dragonborn | 5% |
| Misc races | 5% |
| Undead Margraves (Misc Races) | 5% |

#### Sverograd

Tall shattered guard spires lie empty above a thick ruined stone wall. Inside lies a medium sized city with a small shallow port.

From its inception a millitary city, they fought the initial giant invasion unlike the other cities and were completely destroyed. Undeterred, they greatly admired the Giant and Goliath martial prowess and became their closest human allies. Following their recent defeat in the war, they are starting to understand that the balance of power mgith have shifted in the area.

Sverograd is a city still under Basilian military rule. There is a cerfew in effect. Guards occasionally go missing. The undead investigators are especially active here and sometimes are forced to resort to harsh methods to quiet the rebellious populace.

At the same time, the city itself is split between those that think they should now side with the South, versus those who remain misguidedly faithful to the giants.

Both men and women are taught martial arms from a young age, but little else. Mages are very uncommon.

*Trade*

They have their own weapons supply chain from the hills surrounding the city, but it is nowhere at the scale of the Parintium. That being said, the quality is better, and if there were a master armorer or swordsmith, he would be here.

Races

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Human (Native) | 50% |
| Minotaur | 20% |
| Human (Southern Occupation) | 20% |
| Goliath | 9% |
| Undead Margraves (human) | 1% |

# D) The bog men of Telmasus

## Description

When the giants first exerted hegemony over Idrasia, some fought, some holed themselves up in fortresses. The peaceful rivermen hid in the thick marshes that grew near the coast. Safe from attack for the time being, the built their town while dealing with occassional giant attacks, internal strife and a constant battle with nature that came from living in a swamp.

The bog men are feircely independent, good hunters, trackers and trappers. All of them can swim and are knowledgeable in medicinal plants. They tend to use spears in combat with wooden sheilds, bound with hide. Metal is scarse and good weapons and armor prized in the bogs, especially ones ensorcelled to be rust resistant and several such items are owned by heads of households.

## Affiliation

Dragons.

## Naming Conventions

Also Byzantine.

## Interactions

#### With E:

Crucible is most similar in temperment to Telmasus along the west coast. However, Telmasus's constant struggle for survival they tend to be much more pragmatic. They focus on martial skills and the application of knowledge rather than art or performance.

When sorcerors from Crucible visit, it is usually for arcane supplies. Performers visit once or twice a year and it is always a festive occasion and a welcome break from the slog of everyday life.

#### With F:

The Tritons of the deeps shelf have in the past attempted to conquer the bogs of Telmasus, and the white bones of their warriors that one can still find in the muck of the swamps attests to their failure. There is quite a big of animostiy towards the tritons. Recently, Telmasian fisherman and tritons have come into conflict over fishing rights off the coast.

#### With H:

There didn't used to be much of a connection between the dragonborn and the Telmasians, but with recent developments in Basilia, the dragonborn have turned their attentions to the bog men. Some of it may be recognition of simmilar chaotic spirit. Other of it may be mutual abhorence for the undead direction that the kingdom has taken.

These discussions are still in their infancy, but may yeild something greater in time.

#### With K:

The khanate in recent years has expressed interest in Telmasus because of its knowledge of local plants. A small trade has grown up providing them with crushed petals, extracts and animal parts found in the bogs. Representatives from the Khanate are sometimes seen trying to get infromation from the medicine men and women with varying levels of success.

## Cities

#### Telmasus

The bog men have only one true city, Telmasus. It is a sprawling disorganized affair of rope bridges and planks extending over the ever prescent muck of the swamp. There are little laws, and the theives guild has found this place a great location for recruitment and as a base of operations, its relative seclusion being its only downside.

*Seat of Power*

Never one consolidated power, the men of Telmasus bicker among themselves, usually along family or racial lines. They tend to come to decisions fairly quickly for items of defense, but other things like intra family marrige, fishing rights, forestation and hunting allocations are a thornier issue.

Its a representative democracy, with weight given to the prestige of each individual family.

*Trade*

The city itself is located somewhat close to the shore, but the very shallow water prohibits any real sea trade. Larger ships from Basilia and the Goldwater Assembly have to dock offshore and transfer things to and from the city through smaller boats.

Trade includes animal skins, medicinal herbs, extracts and the prized deadwood, found only in the deepest mires, which has necromatic attributes needed for many spells.

Coming into the city comes grain, finished goods, luxuries, and metal items. A small amount of art is bought by the leading heads of house.

*Races*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Humans | 70% |
| Swamp Tritons | 20% |
| Swamp Minotaur | 10% |

*Swamp Tritons and Minotaur*

These somewhat distinct subraces have taken to identifying themselves alongside the bog-men. No one is sure when the division has happened, but the effects of hundreds of years of isolation are visible. The swamp tritons are brown green in color and hardier, their skin having bark like coverings on their forearms, shoulders and calves, at the cost of much reduced lifespan. They are also found out of the water more frequently.

The swamp minotaur have special oiled fur which stays waterproof. They can however, catch a fungus which attaches to their fur in green clumps, and causes it to fall out, leaving the hapless individual unable to enter the water.

These subraces, especially the tritons reject their ancestral heritage. In the past the tritons have fought against their deepwater relatives and in fact fights between the two nations states are usually started because of fishing conflicts.

Ponder: if it makes sense, the swamp tritons can be replaced/reskinned by lizzardfolk and the minotaur as reskinned Hobgoblins.

# E) The Crucible of Innovation

## Description

Usually just called Crucible, this peaceful fishing village on the side of a lake gained its identity following the arrival of strange sickness which broke out among the populace. It killed almost fifty percent of the inhabitants, but those remaining displayed much higher propensity for art, culture and magic. This gift comes at an additional cost though, its inhabitants, especially its brightest and most outspoken have a tendency to go completely insane.

Crucible extends on wooden stilts out on the cold but serene waters of a melt-water fed lake. The houses are mostly only one or two stories, with only the large gathering buildings being much higher than that.

Each person in crucible is responsible for himself. Small children cannot be found in crucible; those who were born in the city either do not speak of their childhood or cannot remember it. This includes building or finding shelter, finding and gathering food and so forth.

*Seat of Power*

The city is complete anarchy. It is not uncommon to simply have random people burst into uninvited into rooms. Despite this lack of laws, there seem to be very few crimes except those of madness, and in some bizarre situations, art. The thieves guild has obviously tried to send agents here. All of them have either abandoned their missions for simple lives of fishermen or painters, or for the more driven, gone completely mad.

The percentage of mages is much higher in crucible than anywhere else on the continent. Explosions happen frequently as experiments go awry.

*Secret Stuff*

Crucible is, as one might expect, the result of a very interesting and powerful fey deal gone horribly wrong (or right, depending on how you think about it). The villagers, terrified of encroaching giant armies called on a mysterious presence known to live in the lake (The Pale Lady).

This enigmatic entity granted their request by making them known as a city of madmen and crazed artists, hardly the cell of a resistance group worth attacking. She also drowned close to a thousand elite giant infantry when they tried crossing the lake in a surprise attack.

She, when she graces this plane of existence, lives among her citizens, or in a small but bizarrely fashioned cave on the north shore of the lake. The entrance is small and the clear water shows the bones of the men she has dealt with in the past.

She thrives off of creation, and desires nothing more in the world than to see new and interesting things created. Sometimes she forces a little too hard and people go insane.

Because of her unique goal, she is basically anti-giant, but only since their domination is dull and horrid, which reduce the innovation of their subjects.

*Call of the Fey*

You can visit crucible, but once you live there, you must stay forever. This unfortunate sideeffect of the pact made by the original inhabitants has to do with its wording. They defined themselves, their side in the pact as people who lived in the city. The pact is passed on by default then, anyone who lives in the city falls under its power.

Even visitors describe leaving it is difficult and always express some desire to return. Those that manage to do so usually never return to their homelands.

*Temposanire*

The only time the members of crucible are known to work together is in times of war or intense creation called Temposanire. These are actions directly instigated by the Fey herself. All members of crucible are called back during a Temposanire. All foreigners or visitors are all but forced to leave. Those that stay might be used as material for the ceremony of innovation.

These boughts of insanity can literally be anything, from burning down the town in crazed madness, to the group creation of a massively powerful artifact, or simple ritual murder. Regardless of the action, the people forget what happened after the event and clean up whatever materials, destruction or blood they need to and go on with what they were doing.

*The Faceless Artist*

Sometimes insanity can go too far. One particularly driven and motivated mage who was trained as an artist from birth figured out about the Pale Lady. Rather than destroy him, she let him make a separate deal with her. The details are not known, but he gained the ability to travel through art. When two songs are played in any city in the continent, or similar sculptures or paintings are made, he can move between them.

Of course, such an ability to consciously understand this distortion drove him completely mad. Desperate to please his new master, he engaged and still engages in a horrid spree of art inspired murder, with bodies integrated into rugs, frozen withing ice sculptures and so forth. He is wanted in every lawful city and even some unlawful ones. No one has quite put two and two together yet however.

## Affiliation

Fey.

## Naming Conventions

None.

## Interactions

#### With K:

The alchemists of the Khanate are very interested in the sorcery of the people of crucible; so much so that they have enlisted the help of the grey mages (and a great deal of coin) in creating a stable two way portal in a cave (not by the shore, in the mountain to the north) to an underground chamber in the High Alchemists yurt.

This allows for a great deal of collaboration between the two parties. However, have they unknowingly extended the hand of the Pale Lady? Why did all of the mages go mad after opening the portal? Why have the alchemists called for more and more bizarre ingredients in their potions and elixirs?

#### With I:

The sorcery of the people of crucible has not escaped the notice of the counsel of mages. After several teams were sent to determine the cause, and after most of the party had either gone mad, missing or lost their magical ability, they ceased their efforts.

#### With L:

The Members of the circle are not stupid. Unlike the Grey mages they retain their ancient magics. Unlike the giants, they care about the state of the world outside their own domain. They are fully aware of crucible's state, and try sometimes to either learn from it, or capture and dissect members to try to understand the Fey.

Because they are already graced with their own curse of insanity, they are mostly immune to the Fey's curse.

#### All over the Continent:

Members of Crucible can be found all over the continent, usually in three main types as seasonal performers, who operate circuses and plays, as wandering or mercantile sorcerers and enchanters, or as recluse researchers.

*Secret Stuff*

In all cases, they all retain their identity as members of crucible through some object which ties them to the city. For some it is simply nostalgia which they think brings them back. For the more powerful, the object has deeply disturbing arcane runes which forcibly drag the person back.

*Races*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Humans | 50% |
| Misc | 50% |

The Pale Lady seems to particularly like humans, but ensnares anyone she can. Crucible is then the most diverse city on the continent, or at least unfortunately tied with the slave pits of the Circle.

# F) The Deep Shelf

## Description

The Tritons have their own history, some they insist dates to before the giants and dragons even existed, back to when the world was formless and shapeless. Regardless, the tritons were once a united peoples. Some forgotten catclysm or war forced them apart. Some of them settled on the bottom of the ocean at incredible depths where light doesn't even shine.

These tritons are more like Sahuagin, twisted by the dark pressure and alien depths.

## Affiliation

Giant. The giants of old did them some service, perhaps separating them from their enemies by accident when they created the walls that separated the continents. Since then the Tritons have been loyal followers.

## Naming Conventions

Hebrew

## Cities

#### The Undercity of Seph

Down further than than any other mortal could survive, there is a thriving city in the darkness. Covered with strange and bio illuminated skins of skinned fish, the glowing city is located in a deep chasm. The buildings themselves are more like cave like formations carved in the rock.

Because of its unique position, few non-tritons have ever seen it, although some know it by name in passing. Mages are the only individuals who can dare descend to its depths, and perhaps one or two people attempt it a year. The survivors are tight lipped about the specifics, but from what they will tell, the Tritons are actually quite hospitable to foreigners who manage to reach their city.

*Seat of Power*

Who knows...

*Trade*

The tritons are obviously master fishermen, and can accomplish in a day what it takes a full ship a week to do. They trade with land walkers occasionally, but often come to conflict over fishing rights.

They have a small but dedicated crafting group which combines coral, undersea volcanic silicia from vents and bone to create a variety of interesting and horrifyingly organic pieces of art. For the tritons, these pieces blur the line between religious, arcane and aesthetic.

*Races*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Tritons | 80% |
| Deep Tritons (sightless elite) | 20% |

*Deep Tritons*

Down this deep, eyesight is useless and the tritons who live down here permanently are sightless. Instead they “see” through gradients of pressure in the water around them (similar to tremor-sense)

In the very rare cases these sightless creature venture to the surface, for instance in times of war, large trade deals or negotiations, they wear blindfolds of black silk with arcane rune eyes of seeing on them.

# G) The Despotism of Arkastroza

## Description

Following the schism between Giants, the Arkastrozans have helped the lesser races who still look to them for guidance. This is no easy task. The goliaths are warlike and seemingly oblivious of social niciety, the humans are greedy and at the same time constantly fearful, the plainsmen who sided with them are constantly at odds with their Markarskan brethren to the east.

Through this all, the giants have to only exert their own power to what they consider to be a respectful degree. To the cloud rulers of Arkastroza, the world is a thing to structure, the lesser races are chaotic desperate flashes of life that must be aligned with the greater structure of the ordered universe.

The war for the Arkastrozans was a horrible affair, a decision that the regret completely. In all situations, they prefer negotiations to fighting, the former being much more productive and orderly. The despair for the falling of the walls, and see their collapse as an almost personal failure, even though fractured and reduced they no longer had the power to keep them up.

They consider themselves to be the offshoot most aligned with the goals of their forefathers who fought the dragons in an attempt to bring order to the world. They regard the isolationist and cruel Markarskans as at best misguided, and at worst, treasonous, although they would never admit so in person.

So they push and pull, usually in the shadows if they can help it, attempting to still shape the increasingly chaotic world around them in what more and more seems like a futile attempt to realize their vision of an ordered world.

*Noskov Anatol Kazimir: The Solemn Defender*

The giants of Arkastroza have been ruled over for centuries by the same individual, Kazimir. Kazimir is a now subdued cloud giant, who at one time, through sheer personal charisma, force of will, and an almost fanatical devotion to the order of creation, gained the trust of the giants on the continent.

Yet as he became older, and as he saw the effects that giant subjugation was having on the populace, he spoke out against the ruling storm giants. For this, he was named traitor. Enraged, he met his accuser, the leader of the storm giants of Markarska in one on one combat.

During this almost day long fight between the two combatants, Kazimir actually managed to defeat and kill his superior. The cloud giants who had sided with him were set to escalate the action into a full on coup against the Ordning, but Kazimir forbade it. Ashamed and regretful of his actions, seeing that he succeeded in only fracturing the giants further, he and his splinter retreated to their fortress on Mount Azar where they were later joined by like minded giants of all types.

He has a personal friendship with the leader of the ice paladins.

Now centuries old, he looks out over a world increasingly slipping out of his grasp. He finds it harder to overturn the more forceful views of his youngers, especially the storm giants, who argue (never to his face) that they supersede him and the goliaths.

*The War*

No where is this more obvious than the recent war, which was instigated through goliath, human and lower ranking giant efforts, especially those of the warlike city Sverograd. Against his better judgement Kazimir allowed giant backing.

## Affiliation

Themselves.

## Naming Conventions

Russian and eastern european

## Cities

#### Orerbash

*Description*

Mt. Azar is an extinct volcano that was once, in time immemorial, a dragon's lair. On its slopes there are two cities. The city of the lesser races is Orerbash. It has large stone walls, constructed by the goliaths, but lacks the splendor of Palinteos. It is constructed of a grey blue stone which seems to never be quite exposed to the sun, and is cold even on warm days.

The buildings of the city are massive slab buildings mined out of the mountain side. Behind and around the city are mines that lead deeper into the mountain and its foot hills.

*Seat of Power*

The Goliaths take as leader only the strongest, most charismatic and most intellegent of themselves. Typically, this results in a good candidate, however, the last leader proved to be a bit too honor-seeking for his own good.

It is common for the Goliaths to take counsel with the Giants even for domestic matters. They view themselves as allies in a common goal.

*Trade*

Orerbash's trade is in mining. Mostly its mines are stone mines, and it exports gems, cut slabs and stone trinkets. Although the Goliaths revel in conflict, their weapons tend to be crude. After all, it is the man wielding the weapon that matters, not the weapon itself.

*Races*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Goliaths | 55% |
| Minotaur | 20% |
| Humans (Mostly farmers, but some soliders) | 20% |
| Lesser Giants | 4% |
| Earth Genasi | 1% |

### The Unstopable Citadel of Vayelsk

*Description*

A holdover from the war against the dragons, Vayelsk is a solid monolith ripped from some god-forsaken crag and set into motion through a forgotten mixture of arcane and mechanical means. Because of its experimental movement system and massive shielding it remains afloat, even after the Windwalker plunged the rest of them to the ground.

Being literally carved from a single stone, Vayelsk is the smallest of the floating giant holds being only the size of a city block. It was never meant to be a city, and has little actual living space in it.

However, what it lacks in facilities and niceties it makes up in firepower. Vayelsk was constructed to explicitly take punishing amounts of magical damage, and return the favor. It is responsible for the destruction of Mt. Azar and several other dragon strongholds. Only Cindernost could stand before its might.

In a more concrete sense, its defense systems include many mundane siege weapons but also turrets of chain lightening and several batteries of disintegration. The most powerful of its weapons though is a hideous artifact made at the height of the war. It is essentially a disintegration beam, but of unique creation which enables it a range of miles and the ability to blast holes through magic enhanced rock with ease.

It sits right now floating above Mt. Azar, a reminder of the leniency that the Arkastroza giants afford the world.

*Seat of Power*

Only the highest circle of giants (in both Arkastroza and Markarska) have even an inkling of how to operate the fortress, and Kazimir makes sure that its ignition system key (a physical object) stays on his person at all times. He does not mean to use the fortress unless forced to.

*Races*

Although no one lives in the fortress full time, a contingency of storm and cloud giants remain on alert inside it at all times.

#### Arkastroza

*Description*

High of the face of Mt. Azar lies Arkastroza, city of the clouds. Lightening storms and snow storms are common here. The giants of Arkastroza are typically a somber lot as if the weather reflects their mood or perhaps vice versa.

The city is made from simple stone. There is not much in the way of decoration. What makes Arkastroza remarkable is the attention to its architecture. Every brick is press fit perfectly in line with one another. None of the buildings or even the streets have cracks or imperfections. Stone lies from floor to ceiling. It is a cold yet ordered place, indicative of the Arkastrozan giant's vision for the world.

At its center lies a fountain which spews ice cold water, even when the weather is below freezing.

The city has no walls, nor even any defenses besides the giants who live in it and the sheer cliffs of Mt. Azar itself.

If the giants of Markarska are cruel wizards, experimenting in their twisted labs, the giants of Arkastroza are grave artificers and smiths. The Markarskans can claim to be able to make many wondrous items, unparalleled on the continent, but the Arkastrozans make the best weapons and armor.

*Seat of Power*

Kazimir rules the giants by himself. Although he often counsels with the higher giants, and particular annoying collections of vocal lower rank ones, he is in full control of the Arkastrozans at all times.

*Races*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Cloud Giants | 50% |
| Fog Giants | 20% |
| Stone Giants | 15% |
| Storm Giants | 10% |
| Chosen Individuals (Misc lesser races) | 5% |

*Chosen Individuals*

The giants of Arkastroza honor those who do especially well in their service or impress them in feats of intelligence or battle. This can even extend to enemies, provided that the person is at least honorable and not directly affiliated with the dragons.

It is not rare to see dwarven artificers in the forges of Arkastroza, nor heavily armored Minotaur sparing with stone giants. Ice paladins are common visitors and some stay, meditating on the frigid crags of the moutain.

These lesser races are assumed to stay to themselves mostly (and not to make too much of a nuisance). The ability to visit the city is an honor. The ability to live there is even higher still.

# The Invincible Fortress of Cindernost

## Description

When the dragons of Idrasia realized that they were destined to lose the war with the giants, they collected at Mt. Azar and Hoarfell Peak. There there built two massive fortresses. Cindernost was the greater of the two by far. When the lair at Mt. Azar fell to Vayelsk's weapons, cindernost was next in line. Fortunately, the giants decided to regroup before pressing on. This allowed the dragons and their allies the time to prepare.

They opened the earth beneath the formerly frigid Hoarfell Peak and fire filled the sky for days. From this heart stone they shaped Cindernost, interleaving the folds of cooling lava with the strongest runes they could create.

The result was fearsome and effective. Three times the giants fired the full power of Vayelsk and attacked in full onto Cindernost's walls, and three times, the incredible beam was withstood by the defenses, resulting in the worst casualties of the war which prompted the giant's acceptance of peace soon afterward.

Visually, what is left of Hoarfell peak rises clouded in a permentnt cloud of soot and noxious gasses from the earth's center. The volcano remains active, even after decades of peace and beneath the heavy clouds of darkness that endlessly obscure the mountain, it is possible to see streaks of flaring red, a reminder that the legacy of the dragons is far from gone.

The fortress is built into the top third of the mountain, half formed from the living earth in concentric circles of organic looking stone. The only part of the fortress visible form the outside are the magically reinforced walls. However inside is a massive warren of underground tunnels, obviously large enough to sustain a large dragon population.

Beneath the fortress is one entrance to the underground.

*Hoarfell Peak and surroundings*

The still active volcano frequently spews massive tides of burning lava down its slopes, much to the great ire of the Firbolg in the pass to the east and even to their once allies, the Basilians. Miles of country side surrounding the peak are completely barren, a treeless animal-less wasteland. What the dragons created was truly a deathly place, and it remains the second most inhospitable place on Idrasia after the death zone.

*Current Cindernost*

Although the dragons have long retreated into the twisting warrens of the underdark, their spawn, the dragonborn continue their legacy in Cindernost. Cindernost for a time was the only place on Idrasia besides the circle to remain unconquered. Because of this legacy, it has attracted a very diverse collection of refugees from the war who have since put down roots in the dark chambers of the fortress alongside the dragonborn.

## Affiliation

The dragons.

## Naming Conventions

Viking. The word cindernost and its suffix -nost are a Russian construction, but hell, the Russians were originally Norsemen (Kievan Rus) so I'll let it slide because I think it sounds cool.

## Cities

#### Cindernost and nearby tunnels

*Seat of Power*

When the dragons left, they did so hurriedly. With the time they had, they sealed the worst of their weapons in inaccessible places in the stone of the fortress, and gave knowledge of some of the weaker weapons and arts to the dragonborn.

In addition to weapons, they gave the dragonborn laws and a philosophical codex which guides their decisions to this day.

The dragonborn rule themselves via a counsel, usually headed by the oldest and wisest member of the clan.

However, the dragonborn also have to contend with the other races living in the fortress. To this end, every week there is a large gathering of all the races in one of the larger underground chambers where the representatives discuss, and sometimes argue for hours, about the affairs of Cindernost and the world.

In short, its a representative democracy, but with each representative chosen by the race's own methods. Amid the larger gathering, weight is given to each vote by population, with the dragons holding a veto over all actions.

*Trade*

One of the most valuable goods that the dragonborn have is their knowledge given to them by the dragons. It is common to see at least one dragonborn adviser even in not strictly dragon aligned nations.

Set in a mountain, Cindernost produces the second best weapons and armor next to Arkastroza but relatively little of it gets outside the fortress and even less is used. The armor produced in Cindernost is instantly recognizable because of its matte black finish. Those who would rather remain more politically neutral are unable to use it.

The dragonborn maintain a trade with the other denizens of the underdark, but only they know what trade that entails.

*Races*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Dragonborn | 30% |
| Dwarves | 20% |
| Kobolds | 20% |
| Earth Genasi | 10% |
| Fire Genasi | 10% |
| Minotaur | 5% |
| Human | 5% |

The humans of cindernost are dark skinned, with black hair and pale red eyes. They have trouble seeing in bright sunlight, a result of living underground, but are slightly more resistant to heat, and can see better in the dark. The other humans of the continent are wary of them because of their strange appearance.