

Designer Demesnes



by Mark A. Hart

*illustrated by
Stephen Daniele*

You don't need the *PLAYER'S OPTION®: Skills & Powers* rules to use this article, but anyone who has used them to create a player character knows the flexibility and strength of the character-point system. *Skills & Powers* rules let players design the heroes they want to play by providing dozens of choices while maintaining game balance. Because the system is so effective and versatile, adapting it for other elements in a campaign, such as creating kingdoms, makes perfect sense.



The following set of rules applies the *Skills & Powers* system to the design of fantasy kingdoms with "kingdom points" (KPs). With them, you can create a kingdom from the ground up, giving each nation a unique cultural and social atmosphere.

These rules are similar to those in the *Skills & Powers* book. A character gains points based on race and class, and these points are used to purchase skills, special benefits, and powers. For building kingdoms, each domain starts with a pool of points based on its overall size and age. From this pool, you purchase special benefits for the kingdom and choose disadvantages to gain more KPs.

Why use points at all? Why not simply pick and choose benefits for a kingdom and not worry about the bookkeeping? If you feel comfortable building a kingdom without using points, feel free. The point system, however, helps maintain campaign balance and encourages creativity in design.

As you choose benefits and disadvantages, you'll begin to see connections and relationships between the choices. For example, imagine a kingdom infested with monsters. Does the kingdom require a large army to combat the problem? Are the monsters part of a curse? Do nearby nations feel they need to put an end to the monster problem? Every question you answer will further develop the kingdom. Having a budget of points helps you focus on the most important elements of the kingdom, and that focus makes for a more fascinating, cogent world.

Ultimately, the point system is only a set of guidelines, a starting point for your imagination. It should not impede or hamper your creativity. If, during the process, the kingdom runs out of points but absolutely must have a particular special benefit, you should go ahead and fudge the points, but only if there is a creative reason for doing so. Once you have an understanding of how the system works, you can alter it to suit the campaign's needs. You can change the point values and add or alter new themes, benefits, and disadvantages as best suits your own AD&D® game campaign.

Step 1: Choose a Kingdom Type

The first part of the kingdom creation process requires that you determine a basic archetype for the nation. Just as a player generating a character starts out with a basic idea of what type of hero he or she wants to play, you should start with a core concept when designing a kingdom. The type provides an overall impression of what the realm is like.

When choosing a kingdom's type, the classic "good vs. evil" conflict is one of the best places to start. Is the kingdom on the side of good? Does the kingdom follow the forces of evil? Does the kingdom fall between these extremes? The answer might suggest a few types and eliminate others. Sometimes the name of the country suggests a good or evil kingdom—a name like "The Shire" is perfect for a quiet, pastoral land, while "Mordor" suggests a foreboding land of evil.

You should also consider what types of kingdoms the world needs. Each kingdom should fill a special role, whether it be a cultural, social, or plot niche. Consider a party of adventurers; it requires a mix of Warriors, Wizards,

Rogues, and Priests to function effectively. A campaign world with too many of one type of kingdom and not enough of another suffers the same problems.

Below is a list of kingdom archetypes, but you should feel free to create more. If a kingdom requires two types to describe it, combine them. If you want three (or more) types for the same kingdom, you should narrow the focus to avoid having a kingdom whose definition is too nebulous. Choose one or two types that are most prevalent in the kingdom and drop the others.

Ancient Kingdom

This is a nation that has existed for tens of centuries. At one time it was a great empire, spanning large portions of the continent. Its armies and navies ruled vast regions, and the kingdom was once a mighty power in the land. Over time, the empire waned and shrank. It granted freedom to some vassal states, while others earned independence through rebellion. By now, the empire has stabilized, holding steady and not fading further into obscurity. The influence of this empire can still be felt in the

languages, cultures, and religions of many other nations; it can explain why the Common tongue is so prevalent and why the same pantheon of deities is so widespread. Such a nation is well known for its once great status, and ancient books mention this empire as the center of the known world. Most of the empire's citizens care nothing for conquest and are content with the way things are. This attitude is what separates the ancient nation type from the "decadent empire" (below). Natives of an ancient kingdom know the days of empire are gone and accept that fact. Every few generations, however, a few ambitious leaders long for the "good old days" of glory, and the nation enters a brief stage of conquest and expansion. This stage usually burns itself out after a few years of pointless warfare, starting over again when the next generation of hotheads decides to reclaim its "lost legacy." The nation of Mulhorand in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting exemplifies the ancient kingdom.

Barbaric/Savage Lands

This is more a region than a unified nation. The land is home to many barbaric tribes that compete against one another without benefit of a united ruling government. The barbarians might be farmers, hunters, or raiders. More technologically advanced kingdoms consider the people of this land inferior, and these same kingdoms might have hopes of "civilizing" the barbarians as citizens or slaves. The tribes sometimes cooperate to raid surrounding lands, but such cooperation is rare and short-lived. Every few generations, a powerful leader comes along and unites the clans, leading them in great hordes against other kingdoms. In Earth's history, the Norsemen, the Gauls, and the Mongols were all considered barbaric by other kingdoms. In fantasy literature, the Aiel from Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series are barbarians, as are the nomadic tribes of the *Icewind Dale* trilogy. In the GREYHAWK® setting, there are the Frost Barbarians, the Ice Barbarians, and the Snow Barbarians, among others.

Borderlands

A borderland region is not a kingdom in its own right. More correctly, it is a lawless area, a "no man's land" between kingdoms. It serves both as a buffer zone between other nations and as a

dumping ground for criminals, the persecuted, and the banished. Small villages, towns, and minor keeps pepper the region, each with its own ruler and set of laws. Large bands of brigands roam the countryside, preying on anyone they wish. In these wild, ruthless lands, strength is the only true law. Neighboring kingdoms have attempted to conquer this region, but the cost has always far outweighed the meager benefits. The people of the borderlands are stubborn, uncooperative, and too fiercely independent to make good subjects. Borderlands are popular places for adventurers, as there is never a shortage of things to do. The Wild Coast in the GREYHAWK setting and the Dragon Coast in the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting are examples of borderland regions.

Chivalric Kingdom

This is a realm of knights, feudal lords, castles and pageantry. The kingdom is in its heyday of power and influence, expanding its holdings where possible. Despite its imperfections, it is a bastion of good. Other kingdoms look up to this kingdom for guidance, leadership, and protection. A chivalric nation is likely to be in direct conflict with villainous nations (see below); if a truly corrupt or evil kingdom exists, you should have at least one chivalric kingdom to oppose it. A chivalric nation is an excellent place for Paladins and Cavaliers to learn their craft, and it might be famous for holy orders of crusaders, knights templar, and seekers. Examples include France or England of the 13th and 14th centuries, Gondor from Middle-earth, the Kingdom of the Isles of Midkemia from Raymond E. Feist's Riftwar series, Furyondy from the GREYHAWK setting, or Cormyr of the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting.

Conquered Nation

Fantasy kingdoms are constantly attacked, invaded, betrayed, and ruined from within and without, so it is not surprising that some eventually fall or surrender. An outside force has conquered this kingdom. Enemy soldiers occupy the kingdom, and foreign nobles control the government. The conquerors might be benign and civilized people who hope to rule wisely, or they might be ruthless scum intent on genocide. Regardless of their disposition, the native population bitterly resents the

invaders. A conquered nation is often the site of rebellions, civil war, partisans, and pockets of lawlessness. Some of its natives, however, support or collaborate with the invaders, and they might have been instrumental in the kingdom's downfall. These traitors might believe they are doing the right thing for their country, or they might simply be out for personal wealth and power. In the GREYHAWK® setting, the Shield Lands were conquered by Iuz, while Almor was conquered by the Great Kingdom.

Step 1: Choose a Kingdom Type

- Ancient Kingdom
- Barbaric/Savage Land
- Borderlands
- Chivalric Kingdom
- Conquered Nation
- Decadent Empire
- Demihuman/Humanoid Kingdom
- Desolate Land
- Expanding Kingdom
- Merchant Power
- Mystical Realm
- Nation Under Siege
- Pastoral Homeland
- Religious Land
- Villainous Domain

Decadent Empire

History has shown that every empire based on conquest eventually declines; its demise is merely a matter of time. A decadent empire was once powerful and feared long ago, but it has since fallen into ignominy. The decline has been slow and gradual. The citizens have become increasingly concerned with their own hedonistic pleasures, uncaring of others. From the nobles at the top to the peasants at the bottom, the nation is convinced of its greatness, despite all evidence to the contrary. Art, drama, poetry, and music have become stagnant. Artists no longer compose new works but merely revise the old classics. As the empire rots from within, its leader is either pathetically weak, brazenly cruel, or utterly insane. While the empire turns its feeble energies inward, envious kingdoms watch for signs of weakness, ready to pounce on the wealth this nation possesses. Earth

history is filled with empires that fell into decadence; the Roman Empire is probably the most famous example. A fantasy example of a decadent empire is the Kelewan Empire of the Tsurani from Feist's Riftwar series.

Demihuman/Humanoid Kingdom

Some nations are ruled by demihumans or humanoids. There are elven, dwarven, gnomish, and halfling nations in many fantasy worlds, such as the dwarven kingdom of Moria from Middle-earth or the elven island of Evermeet in the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting. Creatures such as orcs, goblins, or worse might even rule some of the more remote kingdoms. Politically and socially, humans are the minority in a demihuman or humanoid kingdom, while one (or more) of the demihuman races is in the majority. Given the low birth rates and long lifespans of demihumans, these nations are typically small in population but quite old in history. Demihuman nations are relatively peaceful and safe, while most humanoid kingdoms are places of evil and death. (See villainous domain, below.) As a plot twist, you could have a nation of "civilized" humanoids (more civilized than others of their kind) who are struggling for recognition.

Desolate Land

A cataclysm has nearly or totally destroyed this nation. The disaster might have been recent or lost in the ancient past. Either way, almost nothing remains of what was once a thriving kingdom. Little remains of the realm other than abandoned cities and lost secrets, ripe for plundering by greedy kingdoms. The devastation could have been a natural disaster such as a year-long desert storm, or it might have been something as spectacular as magical fire raining down from the sky. The people of this nation are few in number, and there are few surviving towns left. As an example, a magical attack known as the Rain of Colorless Fire devastated the ancient Suel empire in the GREYHAWK setting—it is now known as the Sea of Dust. Myth Drannor in the FORGOTTEN REALMS was once a great elven kingdom but now lies in ruin after falling to an army of darkness. Istar was once the greatest kingdom of Ansalon in the DRAGONLANCE® setting before the First Cataclysm destroyed it.

Expanding Kingdom

This is an expansionistic, land-grabbing kingdom that seeks to increase its holdings, civilize the frontiers, and become the dominant world power. Such kingdoms usually begin with a charismatic or brilliant military leader. In such nations, the military has overwhelming power and influence. Decide why this nation seeks to expand and what it hopes to accomplish. Does the kingdom feel threatened by its neighbors? Does it border on expanses of frontier teeming with monsters? Perhaps the kingdom lacks important natural resources and feels it would be better to take than to trade. Other nations fear the grasp of this conqueror and might form alliances to contain its aggression. Weaker nations might sign nonaggression pacts or alliances with the aggressor. The expanding kingdom likely has established buffer zones and vassal states to protect its borders. An expanding kingdom is usually abundant in one or two resources, such as population or metals, but this is not a requirement. History is replete with examples of expansionistic nations. Alexander the Great led the Macedonians down the road of conquest, Julius Caesar led the Romans, and Charlemagne led the Franks. The Great Kingdom of Greyhawk was once an expanding kingdom.

Merchant Power

This kingdom is typically small in size but great in influence due to its dominance as a trading power. The kingdom prides itself on trade and banking. Her ships and caravans travel the trade lanes to the far corners of the world. The coin of this realm might be the "gold" standard for other kingdoms, and many nations depend on this kingdom for luxury items, metals, spices, and other goods. Any nation foolish enough to attack the merchant power could find its own economy crippled. From Earth history, the Phoenicians were a merchant power in the ancient Mediterranean region, while the Dutch were a merchant power during the colonial period. These nations gained great influence through trade as opposed to overwhelming force of arms. In the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting, the kingdom of Sembia is a formidable merchant power.

Mystical Realm

This land is most famed for its mysterious and magical atmosphere. Myth, magic, and the unexplained cloak the mystical nation from the outside world. Any mention of this realm inevitably leads to rumors of miracles, supernatural events, and foretellings. Faerie-haunted woodlands, foreboding sentient forests (like Mirkwood on Middle-earth), or ruins haunted by ancestral spirits might dominate the landscape. A mystical realm is wrapped in the occult, and no one truly knows (or wants to know) what goes on there. This mysticism might be sinister, as it is in the kingdom of Stygia in Robert E. Howard's world of Hyperborea, or it might be spiritually enlightened, as in legendary Tibet. More powerful mystical realms often possess their own sacred guardian or patron spirit with powers beyond that of mortals. This person or creature roams the land, unimpeded by earthly powers, its true purpose known only to itself. Tom Bombadil of the Old Forest and Treebeard of the Fangorn are such creatures in Middle-earth, as is the Simbul of Aglarond in the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign setting.

Nation Under Siege

There are kingdoms that, against all odds, continue to resist overwhelming opposition. They are forever in danger of invasion and attack, and they struggle against one or more deadly enemies on a daily basis. The people of such a kingdom have adopted a siege mentality—they see themselves as alone with no real friends or allies left in the world. Citizens are constantly in training, preparing for or fighting wars and skirmishes. Young children are indoctrinated at an early age, even to the point of carrying daggers when they are old enough to run. Communities are tight-knit and suspicious of strangers but protective of one another. There is little time for art, culture, or relaxation, and love of luxury is a sign of weakness. The people have become so wrapped up in survival that they have forgotten how to live. The death of a friend or loved one is common, and the people have developed a grim humor tinged with resignation toward death. The city of Armengar from Raymond E. Feist's Riftwar saga is an example of a besieged nation.

Pastoral Homeland

This is a region, valley, or tiny kingdom that is the calm at the center of the world around it. This happy, agrarian kingdom is relatively free of troubles, monsters, or tyrants, and it enjoys great prosperity and happiness. Such a kingdom serves as a useful starting place for a campaign (i.e., the heroes grew up there and left because it was too peaceful), or as the place threatened by the coming of evil. The Shire in *The Lord of the Rings* and Emond's Field from the *Wheel of Time* series began as pleasant places, untouched by strife, but in the end they could not hide from the events of the "outside" world.

Religious Land

This kingdom is a theocracy, ruled by a religious figure who claims divine right of leadership from a deity or a pantheon of deities. The kingdom has one official state religion, and officials actively dissuade or persecute other beliefs. The state religion might be an offshoot or variation of a larger faith and thus considered heretical by outsiders, or the state religion might be the mainstream version. The religion might be good, strict, vile, or anything in between at your preference. Regardless, the people of this nation might be intolerant of other beliefs. Those daring to express opposing views find themselves persecuted. A religious nation need not be intolerant—faith and religion can be influences for the greater good. A religious nation could be a shining example to neighboring kingdoms. For example, a kingdom following the dictates of a healer goddess could be a peaceful haven. In the GREYHAWK setting, the Theocracy of the Pale is an example of an intolerant religious nation, while the Archclericy of Veluna is an example of a virtuous religious nation.

Villainous Domain

A truly villainous, despicable kingdom is important for any fantasy world—it gives the characters an enemy they love to hate. A cruel warlord, netherworld fiend, vile necromancer, greater vampire, consortium of mind flayers, or other villain rules the domain. The nation's armies are vast and powerful, its magic dark and twisted. Even the landscape is foreboding. The villainous nation often initiates wars to gain land, destroy adversaries, or to strike fear into

its enemies. Conquest might be a necessity if its rulers need slaves, sacrifices, or spare zombie parts on a constant basis. When this evil kingdom goes to war, massive hordes of humanoids and legions of undead boil out from dark fortresses. Even when the armies lie dormant, the villainous kingdom spreads its corrupting influence into the heart of other nations by employing spies and sorcery to achieve its goals. Often, only one thing stands in the way of the villainous domain—brave nations who refuse to give in to tyranny, such as a chivalric kingdom. Examples of villainous domains abound in fantasy literature, with the land of Mordor from J.R.R. Tolkien's *Middle-earth* being one of the most infamous. Other examples of villainy incarnate include Iuz from the *GREYHAWK* setting and Thay from the *FORGOTTEN REALMS* setting. Such nations are so evil that they cannot possibly be perceived as misunderstood or abused.

Beyond the Types

As mentioned, you should add other types as desired. These types sometimes overlap, and they are by no means all-encompassing. Browsing through history or fantasy literature can inspire other ideas for kingdom types.

The overall type of a nation can and should change over campaign time. For example, a kingdom might start out as a barbaric frontier land, develop into an expanding kingdom, then after many centuries fall into decline and become a decadent empire. Enemy nations, noticing the weakness of the once-mighty empire, attack and invade. After a fierce war and defeat, the former empire becomes a conquered kingdom.

Once you have designed a kingdom, it is often interesting and enlightening to develop some of its history and think about its future: Where has the kingdom been? Where is it now? Where is it going? The status and type of a kingdom could change over the course of a single campaign or over the course of many campaigns.

Example: *Girdalen is a small, land-locked country. Looking at the list of types above, we decide it falls into the category of "nation under siege." Girdalen is locked in mortal conflict with a villainous enemy. It is a nation constantly at war, and its survival is tenuous at best. In addition, we decide that faith has been one of the few things that*

Kingdom Points Table

Size of nation	KPs	Age of nation	KPs
Small	15	Young (<100 years)	5
Medium	20	Mature (100–500 years)	10
Large	25	Old (501–2000 years)	15
Empire	30	Ancient (>2000 years)	20

has allowed Girdalen to survive intact, and thus another type would be "religious nation." Our nation is thus named the Theocracy of Girdalen. We decide the combination of types selected would make Girdalen intolerant of outsiders and suspicious of anyone different, yet its citizens are extremely close-knit and protective of one another.

Step 2: Special Benefits

After choosing the kingdom's type, you can choose special powers and benefits for that kingdom. The type is important in deciding which special benefits the country possesses.

You should know how many "kingdom points" to spend on special abilities. The Kingdom Points Table shows how many points a kingdom has based on the realm's geographical size and population, as well as its age. A larger nation typically has greater resources and opportunities, and an older realm has had more time to develop and progress than its younger neighbors. To use the table, first choose the land size of the kingdom and look to the right to see how many points the kingdom gains. Then, determine the age of the kingdom to find how many additional points are acquired. Add the two together for a total.

When deciding whether a kingdom is "small," "medium," or otherwise, consider how big this kingdom is relative to the entire campaign area, not how big it is in actual square miles. For example, if the campaign region were the size of modern western Europe, then France or Germany would be large, while Switzerland would be small. If the campaign area approximates the size of Europe and what are now the Russian states, then France or Germany would fall into the "medium" size category.

In deciding how old a kingdom is historically, you can either use the numbers in the table as guidelines or, if the campaign area is much younger or much older than these numbers, create an

alternative time scale. In a land of relatively young kingdoms, a nation might be "old" if it had been founded two centuries ago, whereas in a land of ancient empires, "young" might be anything earlier than ten centuries.

Thus, a medium kingdom would receive 20 points. If it were young in age, it would gain another 5 points, providing it a total of 25 kingdom points. Our example nation, Girdalen, is small but has survived for over five hundred years, providing it with a total of 30 (15 + 15) kingdom points to spend.

Feel free to modify these numbers, keeping in mind that no kingdom can have or do everything. Part of the fun of nation-building is making do with what is available. The best method is not to modify the suggested point totals until after you know what items to choose from the lists below. In addition, with this system a kingdom can take disadvantages (see below) to gain additional kingdom points.

Once a point value has been determined, look through the following list of special benefits. Each entry is listed in a format similar to the skills and powers listed in the *PLAYER'S OPTION* system: the name of the special benefit appears with a point cost in parentheses, followed by a brief description of what the benefit entails. In addition, each description indicates which of the above kingdom types would go best with the benefit, and which would be inappropriate. For example, a peaceful pastoral kingdom should not have a massive army without an extremely good reason.

Abundant Natural Resources (5/+5)

The kingdom is blessed with plentiful crops, large expanses of land, bountiful sources of wood, good building stone, or similar resources. For every 5 kingdom points spent, the nation gains another abundant resource. Thus, for 10 points a kingdom could select plentiful crops and good building stone. The kingdom not only meets its own needs

Step 2: Special Benefits

Abundant Natural Resources	5/+5
Abundant Population	10
Alliances	5/10
Blessed	5
Center of Learning/Culture	5
Exceptional Product	5
Feared	10
Great Magic	15
Metal Rich	10
Powerful Army	10
Powerful Navy	10
Priest Support	10
Prosperous	10
Protected Location	10
Reputation	5
Technological Edge	5
Wonder of the World	10

with the resource but also exports materials to other nations, thus generating wealth. A kingdom with abundant natural assets will be the envy of less fortunate kingdoms. Greedier neighbors might try to seize these resources by force. For high quality resources of metal, the kingdom should select the "metal rich" benefit, below. *Preferred:* Barbaric lands, chivalric kingdom, expanding kingdom, merchant power. *Restricted:* Borderlands, desolate land.

Abundant Population (10)

For good or for ill, the kingdom possesses great numbers of citizens. In many cases, this translates into large quantities of cheap soldiers that can overwhelm an enemy with massive numbers. A kingdom with abundant population must explore, expand, and conquer other lands to meet the needs of its citizens. *Preferred:* Barbaric lands, decadent empire, expanding kingdom, villainous domain. *Restricted:* Desolate land, mystical realm, pastoral homeland.

Alliances (5/10)

The kingdom has a military alliance with a neighboring nation for 5 points. For 10 points, the alliance involves several nations. With such a coalition, an attack on this kingdom activates the alliance, bringing her allies into the

war automatically. The theory is that an aggressor nation will hesitate going to war knowing it would face several enemies on multiple fronts. Decide which nations are part of the alliance, what the terms and conditions are, and why the nations originally formed the alliance. Kingdoms form alliances to counter an existing, growing, or perceived threat from a stronger power. Kingdoms might use a system of alliances to maintain the balance of power in a region. There is a downside to this benefit, however. If another alliance nation is attacked, this kingdom must respond as demanded by its treaty obligations. Thus, the kingdom could find itself drawn into a war it did not start. The alliance system dragged most of the European nations into World War I in rapid succession before anyone understood what had happened. *Preferred:* Ancient kingdom, chivalric kingdom, merchant power, expanding kingdom, villainous domain. *Restricted:* Desolate land.

Blessed (5)

A deity has granted divine favor to the nation as a whole. This blessing is a source of great pride for the citizens and the envy of outsiders. Typically, the blessing extends to one or two facets of life in the kingdom; the crops are plentiful, the land is free of plagues, etc. Decide what deity granted such a boon, why, and how long it will last. Other nations are hesitant or reluctant to attack a nation that has a deity's blessing. If the populace is thankless or takes the boon for granted the deity can remove the blessing or replace it with a curse. (See disadvantages, below.) *Preferred:* Chivalric kingdom, demihuman kingdom, expanding kingdom, pastoral homeland, religious land, villainous domain (evil deities). *Restricted:* Conquered nation, decadent empire, desolate land.

Center of Learning/Culture (5)

Other nations of the world recognize this kingdom as a place of enlightened learning and culture. Scholars, artists, and philosophers flock to the cities of the kingdom to learn from the masters and to surround themselves with like-minded people. The kingdom might have the largest library in the world, or perhaps it is home to a distinguished academy of learning. *Preferred:* Ancient

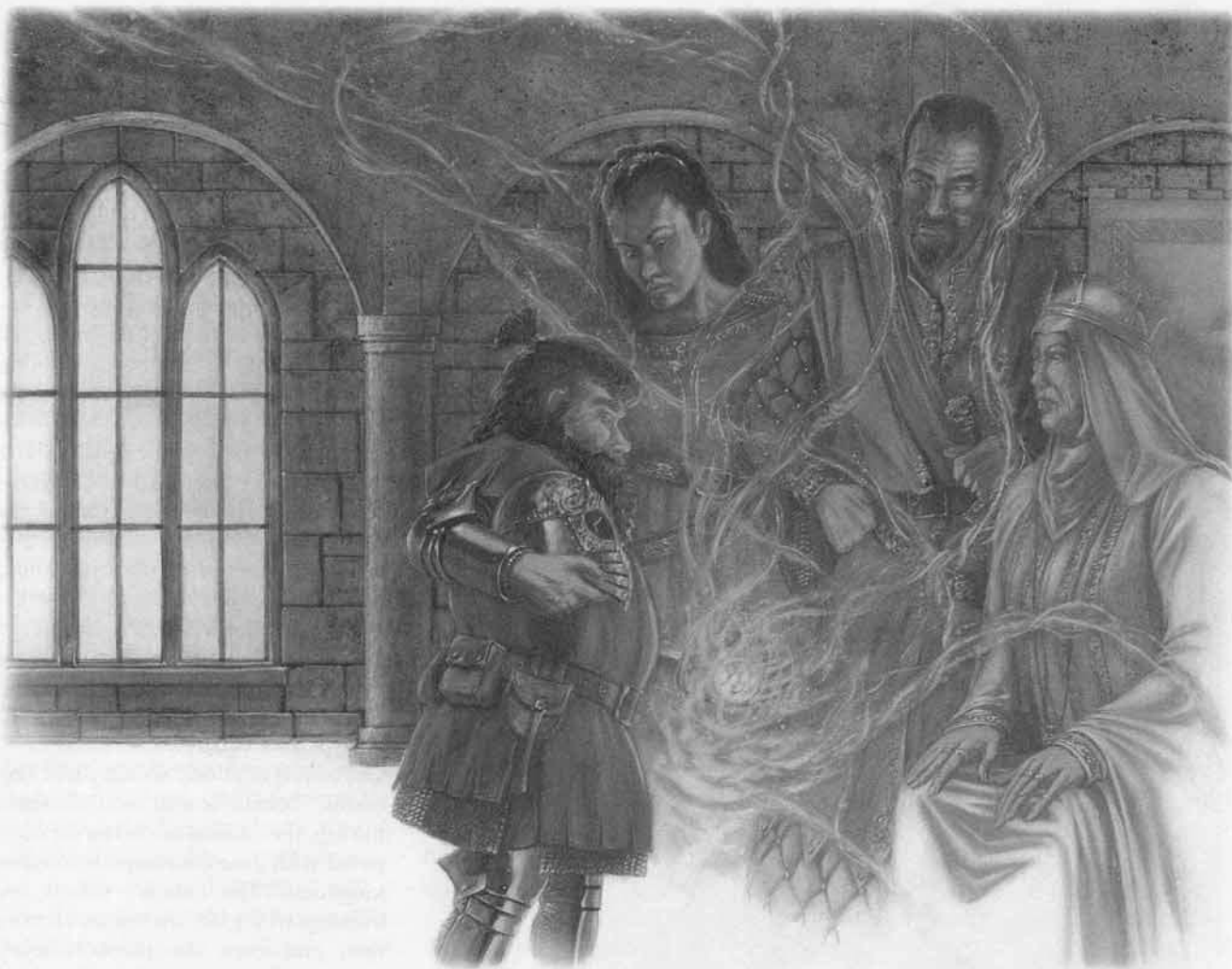
kingdom, chivalric kingdom, demihuman kingdom (especially gray elves), merchant power, religious land. *Restricted:* Barbaric lands, desolate land, mystical realm, pastoral homeland, villainous domain.

Exceptional Product (5)

The region is noted for an exceptional product or resource, one that is highly sought by those who want the best in quality. The type of products could range from steel weapons (e.g., Damascus steel) to well-bred horses, stone (such as Italian marble), or ships. The secret of the quality might lie in the base materials (high quality iron, marble, or animals) or the design (as with ships), or it might be in the manufacturing process. For example, the Japanese produced swords of exceptional quality through a process of forge-welding wrought iron and a high-carbon product called *tamahagane*. Many people desire the secrets of the product but are unable to discover or duplicate them, or they just do not have access to the necessary materials. Exporting this exceptional product brings great wealth to the kingdom and elevates the reputation of its artisans above those of other lands. This special benefit is different from "technological edge" (see below) in one simple way. The kingdom exports and sells an exceptional product, but it does not sell or export a technological edge—they jealously guard such secrets. *Preferred:* Chivalric nation, demihuman kingdom, expanding kingdom, merchant power. *Restricted:* Barbaric land, desolate land, pastoral homeland.

Feared (10)

Evil and aggressive kingdoms, or those domains steeped in dark sorcery, work best with this special benefit. Other nations fear this kingdom, perhaps with cause or perhaps just out of fear of the unknown. The kingdom might be unbeatable on the field of battle, or it might have a tendency toward horrible brutality. Some barbaric kingdoms use fear tactics to demoralize their enemies, defeating them without a fight. Other nations, cowed or fearful of reprisals, might hesitate to attack this kingdom. Fear is useful as a weapon—it discourages enemies from attacking and often allows the kingdom to get its way without bloodshed. *Preferred:* Barbaric lands,



Great magic can give a kingdom the edge over its neighbors.

expanding kingdom, mystical realm, religious land, villainous domain. *Restricted:* Conquered nation, nation under siege, pastoral homeland.

Great Magic (15)

The kingdom is famed for some aspect of its magic. The kingdom might have the best academies of magic available, or the kingdom might be blessed with one (or more) of the greatest Wizards of the age (such as Elminster on Toril or Bigby on Oerth). For whatever reason, the kingdom has more magical resources than most lands, giving it a measure of respect and power. Enemies think twice before attacking a land with such magical ability. Wizards from other lands visit the kingdom, hoping to gain an education or enlightenment. The kingdom could also possess one or more powerful artifacts in its arsenal. If a kingdom is renowned for academies of magic, you might want to specify which schools of magic the nation specializes in teaching. For example, certain

kingdoms would outlaw necromancy, while others would specialize in the darker arts. The nations of Rashemen and Thay in the Realms are both famed for their magic, though of vastly different kinds. *Preferred:* Ancient kingdom, decadent empire, expanding kingdom, mystical realm, religious land, villainous domain. *Restricted:* Barbaric lands, conquered nation, desolate land, pastoral homeland.

Metal Rich (10)

The nation has abundant metal resources, including high-quality iron ore. As a result, the kingdom has equipped its military with the best armor and weapons money can buy. Furthermore, the kingdom exports its surplus metals to other lands to earn great wealth. *Preferred:* Chivalric kingdom, demihuman kingdom (dwarves or gnomes especially), expanding kingdom, merchant power, religious land, villainous domain. *Restricted:* Pastoral homeland.

Powerful Army (10)

The kingdom is renowned for its armed might. The kingdom's army might be powerful due to sheer numbers, it might have earned a deadly reputation, or it might simply be undefeated in battle. The army is famed for its discipline, tactics, and organization, or it is famous for its outright brutality and savagery. The armies of the Roman empire were famed for their tactics and formations, while people feared the hordes of Genghis Khan for their cruelty and ferocity. *Preferred:* Chivalric nation, expanding nation, villainous domain. *Restricted:* Borderlands, conquered nation, desolate land, pastoral homeland. A barbaric nation will not usually have a powerful army unless a great leader unites the tribes; such a force typically survives only as long as its leader remains alive and active.

Powerful Navy (10)

The kingdom has a superior navy that permits it extensive control over the



Chivalric kingdom, expanding kingdom, merchant power. *Restricted:* Conquered nation, desolate land, pastoral homeland.

Priest Support (10)

The kingdom has a good level of Priest support. There are Priests in quantity available to support the army with healers and spell power, and the government can enlist the aid of Priests for investigations, interrogations, rooting out undead, and granting minor blessings. The nation follows one major deity or pantheon as the state religion. The Priests share power with the government, or they might even control the government. *Preferred:* Chivalric kingdom, mystical realm, religious nation, villainous domain (evil Priests). *Restricted:* Borderlands, conquered nation, decadent empire, desolate nation.

Prosperous (10)

The land is relatively wealthy and successful. From the lowest social classes to the top, the citizens are better off compared with their counterparts in other kingdoms. The nation's coffers are bursting with gold, the nobles are content, and even the peasants enjoy unusual prosperity. When the land prospers, the ruling class can afford to be more generous and lenient, and all castes benefit. You should have a good reason why the kingdom is in such good financial shape and at whose expense. It is also important to remember that wealth draws envious attention from other lands. *Preferred:* Chivalric kingdom, expanding kingdom, merchant power, pastoral homeland. *Restricted:* Conquered nation, desolate land, nation under siege.

Protected Location (10)

Natural terrain provides excellent boundaries and defenses for the kingdom. Mountain ranges, thick areas of forest, or vast swamps block off attack routes. The kingdom might even be an island, protected by the sea itself. Terrain defenses make it difficult for would-be attackers to invade, and sustaining a supply line over them is a challenge. Of course, such terrain is no guarantee of protection—Hannibal led his Carthaginians through the Alps to attack the Romans from the north, a feat considered impossible for an army. *Preferred:*

A kingdom's reputation can inspire fear as well as respect.

seas. The kingdom can dictate how other nations use the seas, and her ships control the sea lanes. The kingdom might have the best shipbuilders and designers, or it might just have an overwhelming number of ships. Earth history has proven that no would-be conqueror can long sustain an empire

without control of the seas, and those that dominate the seas can gain great power. The English navy was essential in building and maintaining the British Empire throughout the colonial period, while the Carthaginians gained power in the ancient Mediterranean region with their naval power. *Preferred:*

Demihuman kingdom, mystical realm, nation under siege, pastoral homeland, villainous domain. *Restricted:* Expanding kingdom, merchant power.

Reputation (5)

The kingdom has a reputation that leads other nations to respect, fear, or favor it. Decide what type of reputation the kingdom has and how much of it the kingdom earned. For example, the nation might be renowned for its honesty and integrity in keeping treaties. A nation could be infamous for its cruelty to those who dare oppose it. The reputation is so powerful that it influences how other kingdoms negotiate with this land. Regardless of what the reputation is, it is beneficial to the kingdom in some way. A reputation can have its downside, however, and can sometimes cause problems as well as solve them. For example, a kingdom with a reputation for honesty might find others trying to take advantage of it. This special benefit is open to any type of nation and restricted to none, but make sure the reputation fits the kingdom's type. A villainous nation should not be famous for its honesty and integrity, and a chivalric nation should not have a reputation for cruelty.

Technological Edge (5)

The kingdom has an advance in one type of technology that gives it an advantage over other nations. For example, the kingdom might possess the secret of forging steel while other kingdoms must make due with crude iron weapons. Perhaps they are skilled in engineering, shipbuilding, or stonework. As another example, the kingdom could be renowned for its superior knowledge of medicine and healing or its engineers and architects. Perhaps they have a superior grasp of cartography and navigation, allowing their ships to sail farther and faster. The technological edge need not be military in origin or benefit, although conflict and competition often spur technological advances. *Preferred:* Chivalric kingdom, expanding kingdom, merchant power, mystical realm. *Restricted:* Barbaric lands, desolate nation.

Wonder of the World (10)

One of the great man-made wonders of the world can be found in this kingdom. This wonder attracts pilgrims, visitors,

scholars, and the curious from all across the world. It invokes awe, respect, admiration, and envy from other nations. This great wonder could be mystical (the Oracle at Delphi), gigantic (the Colossus of Rhodes), lavishly opulent (the palace of Versailles in France or the Taj Mahal in India), or magical (an immense bonfire that never burns out, for example). Although the presence of a wonder does not protect a kingdom or guarantee it anything, it is a source of great prestige and pride. The wonder might have special powers not known to the general public. (What if the Colossus could move?) *Preferred:* Chivalric kingdom, decadent empire, religious land, mystical realm, ancient kingdom, demihuman kingdom. *Restricted:* Barbaric lands, pastoral homeland.

Once you have read through the list of special benefits, it's time to read through the disadvantages before making any final decisions. It's helpful to write down any special benefits that are appropriate and interesting, and do the budgeting and editing later.

Example: We look over the list and decide to select several special benefits for the Theocracy of Girdalen. These benefits are purchased from the nation's 30 kingdom points. In addition, we budget 15 points in disadvantages (which we'll select in Step 3), giving us 45 total points for Girdalen to spend. Keeping in mind the types of "religious nation" and "nation under siege," we select the following special benefits:

First, Girdalen is in a protected location. Mountains guard the kingdom on three sides. These mountains are wild and somewhat monster-infested, but they offer formidable protection against invaders. Second, out of necessity Girdalen has built and maintained a powerful army. The Girdaleni army is well trained, well equipped, and highly motivated—they are fighting for their homes and families. The troops have abundant battlefield experience and are among the most veteran of any land. Third, with all of the mountains in the region, Girdalen is blessed with excellent sources of iron ore for forging steel weapons and armor. Fourth, the Theocracy has the blessing of Solarian, the campaign's deity of light and the sun. The Girdaleni people have held to their faith and followed the dictates of their god for centuries. Solarian considers this "his" nation, and he has granted them abundant crops. Finally, Girdalen has a

Step 3: Disadvantages

Cursed	5/10
Decadent Ruler	5
Despised	5
Devastated	5
Exposed Location	5
Frontier	5
Impoverished	10
Internal Strife	10
Metal Poor	10
Mixed Population	5
Monster-Infested	5
Occupied	10
Powerful Enemy	10
Reputation	5
Resource Dependency	5/10

large number of Solarian priests. These priests provide substantial support to the army and the nation. The deity also provides his priests with more power than he grants to Solarian priests of other nations.

Step 3: Disadvantages

In the PLAYER'S OPTION rules, a disadvantage is a weakness or foible that further defines a character and provides a few extra character points. Similarly, kingdoms also might have disadvantages to provide definition and realism—if human beings are imperfect, their governments are doubly so. Kingdoms cannot take more than 15 points from disadvantages; any points gained beyond that are lost. Every kingdom should have at least one disadvantage and most will possess two or three. During the design process, you might have to come up with several ideas of your own to add to the list of disadvantages. As with the benefits mentioned above, each description lists preferred and restricted types. Be careful not to select disadvantages that contradict the benefits already selected for a kingdom. For example, a kingdom with "protected location" should not also have "exposed location."

Cursed (5/10)

A terrible magical or god-inspired curse has swept the land. The people suffer under the curse, unable to find a cure. Decide what effects the curse has, why the curse afflicts the kingdom, and how

to lift the curse. Curses on a large scale often involve withered crops, dying animals, and blighted landscape. For 5 kingdom points, the curse is something that returns on a recurring basis (every full moon, for example) and then is dormant. For 10 points, the curse afflicts the kingdom constantly. You should also decide how outsiders view the curse. Do they feel pity for the cursed nation, or do they consider the curse well earned? *Preferred:* Ancient kingdom, conquered nation, decadent empire, desolate land. *Restricted:* None. Even a pastoral homeland can find itself plagued by a curse.

Decadent Ruler (5)

The ruling family is decadent and depraved, and its members care nothing for the people under their power. They wallow in excesses of wealth, land, and opulence while their subjects starve and suffer deprivations. The ruling family is possibly insane, deranged, or just plain moronic. A decadent ruler bleeds the nation dry of wealth, ruins the nobles, and brings about full-scale rebellion sooner or later, leaving the nation weak and helpless to invaders or those seeking the throne. King Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, were decadent rulers who ignored a financial crisis that destroyed the aristocratic foundations of France, leading to the French Revolution. *Preferred:* Ancient kingdom, decadent empire, desolate nation, religious land, villainous domain. *Restricted:* Pastoral homeland.

Despised (5)

This goes beyond mere reputation and into the realm of hatred. Other kingdoms openly loathe this nation for some major reason. A kingdom suffering this onus finds it difficult if not impossible to gain anyone's assistance, trust, or aid in times of need. A kingdom might combine this disadvantage with the special benefit "Feared" (see above). This disadvantage is appropriate for a villainous domain or a sinister mystical realm. *Preferred:* Barbaric lands, conquered nation, decadent empire, expanding kingdom, mystical realm, religious land, villainous domain. *Restricted:* Merchant power, pastoral homeland.

Devastated (5)

A natural disaster or magical catastrophe has left a portion of the kingdom

ruined and scarred. Nature has done its worst—forest fires blacken the landscape, earthquakes have swallowed entire cities, and plagues have devastated the population. Decide the nature of the disaster and how widespread it is. Such devastation could leave the kingdom easy prey for conquerors as well as rebellion by the discontented populace. This disadvantage differs in one substantial way from the Desolate Land type (see above) in that this disadvantage is not permanently debilitating. After time and effort, the damage can be repaired. A desolate nation remains desolate for years to come. *Preferred:* Conquered nation, desolate land, mystical realm, nation under siege. *Restricted:* Pastoral homeland.

Exposed Location (5)

Due to terrain surrounding the kingdom, or because of its strategic location (e.g., near a major river or a natural harbor), the kingdom is inviting to any would-be invader. The terrain surrounding the kingdom offers little or no protection. In addition, the kingdom could be a stone's throw away from an enemy power. For example, the city of Seoul, capital of South Korea, is in an exposed location. The city contains a quarter of the country's population, and yet it lies less than 30 miles from the border of North Korea. *Preferred:* Conquered nation, desolate land, merchant power, nation under siege. *Restricted:* Demihuman kingdom, mystical realm, pastoral homeland.

Frontier (5)

The majority of the kingdom is still unexplored or is covered with thick, forbidding wilderness such as trackless deserts, thick forests, or tangled jungle. As a result, the actual arable land available is less than is evident on a map. The kingdom is eager to develop and civilize these wilderness regions to exploit the resources and provide more living space for its citizens. This disadvantage works well with the "monster-Infested" disadvantage, below. *Preferred:* Barbaric lands, demihuman kingdom, expanding kingdom. *Restricted:* Ancient kingdom, decadent empire, pastoral homeland.

Impoverished (10)

The kingdom is financially destitute. It owes money to lenders, to neighboring

nations, and to its own citizens. Public works sit idle and abandoned. Worse for the kingdom, unemployment is rampant, and the army has gone without pay for months. Meanwhile, the nobles are refusing to pay their taxes. A poverty-stricken kingdom is inviting invasion from all sides and will be ill-prepared to fend off attacks. The army might be on the verge of mutiny or collapse, and groups of dissatisfied nobles might decide they can run things more effectively if they take power. *Preferred:* Conquered nation, decadent empire, desolate nation, nation under siege. *Restricted:* Barbaric lands, expanding kingdom, merchant power.

Internal Strife (10)

Internal strife between factions, clans, or families tears the nation apart. As a result, the nation has no functional central government (or, alternatively, the strife is a result of a weak central government) and everyone has made a grab for power. The feuding might be a violent conflict or a war of words, but either way the land is in turmoil and without direction. This internal strife makes politics dangerous, but the right type of strong ruler can step in and seize power. A nation suffering an internal schism is easy prey for schemers from within and conquerors from without. *Preferred:* Barbaric lands, borderlands, chivalric kingdom, conquered nation, decadent empire, religious land. *Restricted:* Desolate land, nation under siege, pastoral homeland.

Metal Poor (10)

The nation lacks a reliable and steady source of quality iron ore. It must use substitutes or pay dearly for small quantities of iron from other lands. As a result, the armed forces possess leather or hide armor and weapons that use other materials such as bronze, bone, or stone. This puts the army at a distinct disadvantage when facing better equipped foes. *Preferred:* Barbaric nation, conquered nation, desolate nation, pastoral nation. *Restricted:* Chivalric nation, merchant power.

Mixed Population (5)

Many nations and kingdoms include mixed populations of different tribes, clans, and cultures within their borders. These diverse cultural and ethnic groups do not always get along well

with one another, and one majority group might try to dominate or exterminate the minority groups. Those in the minority might find themselves reduced to second-class citizenship, slavery, or worse. A mixed population is not an actual disadvantage by itself, but the relations between the differing groups can lead to feuding, a bad reputation with other nations, or even civil war. For example, a kingdom might be primarily human but have scattered groups of elves living within its borders. The humans resent the elves for trying to control the forestlands. They see elves as manipulative, inferior creatures who do not deserve equal or fair treatment. It takes surprisingly little to set one group of people apart from another; differences can be racial, ethnic, religious, or cultural (e.g., a population of "barbarians" living near a more civilized republic). *Preferred:* Barbaric lands, borderlands, conquered nation, decadent empire, demihuman kingdom, expanding kingdom, religious land. *Restricted:* Ancient kingdom, desolate nation.

Monster-Infested (5)

The nation has a monster problem. Large areas of the kingdom are haunted, infested, or overrun with creatures inimical to humans and demihumans. Determine what types of monsters are most prevalent and why there are so many of them. Dragons, trolls, humanoids, and undead are among the most likely monsters to cause problems. This disadvantage works well with the disadvantage of "Frontier" (see above). The kingdom must spend a great deal of money and effort to combat these monstrous populations. Such lands often become infested with another group of dangerous, unpredictable creatures—adventurers. *Preferred:* Barbaric lands, borderlands, chivalric kingdom, demihuman kingdom, desolate nation, mystical realm, villainous domain. *Restricted:* Pastoral homeland.

Occupied (10)

The land has come under partial control of an invading force. This enemy occupies extensive stretches of the kingdom with garrisons and raiding parties. The enemy might claim to own some or all of the kingdom, but it is unable to complete the conquest or

subdue the entire population. The native citizens fight back, and ongoing warfare is certain. *Preferred:* Barbaric lands, borderlands, conquered nation, chivalric kingdom, decadent empire, desolate land, nation under siege. *Restricted:* Pastoral homeland.

Powerful Enemy (10)

The kingdom has had a blood enemy for as long as anyone can remember. The enemy is at least as strong as this kingdom, and the animosity between them is legendary. There will never be peace, and the bloodshed will not end until one side eradicates the other. People can no longer remember the reasons for the hatred—they have learned to hate without knowing why. Both nations are in a constant state of armed readiness, and the military has great importance in politics and everyday life. Any nation can have a powerful enemy, although it should be rare for a pastoral homeland.

Reputation (5)

A kingdom can have a good reputation, as described in the special benefit "reputation," above, but it is also possible to have a poor or negative reputation. A nation might be known for its tendency to break treaties and ignore alliances. A kingdom might be infamous for its persecution of spellcasters, or it could be known for its intolerance and bigotry toward foreigners. Decide the kingdom's reputation and whether it earned that reputation. Regardless of what the reputation involves, it is a hindrance to the nation during negotiations, trade agreements, and at times when the nation needs outside assistance. *Preferred:* Barbaric lands, decadent empire, expanding kingdom, mystical realm, religious land, villainous domain. *Restricted:* None.

Resource Dependency (5/10)

The kingdom is heavily dependent on a neighboring nation for a critical resource—food, metals, wood, etc. Choose what the resource is and what nation provides the resource. A kingdom that suffers a resource dependency is at the mercy of its suppliers. War, pestilence, political disagreements, and natural disasters can all interrupt imports, bringing the kingdom to its knees. For example, an

island nation might need to import food to supplement its meager crops. *Preferred:* Conquered nation, expanding kingdom. *Restricted:* None.

Example: To help pay for the special benefits selected earlier, Girdalen needs 15 points of disadvantages. Following the types established earlier, this is easy to accomplish. We select two disadvantages.

First, Girdalen has a powerful enemy. This is the nation (a villainous one at that) determined to crush Girdalen, and the two kingdoms have been locked in mortal conflict for centuries. Girdalen is strong enough to maintain its sovereignty but not strong enough to go on the offensive.

Second, Girdalen has gained a reputation for being an intolerant, narrow-minded nation. The people of Girdalen see themselves as the "chosen of Solarian," and they see all other kingdoms as weak or immoral. As a result, few kingdoms are willing to help Girdalen in its struggle against evil.

Putting It All Together

After purchasing the kingdom's benefits and disadvantages, bring these elements together and write a short description of the kingdom. Explain why the kingdom possesses its special benefits, why it suffers the problems it does, and what life there is like for the average citizen.

Ultimately, the most important question is how it all affects the player characters. A PC raised in a monster-infested frontier barony would be quite different from one who grew up in the greatest city in the known world. Where a PC grew up and lived affects the character's social status, skills, equipment, and even character class.

By adapting the ideas from *Skills & Powers*, you can easily design exciting and detailed kingdoms. Great empires, evil kingdoms, and dynamic nations can be designed quickly, populating the world for the next generation of heroes to explore.



Mark has found that allowing players to share in the creation of the fantasy world ultimately forges a place where players feel at home, like a place they've visited before. Any storyteller worth his gold knows that audience participation is the only way to tell a grand saga.