

MIDNIGHT™

FORGE OF SHADOW™



A Sourcebook for Steel Hill



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Cruach Emyn

The forge of Shadow

Introduction

The city of Steel Hill (*Norther: Cruach Emyn*) is a mining and foundry town in the foothills of the Highhorn Mountains. Before Izrador conquered the Northlands, Steel Hill was known for its fine weapons, armor, and tools, and was also a source of the raw iron ingots from which most southerly smiths forged their wares. The city, named for the hill upon which it sprawled, was a complex of foundries surrounded by residential areas as well as the outlying villages of miners, farmers, and woodcutters. The air was always full of gray charcoal smoke and the clanging music of hammers.

In the final days before the Last Age, Steel Hill was ruled by Lady Eden of House Falon, called the Maidensword. Eden was a noble queen, and one of the few female rulers among the Dorns. Lady Falon planned to die in glorious battle, defending her people and Erenland from the threat of Izrador. Unfortunately, this was not to be: The insidious agents of the dark lord spread their corrupting touch into her city and subverted one of her liegemen, a Sarcosan-born prince by the name of Aushav, with promises of eternal life. As the Maidensword rallied her troops to stand against the Shadow, soldiers loyal to Aushav betrayed her and took the city from within. Izrador established control quickly thereafter, losing few troops to the demoralized defenders.

The increasingly demonic Aushav now controls what remains of House Falon. Steel Hill's populace slaves under the yoke of orc lash-masters, digging in the mines and smelting steel. As quickly as they die, more are brought in by goblin slavers from across the Northlands to take their places. The steel and weapons they produce are shipped in well-guarded caravans across Erenland, and eventually used to kill their mak-

ers' brethren and to support the war efforts against the elves and dwarves.

Welcome to Steel Hill, the Forge of Shadow.

The Lay of the Land

Where the grasslands of Eris Aman meet the tundra of the Northern Marches, the land climbs toward the snow-capped peaks of the Highhorn Mountains. The Dorns call this place the Redstone Hills (*Norther: Lía Rudh Emyn*), named for its rock, stained vermilion by rich veins of iron. The terrain of the Lía Rudh Emyn is an echo of the Veradeen farther to the west: hills, valleys, and gorges carved by myriad rivers and streams create a bewildering country for those unfamiliar with it.

The flora of the Lía Rudh Emyn is dramatically different from the majestic grasslands and cold tundra of the lands to the North. The hills in the center of the region are carpeted with a forest of evergreens and oaks, but the forest thins as it nears the tundra. To the west the oaks disappear, but the evergreens march on as the ground climbs toward the icy walls of the Highhorns.

The Be'neeya is the most prominent river of the Lía Rudh Emyn, running from the Highhorns to the Sea of Pelluria far to the south. The River Be'neeya begins its life as a frigid stream, but quickly grows wider as it flows south and is joined by the numerous icy rivers and streams that crisscross the region. The prevalence of waterways and a slow spring thaw transforms many of the narrower gorges and valleys of the Lía Rudh Emyn into swamps for more than half the year, making non-highway travel torturous during the arcs of Doshram to Obares.

The weather in the region is often foul. The hills are the interface between the lowland and highland terrain of northwestern Erenland, and suffer the effects of weather fronts that break against the immovable flanks of the Highhorns. Rainstorms are frequent. In the winter arcs these become snowstorms and blizzards of uncommon ferocity; many valleys and roads are completely isolated during this season. In the spring and summer, the weather is less harsh, but no less treacherous. Thick fog and constant rain are the enemy of travelers throughout the Lía Rudh Emyn, enshrouding the landscape, transforming dirt tracks into rivers of mud, and triggering lethal rock slides.

The city of Cruach Emyn stands at the intersection of two river valleys in a barren landscape that is in stark contrast to the rest of the Lía Rudh Emyn; years of felling to feed the ever-hungry furnaces of Steel Hill's foundries have all but depleted the local woodlands. The valleys of the Be'Neeya and Coinlin rivers are tangles of brambles and gorse growing over countless rotting tree stumps. On the higher slopes, the brambles give way to heather and bracken. These bring forth a riot of purple flowers in the spring, but are prone to fire during the summer. These moorlands are a rich source of peat, which is used year-round by locals to fuel their hearth fires against the ever-present damp and cold.

In the brooding skies above Steel Hill, carrion birds circle amidst the pall of smoke that hangs expectantly about the city. Beneath their dark wings and merciless cries, the Road of the Damned carries human slaves to the Tarish mines. Exhumed iron returns by the same route and feeds the city's foundries. To the south, the River Be'neeya and the Iron Road carry the fruits of this human suffering to the waiting armies of Jahzir's host.

A Brief History of Cruach Emyn

Gerard the Northsword, a long-ago lord of House Falon, founded Cruach Emyn more than fifteen hundred years ago near the site of a simple Dornish iron works. The outpost quickly attracted settlers and grew into a walled settlement. As the iron mine's prominence grew, Steel Hill's placement near the river Be'neeya proved perfectly suited for both defense and trade. The settlement grew from outpost to town to city, and House Falon enjoyed an upturn in its fortunes.

Falon's ascendance was not an easy one, and was set against a backdrop of many savage battles with the Shadow's forces in the merciless north. Despite the clan's heroism and sturdiness, however, it was eventually one of their own who destroyed them, betraying his kin and casting the Great House into darkness. The Shadow's forces plundered the city, raped and murdered its people, and then enslaved the survivors; these were put to work in the mines to equip Jahzir's war machine.

Steel Hill (Cruach Emyn)

Small city: Nonstandard; AL CE; Population 8432; Mixed (Dorns 68%, Erenlanders 10%, Sarcosans 2%, orcs 8%, halflings 5%, goblins 3%, gnomes 2%, oruks 1%, others 1%).

Authority Figures: Prince Aushav Falon, CE shadow servant male Sarcosan Rog3/Chn12; Dorgath Blackhand, LE male Erenlander Lgt11 (High Legate of Steel Hill); Sharzun the Bloodaxe, NE oruk Ftr12 (Lord Commander of the Splintered Skull Legion).

Important Characters: Morgatha, NE female orc Chr14 (kurasatch udareen of the Mother of the Blooded Claw tribe); Bazan Githuran, LE Erenlander Ftr7/Blr5 (High Captain of Steel Hill); Vylaria, LE female Erenlander Lgt8 (Preceptor); Halting Ironhammer, LE male dwarf Exp12/War2 (Lord Smith); Voratch Darksworn, LE Erenlander Ftr4/Lgt3/Sbr6 (Knight Commander of the Brotherhood of the Black Sword); Cleite Fir, NG male Dorn Chr5/Dru6; Alarin, CE male Sarcosan Rog8; Essylt, N female Dorn Com8/Rog3 (Whoremistress of Tarish); Fethwik One-Eye, LE male dwarf Exp7/Rog6 (Master of the Mines); Kregar, NE male oruk Bbn3/Ftr8; Mackav, CE male Dorn Ftr12 (Champion of the Tarish Fighting Pits).

Legion of the Splintered Skull: oruk Ftr6 (6), oruk Ftr3 (30), orc Ftr3 (60), orc Ftr2 (240), orc War1 (360), goblin War1 (200), goblin Wld2 (75), goblin Bbn1/Ftr2 (50).

Bloodguard of Cruach Emyn: human (mixed) War1 (100), human (mixed) Ftr1 (75), human (mixed) Ftr2 (25), human (mixed) Ftr5 (10), human (mixed) Ftr7/Blr1 (30), human (Erenlander) Ftr7/Blr3 (3).

Brotherhood of the Black Sword: Erenlander Ftr4/Lgt3/Sbr4 (1), Erenlander Ftr4/Lgt3/Sbr2 (3), Erenlander Ftr4/Lgt3/Sbr1 (8), human (mixed) Ftr4/Lgt3 (6), human (mixed) Ftr2/Lgt3 (13), human (mixed) Ftr1/Lgt3 (26), human (mixed) Ftr5 (7), human (mixed) Ftr3 (14), human (mixed) Ftr1 (28), human (mixed) War1 (51).

Others: Bbn10 (1), Bbn8 (1), Bbn5 (2), Bbn4 (2), Bbn3 (4), Bbn2 (4), Bbn1 (16), Chr6 (2), Chr3 (4), Chr1 (8), Def8 (1), Def4 (2), Def2 (4), Def1 (8), Ftr9 (1), Ftr6 (2), Ftr4 (2), Ftr2 (4), Ftr1 (4), Lgt6 (2), Lgt5 (2), Lgt4 (2), Lgt3 (8), Lgt2 (4), Lgt1 (24), Rog12 (1), Rog10 (1), Rog7 (1), Rog6 (2), Rog5 (2), Rog4 (4), Rog3 (8), Rog2 (8), Rog1 (32), Wld8 (1), Wld7 (1), Wld4 (4), Wld2 (8), Wld1 (16), Ari10 (1), Ari9 (1), Ari5 (4), Ari3 (8), Ari1 (71), Com15 (1), Com14 (1), Com 8 (2), Com7 (2), Com4 (8), Com2 (16), Com1 (6229), Exp8 (2), Exp6 (2), Exp5 (2), Exp4 (4), Exp3 (8), Exp2 (8), Exp1 (412), War14 (1), War8 (1), War7 (2), War4 (6), War2 (12), War1 (102). Most of Cruach Emyn's commoners are slaves; most of its experts are smiths, armorers, or other types of metalworkers.

CHAPTER 1

The City Wards

The city of Cruach Emyn actually covers two hills and the surrounding lands that lie between the Be'neeya and Coinlin rivers. A fortified wall broken by frequent guard towers surrounds the city demesne and is pierced by three gates to the north, east, and south. A second wall encircles the top of the larger of the hills, Castle Hill, which is accessed by a gatehouse called the Prince's Gate.

The city can be broadly described in three parts: The Hill, referring to the area atop Castle Hill and within the inner walls; Lowtown, which encompasses all that lies between the inner and the outer walls; and the Sprawl, used expansively to indicate all that lies beyond the city walls but is within sight of the city. These areas are further divided into a number of wards, each with its own distinct character that is defined by its occupants or the major activities that take place there. The Hill encompasses the Ceannai, Quill, Garden, Temple, and Castle Wards. Lowtown includes Gibbet's Hill, Market Quarter, the Winde, the Anvil, and the three gate wards. Lastly, the river communities of Durga and Breantas are included in the Sprawl, as is the charcoal burner's shantytown that is the Sprawl proper.

The architecture of Steel Hill is uniformly grim, accentuated by the ever-present fog, blanketing wood smoke, and perpetually brooding iron-gray skies. Most houses are two-story affairs, with the ground floor typically constructed from gray stone and the upper story from wood. Roofs are covered with stone slates or bark shingles. Color, never a prominent feature in Steel Hill, seems to have all but leached from the city since the Shadow claimed it. The signboards of those shops and taverns that are still open favor muted browns and greens, and are often stained gray with smoke and grime.

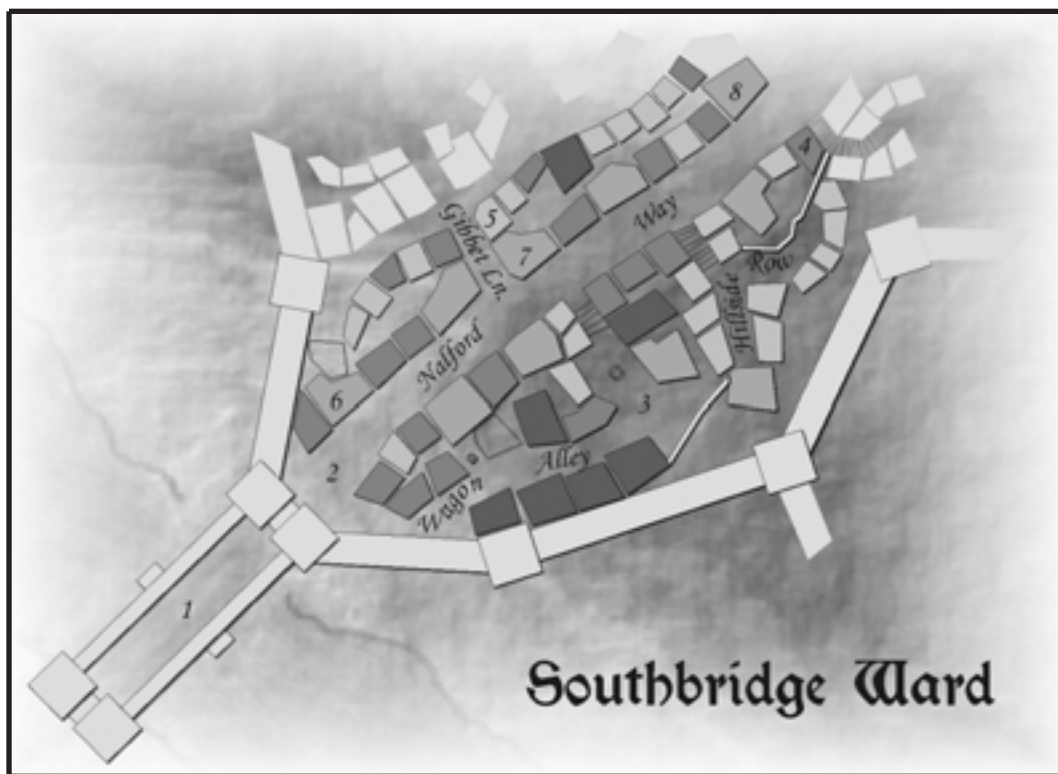
Before the Betrayal, Steel Hill rang with the sound of hammer on anvil by day and the carousing of its inhabitants by night. The city under Aushav's rule is a different place altogether; many of the shops and work-

shops that once bustled with business and activity are now deserted, boarded up, or burned-out shells. Only those merchants and tradesmen who provide basic goods or who serve the Shadow still remain.

While there once seemed to be as many taverns or inns as there were houses, those establishments are greatly reduced in number. With few casual visitors to the city, only a handful of inns still operate, and those taverns that yet trade are marked by somber atmosphere, poor fare, and watered-down ale. The city's taverns fall into three groups. Those in the gate wards and Gibbet's Hill are frequented by the orcs and oruks of the legion. On the Hill, taverns of generally higher quality cater to the Bloodguard, legates, and cronies of the Traitor Prince. Finally, scattered throughout most wards but concentrated in the Winde, the worst taverns provide meager refuge for freemen and indentured servants, who are all that remain of Steel Hill's indigenous people.

Lowtown

Almost all the streets of Lowtown are cobbled, but mud and sewage are an ever-present nuisance. The main streets are often ankle-deep in mud, horse droppings, and effluent overflowing from the city's inadequate sewer system. The less well-trodden side streets are better, but the frequent rain quickly turns these into streams of filth. As a result, travel about the city is usually a slow and messy affair during spring and summer, and is downright dangerous in the winter when the muck freezes solid. To make matters worse, many of the streets, particularly in the Gibbet's Hill district and about the flank of Castle Hill, are steep; the inclines of the roads and inconveniently placed steps make it difficult for carts and carriages to progress.



Southbridge Ward

Southbridge ward was once a prosperous area, being the only route out of the city across the Be'neeya and towards Nalford, Cale, and the Eris Aman. Southbridge is now as seedy and run down as the rest of city, containing many deserted residences, shops, and workshops. Southbridge is still the first stopping point within the city walls for merchandise coming up the river, as well as for the food-bearing wagons that arrive weekly from the outlying villages. Much of this produce makes its way into the Market Quarter, but the merchants and wagon drivers also store their wares in a block of warehouses nestled at the foot of Castle Hill.

1. Southbridge Gate

Southbridge Gate leads directly to Nalford Way and from there into Market Square. Its heavy gates are made from fire-hardened oak and banded with steel. Above, a stone gatehouse squats menacingly, guarding the fortified bridge that spans the River Be'neeya. The merchants and river gnomes who ply the Be'neeya must pass under the forbidding bridge to enter Steel Hill, past the scrutiny of the vindictive orcs who guard it. The Southbridge is constructed of stone and wooden planking, and is wide enough to accommodate two wagons side-by-side. A second gatehouse guards the far end of the bridge, and like its twin consists of several guardrooms and barracks. The gatehouses are pierced by

arrow slits, and murder holes open onto the bridge below. Massive iron portcullises act as a secondary barrier if the great gates are breached. The gatehouses are garrisoned by orcs from the Splintered Skull legion.

Outside the city, Nalford Way climbs into the Lia Rudh Emyn, passing beneath watchful eyes in Tol Be'neeya. This road is infrequently traveled past the southern villages; it leads, after many days travel, past the demon-haunted ruins of Cale. The river settlement of Durga lies off Nalford Way, in view of Southbridge.

2. Harlot's Place

The first sight to greet a visitor coming through the Southbridge gate is Harlot's Place. Here, tired-looking whores stand forlornly in doorways or hang unenthusiastically out of windows, staring at passers-by. Two competing madams run brothels overlooking the cobbled square. Their girls attempt to catch the eyes of visiting clansmen, merchants, and farmers, although the unremitting misery of the city tends to dampen most peoples' lust. Passing orcs offer derisive comments, but are unlikely to pay for services that they can simply take at whim from the women of the surrounding communities.

3. Cavern Square

Cavern Square is named for the caves that lie off its cobbled yard, their entrances sealed by large wooden doors. Only merchants from the remaining clans of

House Falon are given the privilege of using the caves as warehouses; others must make do with the warehouses lining Wagon Alley as it runs into the square. It is a closely guarded secret of the merchants that a hidden passage leads from one of the caves to Temple Ward. The legates are unaware of this tunnel.

4. Nutha the Scabbard Maker

Old Nutha sells many different leather goods but specializes in scabbards, tool belts, and harnesses for horses and oxen. The diminutive leatherworker is widely regarded for the quality of his work, and is patronized by orcs and human guardsmen alike.

5. Riselda's Boarding House

Riselda, with limited help from her infirm mother, runs a boarding house for travelers who stay in the city for extended periods. Riselda demands Aushav's coin or fair value in goods to stay at her lodgings, which are

tired-looking but clean, and are accompanied by better-than-average food. Riselda sometimes allows a lodger to work for his board. The boarding house is over 300 years old and has seen better days. It is not uncommon to see boarders repairing the roof or caulking windows and doors.

6. Prince's Man Inn

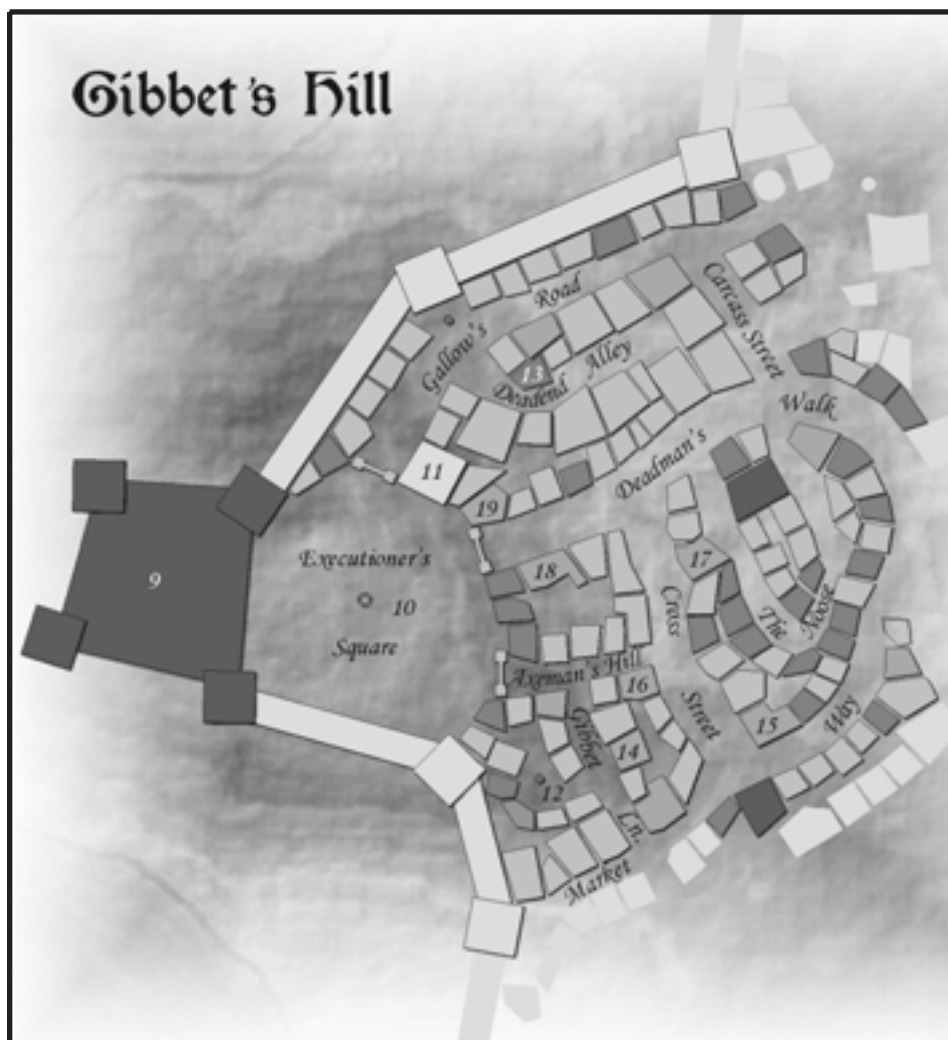
One of the few remaining inns of the city, this is used mostly by human merchants and agents of the Shadow who have business within the city.

7. Hanged Man Tavern

A weasel-like man named Garba runs this seedy tavern. His establishment is sycophantically tailored to the tastes of orcs, and is often frequented by those who are supposed to be on patrol or who have just gotten off duty from Southbridge gate. Humans who cross the threshold into Garba's place can expect a hard welcome from his patrons.

8. Blood Moon Tavern

As Garba's place favors the orcs of the Splintered Skull legion, the nearby Blood Moon tavern, run by the Erenlander Ottal Underbek, is polarized toward the humans of Aushav's soldiery. The troops use the tavern both to relax and for the opportunity it presents for spying on the orcs. The patrons of the Blood Moon give orcs a cold reception on the odd occasion that one steps inside looking for trouble.



Gibbet's Hill

Built upon the lower of Cruach Emy'n's hills, this ward was once called Warrior's Mount. Here, the pride of House Falon trained within the formidable Bastion and



Law and Order

The Bloodguard and the orc legion seem to compete for the position of the most brutal enforcers of the laws of the Night Kings. Trials, when they occur, are a mockery of justice, intended only to further break the spirit of the enslaved populace. The Voices of the Shadow oversee most trials and executions in Cruach Emyr. The captains of the Bloodguard are also authorized to dispense justice within Aushav's dominion. The orcs, meanwhile, do all they can to hinder and undermine the humans' authority: carrying out summary executions in the street, keeping the black-clad priests waiting in Executioner's Square before bringing out the prisoners from the Bastion's dungeons, enacting executions before the presiding legate has finished his dire proclamations, and so on. Because the orcs have such a strong power base in Steel Hill and Dorgath's is so eroded, the legates are usually helpless to punish such acts of insubordination. Fear of reprisals from the orcs and reluctance to draw attention to themselves from the high priests of Theros Obsidia prevents most legates from doing anything to upset the status quo.

lived in neat, utilitarian houses built upon the flank of the hill. Since the Shadow's rule began, the name of Warrior's Mount has been forgotten. As the humans abandoned the area to the orcs, the once well-kept houses and shops fell into disrepair. The Bastion too is falling to ruin, fit only to shelter carrion birds. The grand parade grounds, once used by proud Dornish warriors, are the stage for weekly executions that have given the ward its new name of Gibbet's Hill. Only the desperate and despicable still reside here.

9. Bastion (The Rookery)

Once the main garrison of Steel Hill's standing army, the Bastion has been largely neglected by the orcs, who prefer to dwell beneath the ground. The Legion of the Splintered Skull has excavated the already extensive basements and under-cellars of the fortress, and eventually connected them with the natural cave systems that riddle Gibbet's Hill. The orcs use the ground floor of the Bastion to come and go from their subterranean lair, but have left the upper stories to crumble. As a result, the towers and walls of the ancient fort are in poor repair, and the upper levels have been colonized by hundreds of rooks, ravens, and crows that swarm in the skies above the city. These raucous carrion birds have given the Bastion its more common name: the Rookery.

It is common knowledge that the Raven Crone Morgatha dwells in the upper stories of the Rookery, and that the birds serve her as emissaries and spies. The people of Steel Hill often refer to ravens as "Morgatha's Eyes" and make signs to ward off evil in their presence.

10. Executioner's Square

This square, which in Eden Falon's time served as a parade ground for Steel Hill's soldiers, houses a multitude of murder devices, including several gibbets. The three main avenues into the square pass under forbidding arches adorned with the heads of previous victims of the headsman's block.

A staggering number of executions take place atop Gibbet's Hill, at least three per week, and quite an industry has built up around these gruesome spectacles. Sellers of food and grisly keepsakes and charms work the crowd along with pickpockets and spies of one faction or another. Many have muttered aloud about the Prince's injustice while watching a comrade hang, only to be overheard and find themselves as the main attraction, charged with treason, at the next execution.

11. Bell Tower

The bell in this tower rings only one day of the week; on execution day the bells start their ominous toll at the first hint of dawn, and continue to peal, slowly, until the last execution of the day has taken place.

12. Corpse Yard

Victims of Executioner's Square are brought here via Bloodstain Alley, a small passage that runs between an abandoned house and a chandler's shop. In this narrow yard, they are loaded onto carts to be taken to the Gardens of Death for disposal. The yard owner, Donn, lives in a small house overlooking his workplace, and could be considered the city's undertaker.

13. Tattooist

Taren, an elderly Dorn who still wears House Falon colors, is a master of traditional Dornish tattooing. Many freemen of the Clans bear his work with pride. Taren will not tattoo the symbols of the exiled clans, nor any other device that could be considered insulting to the city's cruel masters. Taren is also a master of herbal tattooing, a skill passed down from his father, who himself learned in the company of the Danisil. The powers granted by these marks are valued by the enemies of the Shadow; obviously, the old man does not advertise this ability, and only uses his skills for those he trusts.

Inns and Taverns of Gibbet's Hill

Gibbet's Hill's drinking establishments are all very similar: grim, grimy, and frequented by orcs. Humans would be foolish to enter many of the taverns in this district. Fighting and bloody games of chance are common and the proprietors are hard pressed to keep their hired help because of abuse from their patrons. Out of desperation, most resort to slaves or take on debtors as indentured servants. Such servants not only feel little to no loyalty to the masters who put them in harm's way, but channel their hatred of their orcish tormentors toward them. This arrangement creates a bleak cycle of misery within the profession, making it as grim as any other in Steel Hill.

14. The Nine Cats Tavern

Halfway along Gibbet Lane, the sign of this establishment depicts nine unfortunate felines hanging from a gallow's arm. The dimly lit, filthy interior does little to lift the morbid air of this tavern.

15. The Jolly Orc Tavern

The sign of the Jolly Orc shows a grinning orc, covered in blood and brandishing a vardatch above his head. The Jolly Orc is noted for its oft-violent games of chance. These mostly revolve around knives or throwing axes, and typically lead to massive blood loss.

16. The Dorn's Head Tavern

The sign of the Dorn's Head is illustrated with a severed and bloody human head held by an orcish hand. The sign is not very popular in the city and it has been vandalized or destroyed countless times. Some of the younger Dorns consider it a right of passage to steal, deface, or destroy the sign. Those that fail are normally used by the orcs as entertainment.

17. The Burning Elf Inn

Another hostelry whose sign is designed to appeal to the orcish warriors of Steel Hill, the sign of the Burning Elf depicts one of the fey screaming in agony as flames engulf him. The inn is favored by Logdur's warband, and there is likely to be at least a dozen of his orcs here at any given time. The inn offers rooms, but any non-orc would have to be truly desperate before thinking of staying here.

18. The Blood Axe Tavern

Aerik Garanson is the owner of the Blood Axe, which stands at the top of Deadman's Walk near where the main arch opens into Executioner's Square. Aerik was recently injured when one of his slaves attacked him with a kitchen knife. The Dorn's left arm has become all but useless since the attack, which severed several major nerves in his shoulder. He hopes to one

Imprisonment

There are holding cells in the gatehouses of the city gates, and each ward of Lowtown has a guardhouse manned by orcs or Bloodguards, depending on which military force holds sway there. The cells are basic but secure; most are windowless, stone-lined pits in underground chambers, while the above-ground rooms boast only small, barred windows. There are further dungeons beneath Castle Falon, the Bastion, and the Temple of Shadow, where unfortunates sentenced to torture or longer imprisonment are incarcerated. Criminals considered dangerous, such as resistance fighters, are taken to one of these dungeons; which one is dependant on the force that captured them. Jail breaks from the guardhouses are not uncommon, but escaping from the prisons is almost unheard of. The disappearance of the smith Cullan is the most recent and notable escape from the castle's infamous dungeons.



day be able to bribe a legate or pay a channeler in order to have it healed; of late, he has been keeping a close eye on his patrons to see if any who come to watch their kin be hanged might have rewards on their heads. He wouldn't be above framing a patron if he thought he could claim his belongings after the unfortunate was taken away by the authorities.

19. The Gallows Inn

The Gallows is the only true inn in this part of the city, and offers accommodation in a common dormitory or in one of eight private rooms. The proprietor, Fynd McHail, charges extra for a room with a view over Executioner's Square. The accommodation isn't fancy, but is at least clean and relatively free of vermin. The inn's clientele are primarily travelers or those with business at the Bastion.

Market Quarter

In the days of Eden the Maidensword, the Market Quarter was a hive of activity. Each day saw a market of a slightly different character, where merchandise from the length and breadth of Eredane could be found. After more than a hundred years under the Shadow's yoke, Market Quarter is a pale reflection of that vibrant place. Slaves and food are now the chief commodities sold in the market square. Craftsmen still barter their products at the twice-weekly market, but choice is limited and prices are exorbitant. Farmers from the outlying villages pay heavy tithes to Aushav's regime, but what little they have left after feeding their own is traded in the Market Quarter for desperately needed tools and clothing.

20. Market Square

Slaves are sold here one day each week, while normal goods are bartered and sold twice per week. The slave market is a recurrent reminder of Dornish shame. Goblin slavers, bolstered by brutish orc soldiers and human mercenaries, escort slaves from the pens outside the city to the auction block in the center of the square. Individual bidders and representatives from the mines, foundries, and temple review the latest stock and bid for fresh slaves to replace those lost to exhaustion, accident, and sacrifice. The market also attracts a large number of spectators; a pathetic and all too frequent scene is that of a family trying, vainly, to buy back a loved one's freedom.

21. Granaries

Seed and grain from tithes are stockpiled in these large, circular stone buildings. Such is the scarcity of food that the doors are guarded day and night by orcs or oruks to prevent the often starving citizens from attempting to seize the grain.

22. Belgan's Bath House

Due to the filth in the city and the lack of inns, Market Quarter's bathhouse remains busy. Bathers can also have their clothes cleaned here or have simple repairs made. Belgan, a sleazy looking Erenlander, keeps a bevy of fairly healthy young Dornish maids to help run the establishment; for those willing to pay, massages and other personal services are made available.

23. Guardhouse

This former guildhall for House Redgard merchants is now a guardhouse and barracks for the orcs who patrol Market Quarter. The lower windows of the crumbling building have been barred and the doors reinforced. The orcs hold prisoners in the guildhall's cellars until judgment has been passed by the ranking orc or a passing legate. Those found guilty (the majority) are then transferred to one of the city's prisons to await torture and execution.

24. Strachan's Pride

Strachan's pride is owned by Brin of Clan Strachan. The clan has a number of businesses in the city, and its clansmen are often in Brin's place. It is rare

to see patrons in this tavern who do not wear the Strachan plaid.

25. The Barley Mow Tavern

The Barley Mow is one of the oldest taverns in the city. It has survived due to the quality of its ales and food. The Mow is often the first stop of visiting merchants. If you're looking for entertainment, you've come to the wrong place. The Mow is more a place to eat a good meal and drink quietly.

26. The Roasted Ox Tavern

A nondescript tavern that has the cheapest (and worst) ale in the ward. Roasted ox is not, nor in living memory has it ever been, on the hostelry's menu. The Ox primarily provides service to poorly paid workers, drovers, and merchant guards, but will cater to anyone with coin or tradable goods.

27. The Ore Cart Inn

On the corner of Market Street and Smith's Square stands Rochad MacCor's inn, the Ore Cart. The MacCors are an influential family of Clan Kalle, and Rochad's business is important to the clan's fortunes: many of the city's most powerful merchants and caravan-masters stay at the Cart. Two huge clansmen, dressed in Kalle tartan, often stand guard at the Ore Cart. These are Rochad's cousins, Guaire and Oengus, and they are very effective at keeping the peace in his establishment.

28. The Red Boar

The Red Boar is struggling to survive, which shows in its run-down façade and dirty interior. The owner, Torald, is desperate for money to repair the building and improve the Boar's image. Torald worries that he will have to close his business, and fears what his lenders will do to him if that happens. Torald's financial problems (and the fear of ending his days toiling in the mines) make him vulnerable to manipulation.

The Winde

The Winde has always been the main residential area for the common folk of Cruach Emyrn. This is still the case under Aushav's rule, although the conditions under which they live are far worse than those in Eden's day. The sanitation system is more dilapidated in this ward than anywhere else in the city other than the Sprawl, where the streets are open sewers. The houses and tenements of the Winde are so closely packed that many streets are permanently hidden from the rare

The Prince's Coin

Steel Hill has one of the few functioning economies north of the Pellurian Sea. In one of his more lucid moments, Prince Aushav created a currency based on iron coins to support the flow of goods and services in the industrial town. The coins are cast in a well-guarded mint situated beneath Castle Falon, and vary in size and value. From large to small, the coins are gilden, sproats, and cruks, equating to the gold, silver and copper coins of the old Erenland economy, respectively. These tokens typically have two impressions: on one side, the loathsome horned symbol of Izrador glares balefully; the other is marked with the hammer and pick emblem of House Falon. The coins are used throughout Steel Hill and Tarish, and are accepted in villages within approximately three days travel (50 miles) of Steel Hill.

The economy works because Aushav wants it to work. Iron coins can buy a meal, drink, small everyday items, and simple services (a day's work, delivery of a message, and the like). Merchants dare not deny the iron coins; those who do wind up in Executioner's Square. Still, while small purchases are made using the Prince's coin, major transactions are still conducted by bartering of goods and services.

appearances of the sun. The buildings stand more by dint of leaning against one another than through the use of mortar, and collapsing buildings are a constant danger. Fire is also a hazard in the Winde, as wood is used more prevalently in construction here than elsewhere in Steel Hill. Fortunately, the wet climate of the Lia Rudh Emyrn and the sodden, rotting timbers of the houses invariably mean fires are short-lived and relatively contained. This is fortunate, as there is little in the way of organized fire-fighting capability in the Winde.

The Winde can be extremely dangerous due to the desperation of its inhabitants and the lack of orc patrols, who consider the ward unimportant. Ironically, this depraved slum boasts the closest thing to freedom for the beleaguered populace of Steel Hill, and they guard it fiercely. A visitor to the city, particularly a servant of the Shadow, would be ill-advised to travel the Winde alone.



31. The Monarch of the Glen Tavern

The faded sign of this unassuming tavern depicts a majestic stag atop a hill. Popular with the locals of the Winde, the cellars of this busy alehouse hide a secret entrance to the sewers, which in turn lead to the labyrinthine caves that delve beneath the city. The tavern's owner, Dhairmud MacCuhl, is a resistance sympathizer and, unbeknownst to even his closest kin, an agent of the Lord of Rags.

29. The Cinder

Halfway along Cut-Throat Alley, a wide area of blackened stones and charred timbers mark the Cinder. The ground in this area is unstable, owing to the fact that collapsing structures have weakened the supports and struts in the sewers, cellars, and sub-basements that lie beneath. The ground has sunk in many places, and subsidence is an ongoing peril in this part of the Winde.

There are rumors that the falling buildings in the Cinder have opened up entrances to ancient and long forgotten catacombs that lie below the deepest sub-basement of the ward. Here, the stories suggest, the enigmatic Lord of Rags holds court among the urchins, cripples, and vagabonds. Whatever truth the tales hold, gangs of the dispossessed haunt the ruins, and even the hardened residents of the Winde avoid this desolate place.

30. Ralgan's Hole

This old warehouse hides a den of iniquity: a taproom, brothel, gambling hall, and fighting pit can all be found within this apparently abandoned building. The worst elements of the city can be found here, seeking visceral entertainment to enliven their grim existences. Occasionally, members of the Bloodguard visit the Hole to witness brutal fights or to sample the other diversions on offer. They are unwelcome, but the populace fear Aushav's red-cloaked soldiers too much to act openly against them. However, it is telling that the Bloodguard never frequent the Hole in parties fewer than ten.

Ralgan, a thickset Dorn of Clan Kalle, runs the Hole. It is said he can acquire any number of contraband items or information, for the right price. Other rumors suggest that Raglan serves the secretive Lord of Rags; the quietest whispers speculate that the grim-faced Dorn is the king of the beggars himself.

Ore—Gate Ward

Ore Gate provides the only entry into the city from the north. Beyond its heavy, scarred gates, Ore Street spills into the ragged shanty of the Sprawl. After passing through this human cesspool, the Road of the Damned winds northward to Tarish and the mines, from which wagons laden with iron ore and crude ingots arrive regularly. Once through the Ore Gate, all wagon contents are inspected and inventoried before being distributed to the warehouses and foundries. To ensure that nothing hinders the efficient distribution of these raw materials, slave gangs labor in all weather to keep this ward free of the mud and debris that clog the thoroughfares elsewhere in the city. Those guards that pull the unlucky duty of supervising them are nearly as miserable, and take out their woes on the workers beneath them.

An army of officials oversees the movement of resources from the mines to the foundries and, subsequently, the distribution of newly-forged armaments to the merchant coasters of March Ward. These administrators, tally masters, scribes, and inspectors work within a complex hierarchy beset with bureaucracy and inefficiency. Bribery and corruption are rife, as the city's political factions vie to control the lifeblood of Steel Hill and grasp what power they can. Consequently, this smallest of the city's wards is crowded with people; some conduct legitimate business, but many are spies and agents, employed in bribing or threatening officials and keeping an eye on the activities of their masters' rivals. Despite the Machiavellian complexity of these interactions, the foundries are kept well supplied and maintain a surprising level of productivity. The efficiency of the foundries' operation is in no small part due to the presence of the dwarves of Dorin Clan. The fiery tempers and sadistic punishments doled out by these "Black Bloods" ensure that their requirements are

quickly met, no matter what other political considerations might be at stake.

32. Ore Gate

Massive wooden gates and a heavy portcullis can be used to close off the northern entrance to the city. A fist of orcs mans the gatehouse and inspects all incoming traffic. These guards can call upon reinforcements from a barracks at the far end of Ore Street. The gates are closed at dusk and opened during the hours of darkness only for orcs or, begrudgingly, members of the Bloodguard.

33. Counting House

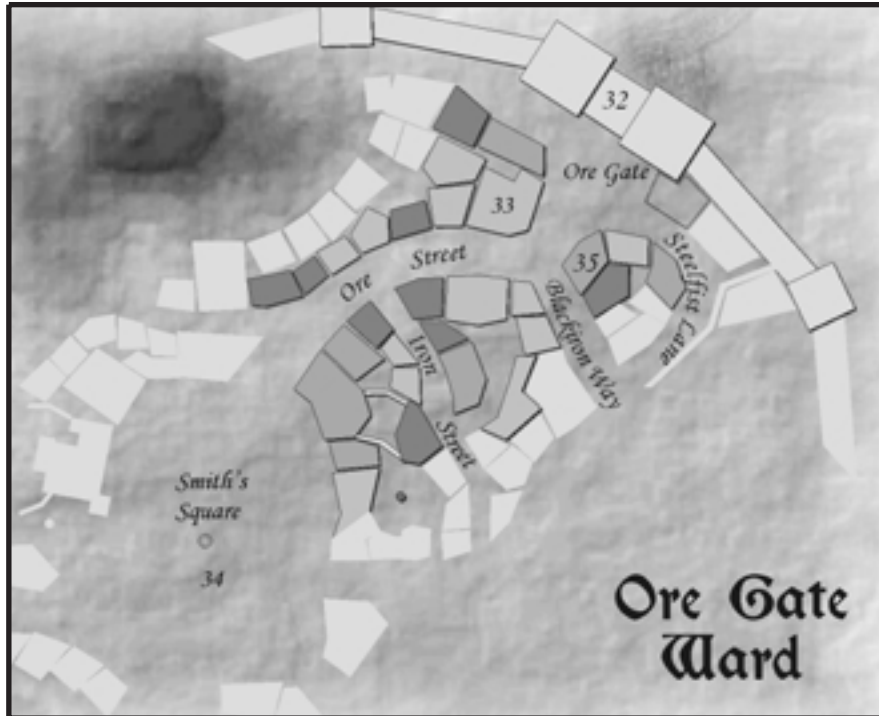
The Counting house is the main administrative building in the ward. The office is run by members of House Falon, but is inspected weekly by legates. The records stored here would likely be highly prized by any of the city's factions, and certainly by resistance forces.

34. Smith's Square

This square was once the haunt of the smiths and other artisans of the city. A great fountain and majestic trees provided pleasant surroundings for these hard-working, honored members of society to come and eat, drink, and talk during their midday rest. Now, Smith's Square is a barren, cobbled expanse; the trees and fountains are gone, and the descendents of those smiths and artisans are slaves, indentured servants or, at best, freemen with little true freedom at all. Now the square is used as a staging ground for loading and unloading ore from the mines or as a meeting ground for the representatives from merchant coasters to bid for cargo.

35. The Merry Miner

The ruddy faced, broadly grinning man depicted on this tavern's sign bears no resemblance to any of the slaves who labor to their deaths in Steel Hill's mines. Only wagon drivers and travelers from Tarish frequent the Merry Miner; none of its namesakes have entered the tavern since the end of the Third Age.



The Anvil

If Ore Gate and the Quill Ward are the administrative centers of the city, then the Anvil is the city's pulsing heart. It is home to Steel Hill's foundries, which belch smoke day and night, and its masters preside over an almost unbroken stream of wagons laden with arms and armor leaving March Gate. Dawn and dusk sees scores of laborers streaming into and out of the ward as the grueling twelve-hour shifts come to an end for the smiths, furnace stokers, charcoal carriers, and the like.

This ward is also the location of Aushav's Pit, a combat arena built in the style of the great Sarcosan cities of the south. Weekly battles take place within the arena, and these constitute the only form of officially sanctioned entertainment in Steel Hill other than the public executions of Gibbet's Hill.

The Anvil is heavily patrolled by orcs and members of the Bloodguard, each protecting the foundries and their respective masters' interests.

36. Aushav's Pit

Aushav's Pit resembles the Sarcosan fighting arenas of Southern Erenland. The Pit is a large open area surrounded by tiers of uncomfortable stone seats. A covered box over the entrance tunnel to the arena provides more comfort to the privileged of Steel Hill. Entry to the arena is free, Aushav's gift to the people of Steel Hill. The pit attracts all sorts of competition, from bare-knuckle fighting to full-scale gladiatorial combat. The contests are ostentatious, wildly unmatched, and tend to



focus on wanton destruction and maximum bloodshed rather than skill at arms. Those seeking more professional blood sports go to the fighting pits of Tarish.

37. Ironhammer Foundry

The largest of the city's foundries is directly overseen by the leader of the Dorin Clan dwarves, Halding Ironhammer, and is widely recognized as producing the best weapons and armor in Steel Hill. The foundry has two main working areas: a large, general foundry of many forges used for large-scale production, and a smaller forge, used exclusively by the Black Bloods. This private forge is isolated from the main foundry and guarded by two massive ogres.

38. Blackiron Foundry

Blackiron Foundry fashions most of the armor and weapons used by the Bloodguard, as well as contributing to armaments for the war. Blackiron is overseen by Padris Falon, a blood relative of Prince Aushav who rarely leaves the Anvil for fear that his rivals or even his servants will sabotage the foundry. As all profits from Blackiron flow into House Falon's (in reality, Aushav's) coffers, Padris is terrified of how the Prince might react should productivity drop. The prematurely aged Dorn knows that his blood ties mean nothing to Aushav.

39. Steelfist Foundry

The foundry of Steelfist is overseen by members of Clan Strachan. Most of the foundry's weapons are sent south to support Jahzir's armies, but the Strachans are able to make a considerable profit by selling the remainder to approved clan and mercenary forces. The foundry had trouble in the past with illegal production and smuggling of weapons, and its records and shipments are now closely scrutinized.

40. Smith Street

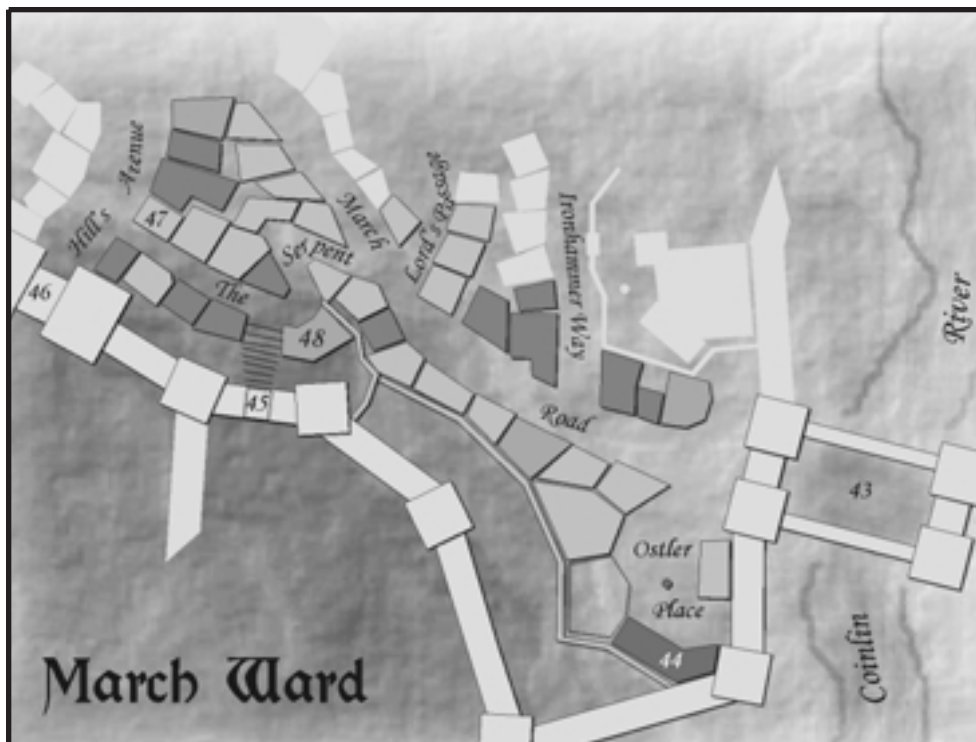
The rumble of wagons and the shouts of workers are seemingly ever-present in Smith Street. Red-cloaked Bloodguards and black-armored orcs glower at one another while slave gangs toil beneath the whip to keep the street clear—nothing must hinder the flow of arms to the waiting armies in the south.

41. Smith's Rest Tavern

Arguably the best tavern in the Anvil, the Smith's Rest is frequented by off-duty workers from the foundries. The Rest lives up to its name, offering a relaxing haven where talk is relatively free. The proprietor, Tadhg MacHeirt, was once a forge master at the Steelfist Foundry, and he ensures that the freemen get good return for their coin. Tadhg has used his influence to keep soldiers out of the tavern; so long as there is no trouble, the Rest is left alone. The regulars know the score, and quickly force any trouble out onto Smith Street for the guards to deal with brutally.

42. The Pit Fighter Tavern

As its name suggests, this tavern caters to those who attend or fight in Aushav's Pit, though its proprietor is happy to serve any with coin to spend. Freemen, lords off the Hill, blood riders, Bloodguards, and even orcs can be found fraternizing here before and after a gladiatorial spectacle. Those who seek information on the Anvil might glean knowledge by listening in on the conversations in the Pit Fighter's tavern; however, the place is crawling with spies, so anything overheard here is as likely to be misinformation or a purposely leaked secret as it is to be valid or useful intelligence. Agents of the various factions of Steel Hill, Prince Samael, Theros Obsidia, and the resistance movements all rub elbows in the Pit Fighter.



March Ward

The March ward is the main entrance into Steel Hill. Travelers from the south and east tend to avoid Ore Gate and its heavy, local traffic, besides which, March ward provides the fastest access to the Anvil and the Hill. Corrals, merchant coasters, warehouses, small general stores, and inspection stations dominate the district. Those seeking an inn and not employed by one of the transport companies, who often have quarters for their employees locally, must look further into the city. Merchants from all the major clans have warehouses and offices in the March Ward.

43. March Gate

From Smith's Square, March Street leads to a fortified bridge, similar in construction to Southbridge, which crosses the Coinlin River. March Gate Bridge is the main point of entry into Steel Hill. From its gates, the Iron Road wends its way through the Lía Rudh Emyr toward the grasslands of Northern Erenland and Bastion.

March Gate is garrisoned by the Bloodguard, who maintain a sizeable force in the gatehouses and adjoining fortified buildings. Orcs control the other two gates into the city, including the strategically important Ore Gate. Even though the legion controls Southbridge, and therefore access to Durga and the Be'neeya, little weaponry leaves by this route: the orcs fear the water, and cannot adequately guard shipments heading south

by river. As a result, most of the city's arms leave by March Gate and travel the Iron Road in heavily guarded caravans. The status quo is precariously balanced, with the orcs controlling the flow of ore into the city and the Bloodguard controlling the flow of arms out.

44. Loeg's Wagons and Guards

Loeg Kalle runs a transport company that is kept busy carrying arms and armor south to Fallport and Highwall. The coaster owns a stable and staging yard off Ostler

Place; next door is a large building in which Loeg quarters his men. A small taproom offers cheap food and beer of surprisingly good quality, while a common room above provides rudimentary accommodations for the drivers and guards of Loeg's caravans. In the back, a locked room serves as armory. It contains weapons, armor, and supplies that Loeg loans to his hired toughs while they are in his employ; this is a hollow boon, because between abuse by orcs, attacks by beasts and fell along the road, and raids by the resistance, the average life expectancy after signing on with Loeg is about three arcs. Loeg's quartermaster is a hard man called Ild MacBannoch. He runs a tight ship with no room for waste or inefficiency. Ild's frugal nature is legendary; dented or ripped armor is repaired and nicks in axes and swords are painstakingly ground out. Although the equipment provided at Loeg's is old and has seen plenty of use, it is clean and serviceable.

45. Garden Gate

Rising sharply from the winding lane known as the Serpent, steps lead to a small postern gate in the high wall circumscribing the Hill. A short passage opens into the overgrown forest of the Gardens of Death. From within the shadowy foliage, the shuffling and moaning of dead things can be heard. The deep arch is blocked by a portcullis of remarkably thick steel. The Bloodguard commander of Prince's Gate and Donn the undertaker both have keys to this locked gate.

Bearing Weapons in Steel Hill

Steel Hill and its demesne is a dangerous place, plagued by monsters and troubled by rebels and insurgents. The city's masters realize that they cannot adequately patrol such a vast and labyrinthine land, but still require that merchants carrying arms and armor vital to the war effort make their way south unscathed. Consequently, the laws concerning humans bearing weapons are more lenient here than elsewhere under the Shadow's occupation. As usual, legates are exempt from all weapon restrictions. Clansmen loyal to House Falon and mercenaries in the pay of sanctioned merchant coasters are allowed to bear arms outside the city walls, but not within. Inside the city, all weapons must be surrendered at the city gates or to the quartermasters of the various coasters. In certain cases, humans may benefit from exemptions: these include the nobles of clans Kalle and Strachan, any humans directly within the service of the Order of Shadow or Aushav, and of course the Bloodguard. Even for these few, all weapons must be bonded (secured to prevent them being easily freed for use. In game terms, readying a bonded weapon is a full-round action and provokes attacks of opportunity.) These individuals must, at all times, carry a letter of authority signed by an official. Given the antagonism between the various military forces, being found without such papers can be a death warrant. It is not unknown for a clansman to be imprisoned or summarily executed by orcs who claim that the human in question wasn't in possession of the correct papers, or that the papers were forged. As most orcs are illiterate, such assertions are obviously fiction, and incidents like these have done little to ease racial tensions in the city.

46. Prince's Gate

Hill Avenue rises sharply from Smith's Square to the impressive gatehouse known as Prince's Gate. A massive arch yawns like a dragon's maw with a half-glimpsed portcullis serving as its teeth. The Prince's Gate is manned by a cadre of Bloodguards. At least two of their number, armed with vicious looking halberds and heavy iron longswords, are always at hand to con-

duct an inspection of traffic passing through the gate. Invariably, some traitor or other languishes in a cage hung above the arch. The red-cloaked Bloodguards keep a close eye on the condition of the gate's human decorations; as soon as they die, the bodies are thrown into the Garden of Death. However, it is not unheard of for a victim of the prince's cages to rise as a Fell before it can be relocated, then to rage and slaver at the living without. This creates no end of problems for the guards, who are faced with removing the dangerous undead unharmed.

47. The Prince's Own Tavern

This small tavern stands halfway up Hill's Avenue, and caters to those who pause to strengthen their resolve before heading up to the Hill. Due to its small size, the tavern has very few places to sit, and there is often a small crowd drinking outside the tavern during daylight hours.

48. The Serpent Tavern

On the winding street known as the Serpent, the hostelry of the same name has no sign or any other outward marking that indicates its business. The owner and his patrons wish to keep the tavern quiet and relatively exclusive. The Serpent is a place where Dorns can talk in relative safety of old glories; rarely are men of other races found here.

The Hill

As a visitor to Steel Hill steps through Prince's Gate, past members of the Bloodguard with their cloaks of wool dyed blood-red, it is like stepping into another city. The buildings on the Hill are generally larger, more ornate, and better maintained than those in Lowtown. The cobbled streets are kept relatively clean by work-gangs of slaves who cringe before the whips of mealy-mouthed goblins. The same patina of soot and grime stains the stones of the buildings here, but there is a faded elegance still present on the Hill that is entirely absent from Lowtown.

Ceannai Way

Ceannai Way is no longer the affluent merchant district it once was, but its streets might as well be paved with gold compared to the Market Quarter. Shops selling a wider range of goods can be found here, although the range of choice is still poor and the prices extortionate. Aushav's coins are begrudgingly accepted among the shopkeepers, but bartering is still the preferred mechanism of exchange for expensive items.

49. Tailor

Leontas, a Sarcosan who has been accepted into House Falon, runs this small haberdashery. The shop works almost exclusively for House Falon and the high and mighty of Steel Hill. The tailor claims the best quality cloth from the dyers and weavers of Breantas.

50. Maila the Herbalist

Maila, an Erenlander formerly of Baden's Bluff, runs an herbalist shop that also offers medical services. Maila is a well-respected healer, highly skilled and experienced, who provides medical care to those who do not wish to approach the legates. Maila tries to stay clear of politics; she claims that she is only concerned with her craft. She will buy and sell herbs with no questions asked, but will not see patients outside her house, which is also her shop: Maila is aware that the Order of Shadow is watching her, so she doesn't take unnecessary risks.

51–53. Specialty Merchants

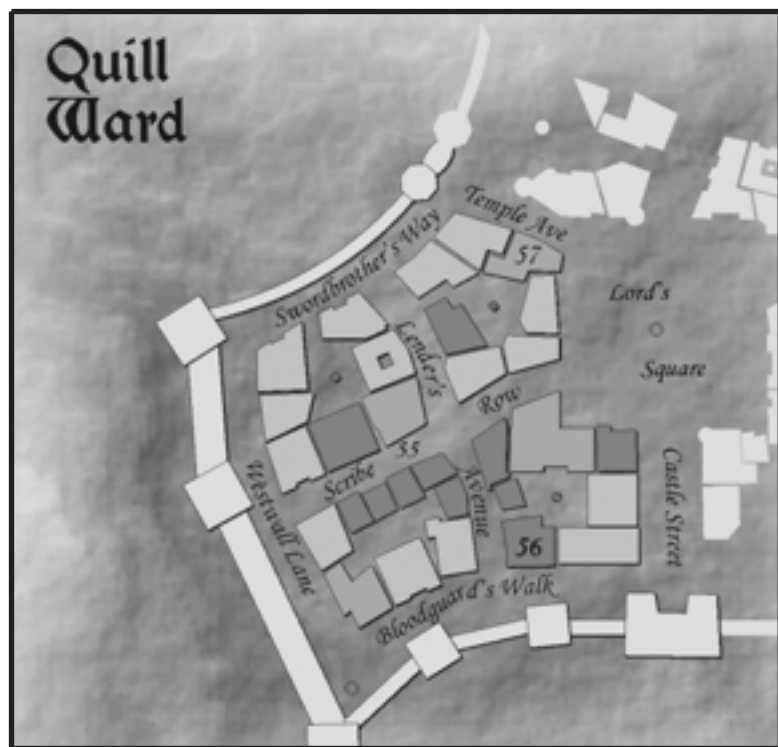
A number of merchants dealing in luxuries available only to those who live on the Hill reside and conduct business along Ceannai Way: tobacco, fine wines, rare food, jewelry, and more are available.

54. The Battered Mug Tavern

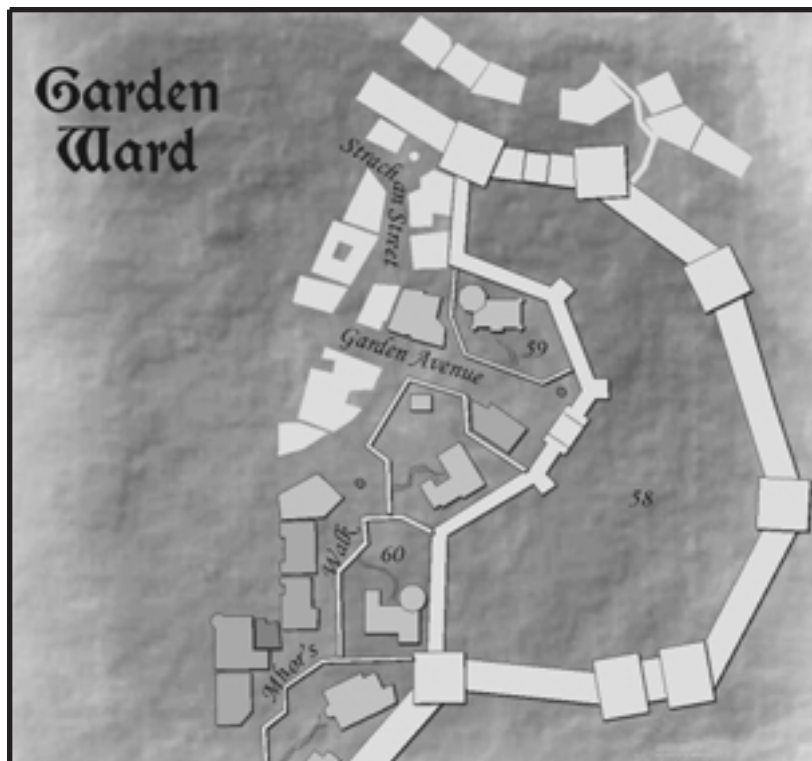
The Battered Mug is the oldest continually operating tavern in Steel Hill. Those who live and work in Quill ward, as well as visiting clansmen, frequent this tavern. Because business is good and his patrons are high-class, the owner is able to serve good meals and quality ale. Legates and blood riders come here only infrequently, allowing the tavern's patrons to pretend that they are good, honest Dorns simply making their way in the world.

Quill Ward

Once literacy was common among the people of Cruach Emyrn, but even then professional scribes were used by most to pen important letters and keep their



records. These scribes worked and lived alongside the other administrators of the city in the appropriately named Quill Ward. Under Izrador's shadow, literacy has all but died out in the north, but even the forces of evil have, on occasion, the need of the written word. The legates called the Voices of Shadow carry out this work and are assisted by a number of layman scribes. These



slaves and freemen live in luxury compared to their fellows who labor in the city's foundries and mines, but their masters are equally unforgiving; punishments meted out by the legates are often more imaginatively cruel than the crude brutality inflicted by orc and goblin lash-masters. Most of the scribes are proficient only in tallying and basic letters, sufficient for them to inventory stock. All missives of import are penned by the Voices themselves.

55. Scribe Row

The buildings of Scribe Row form the administrative heart of Steel Hill. The Voices of Shadow maintain a small chapterhouse on the Row from which they oversee their slave-scribes. Writing can be commissioned at some cost from these scribes; however, any such documents are liable to be read and copied by the Voices of Shadow.

56. Aiffe's Bathhouse

One of the two remaining bathhouses on the Hill, Aiffe's offers many amenities and is frequented by many of the humans who live or work in the upper wards. The bathhouse is also used as a rendezvous by various factions. However, this isn't always a safe place, and political assassinations in the steam rooms are not uncommon. As a result, most conspirators bring bodyguards who hunker uncomfortably in the humid atmosphere while their masters conduct their clandestine business.

57. The Dark Victory

The Dark Victory caters almost exclusively to the Order of Shadow. The Inn was confiscated 30 years ago by legates, and since that time the Dark Victory has been a place for both local and visiting priests to eat and drink in comfort and relative safety. Frizon, an old sword brother, currently runs the inn.

Garden Ward

Garden Ward was the most prestigious residential area of the city prior to the Betrayal, and the ruling families of the House each maintained at least one residence here. The ward's gardens, renowned throughout the North, were open to all. Since Prince Aushav's coup, however, the Garden Ward has become a place of dread and horror. Those clans still loyal to the Prince claim estates here and reside in decadent splendor. The

opulence of the manor houses is countered by horrific Gardens of Death, however, from which the howls of the Fell erupt at night. Those hideous screams are a constant reminder to the nobles that the continuance of their lifestyles, and their very lives, are subject to Aushav's whim.

58. Gardens of Death

The splendid gardens of Cruach Emyr are long since overgrown. Delicate gates that once stood open in welcome are replaced by thick iron grills, and the walls around the garden have been raised and topped by spikes. Arcane symbols that pulse with eldritch power are inscribed intermittently along their length. These wards and fortifications are not intended to keep people out; rather, they are to keep the garden's occupants in. Prince Aushav, in his madness, has decreed that those executed on Gibbet's Hill shall be thrown into the garden. Many rise as Fell. At night the restless dead, mostly mindless, roam the gardens and howl their anguish in an unending caterwaul audible throughout the city. The inhabitants of the Garden Ward welcome violent storms because the wind and rain drown out the screams of the undead.

There are two other entrances into the gardens: a small postern into March Ward and a gatehouse that pierces the city's outer wall. This once grand gatehouse marked the literal and symbolic exit from the city for Steel Hill's dead. The Dorns of Eden's time carried their fallen in elaborate funeral marches that wound through the city districts, passing at last through the fabulous

Gardens of Cruach Emyrn. From here, the dead were carried beneath the ornate gatehouse and along the Path of the Dead to rest, at last, near the clans' ancestor stones. None respect the dead so publicly since the Shadow fell. The gardens, originally intended to ease a soul's passing, now languish in cruel mockery of their noble purpose. Little more than an animal trail remains to make the Path of the Dead, which winds around the southeastern flank of Castle Hill and ends at the enigmatic ancestor stones of Cruach Emyrn.

59. Githuran's Estate

This manor house and its grounds were seized from a noble of Clan Falon after he was executed by Prince Aushav for perceived crimes against the House. The estate was subsequently given to Bazan Githuran, High Captain of Steel Hill. Captain Githuran rarely uses the manor, preferring to be close to his men and lord in the castle. As a result, the estate is remarkably spartan and has an air of abandonment. A small detachment of Bloodguards is stationed at the house to protect it from thieves and spies.

60. Strachan Estate

Brath Strachan is the Mhor of his clan, one of the few to support Aushav during his coup. The Strachans have gained position and wealth by betraying their fellow clans, and the Mhor has interests in most of the city's remaining businesses. The Strachan clansmen are allowed to bear arms, and a small force guards the estate. A larger warband may be mustered from among the clansmen who dwell in the city and in the clan's holdings to the south.

Temple Ward

This walled district was once a wealthy residential area for Steel Hill's elite, and contained the shrines of the clans' honored ancestors. The shrines and many of the fine homes were torn down to make way for the compound of the Temple of Shadowed Steel (*Norther: Scath na'Cruach*). Those that remain serve as residences for the legates and the sword brethren of the Order of the Black Sword. The ward is cut off from the rest of the city by a high stone wall that is patrolled night and day. The Black Gates of the ward are normally kept closed, with only a small postern open for foot traffic.

61. Scath na'Cruach

The Temple of Shadowed Steel is the largest and oldest temple to Izrador in the northern Dornish territories. The temple is a foreboding complex of buildings that seem to resonate with the dark god's

power. Broad steps lead to a massive pair of doors made from black wood studded with iron, which bear the unholy symbol of Izrador: a demonic skull mask with curving horns. The temple interior is shrouded in gloom, its great vaulted ceiling supported by pillars carved with the shapes of abominations and scenes of unspeakable acts. At the center of the grand cathedral lies a large, bloodstained altar. Here, the legates make bloody sacrifices to their god. Worshippers from outside the Order's ranks are rarely allowed into the temple. Small shrines around the city provide spiritual succor to the populace, whether they want it or not. These shrines are tended by the Voices of the Shadow, and citizens are expected to genuflect or leave some token of their respect as they pass; those who don't mark themselves as potential victims to be dragged to the temple's altar for sacrifice.

Beneath the cathedral, accessed by broad steps carved from black marble, lies the Chamber of the Mirror. Herein stands a stone basin filled with a midnight liquid of disturbing viscosity. This is a zordrafin corith, a black mirror through which Izrador feasts upon the magical energies of the land. The mirror is one of the oldest of its kind in the captured territories of the north, and its malign influence has spread throughout Prince Aushav's realm (the zordrafin corith affects a 100-mile radius and is classified as a Red Mirror). See page 196 of the MIDNIGHT core book for details on the effects on magic use within the sphere of influence of a Red Mirror and of zordrafin coriths in general.



62. Dorgath Blackhand's Estate

Dorgath, High Legate of Steel Hill, resides in a lavish home that once belonged to a wealthy merchant. Dorgath lives extremely well and is attended by a number of slaves that include concubines, cooks, and a food taster. Of these, only the head slave, Troom, is allowed to leave the compound and receive deliveries or visitors. Dorgath is concerned about security, rightfully believing that his enemies are trying to kill him. The paranoid legate doesn't go anywhere without a guard of sword brethren.

63. Chapterhouse of the Order of the Black Sword

The elite sword brethren of the Brotherhood of the Black Sword have a large chapterhouse that comprises living quarters, a small armory, training grounds, and cells for holding and interrogating prisoners.

64. Vylaria's Residence

Vylaria is the preceptor of a commandery of the Sisterhood of Tender Mercies. She and her sisters have taken over a large townhouse on Master's Avenue and dwell there in clannish isolation from the other legates of the ward. The sisterhood's creed preaches austerity, and Vylaria and her sisters are strict adherents. The house is minimalist (with a sadistic bent), exhibiting

none of the opulence seen in Dorgath's home. With Vylaria's recent inexplicable mood swings, the sisters of her commandery have seen little of her. She spends most of her time locked away in the extensive cellars of the house, which she has converted into a grim dungeon with a disturbing variety of torture chambers.

65. The forgotten Shrine

Beneath an old house on South Walk, a secret door opens onto a worked stone tunnel that leads to an ancient shrine. Before the Sundering, a forgotten people worshipped mysterious gods at this fane. Nothing remains to tell which deity was honored here, but the worked stone of the cavern speaks of the alien hands that shaped it. Strange, swirling patterns cover the walls and ceiling. Cleite Fir has learned of the existence of this place from the spirit of Be'neeya, but is unsure of its exact location. Few others know of this ancient shrine, and the Order of Shadow is entirely unaware of its existence.

The shrine has a rather unique feature: it acts as though permanently under the influence of a *nondetection* spell. Anyone within the shrine is protected from detection by any kind of scrying. Also, any magic items within the shrine are undetectable to an astirax's senses. What other secrets this forgotten shrine to elder gods holds remain to be seen.

Castle Ward

Commanding the highest point in Steel Hill, the castle and its sinister tower dominate the landscape for miles around. Castle Falon is home to the Bloodguard as well as to the Prince's most trusted servants and most hopeless slaves. Aushav, obsessed with secret machinations, spends most of his time plotting in the tower called the Iron Claw.

A curtain wall with a heavily guarded gatehouse joins to the city walls that crown the Hill, enclosing the ward. Behind this edifice lies the castle, Aushav's tower, extensive stables, tack rooms, an armory, and a smithy.

66. Castle Falon

The ancient seat of House Falon grew from a simple squat tower atop Castle Hill to the rambling keep and lofty towers that exist today. The castle is a maze of corridors, chambers, halls, and stairs, the product of generations of haphazard expansion and renovation. Those rooms currently in use are austere but



functional; the only exception is the abandoned but opulent Great Hall, where the lords of House Falon once held court and met with important visitors. This chamber is hung with faded tapestries, and dust-covered heirlooms decorate the niches and walls. Prince Aushav rarely has guests, and those that do visit the castle don't often return.

High Captain Githuran, concerned that the orcs may one day revolt and seek to take over the city, has ensured that the castle is able to withstand a prolonged siege. The under-cellars are filled with food, water, and enough weapons and armor to equip hundreds of men. Below the under-cellars lies Aushav's contribution to the ancient structure: the castle's dungeon has been greatly enlarged, and now extends to several levels. Its black pits, cells, and torture chambers have claimed many lives over the years. The lowest reaches of the dungeon connect with ancient tunnels that riddle the Hill. One such passage leads to a lightless cathedral deep beneath the earth where the dread blood riders perform vile rites to gain Izrador's dark blessings. These passageways connect with the wider network of caverns and tunnels that honeycomb the hills upon which the city rests, allowing Aushav and his trusted minions to escape if necessary, or to emerge seemingly out of nowhere to quell unrest or trap an invading army. This system is Aushav's ultimate trump card, and he has shared its existence with none but Bazan Githuran and the blood riders. The tunnels would only be used in the most dire of circumstances, and Bazan Githuran has ensured that these hidden approaches are cunningly trapped and well-guarded.

68. Iron Claw

Overshadowing even the battlements of Castle Falon, the Iron Claw is a tall tower built upon the site of a shrine to the clan's ancestors. It gains its name from several side towers and turrets that sprout near the top of the structure, giving it the appearance of a twisted claw.

The tower is permanently shrouded in cloud and is often the target of lightning strikes emerging from the frequent storms of the region. A combination of iron rods mounted upon the tower and an intricate pattern of iron-bound stones used in its construction attract the lightning and cause it to coruscate along the structure's length, creating a blue nimbus that can be observed for several leagues. The Iron Claw is Aushav's private dwelling place, and is forbidden to all but his closest servants.

The city's human and orc populace alike fear the Claw and the dark designs of its master. Even the legates of Scath na'Cruach worry about the paths the mad prince walks, and they begin to doubt whether his dabbling serves their dark god's purposes.

The Tapestry of Flayed Souls

In the highest level of the tower, the prince has an extraordinarily powerful and evil magical item: the *Tapestry of Flayed Souls*. Since the fall of the Maidensword, Prince Aushav has imprisoned many enemies in the dungeons below the castle. The greatest of these have then been taken to the Claw, where the prince flayed them slowly, keeping them alive long enough to enact a terrible ritual in which he bound the victims' spirits to their tattered flesh. Aushav then took the skins and souls of dozens of his greatest enemies and wove them together into a macabre tapestry that writhes with the agonies of its prisoners. Aushav has the power to demand service of the bound souls and often seeks their council. The spirits of the tapestry are privy to knowledge beyond what they knew in life, and over time have merged into a single entity of immense knowledge. This abomination speaks with different voices as the various souls trapped within gain temporary ascendancy. However, at times multiple souls speak or scream in indecipherable tongues and must be appeased with blood.

Aushav uses the tapestry to great effect: there is little that he does not know about his city, his foes in the north, and even the plans of Theros Obsidia. Aushav has come to rely heavily upon the tapestry's counsel, and rarely leaves its chamber. How Aushav created the tapestry of flayed souls, and how he keeps it under his control, is a mystery, but the prince's continued use of it may explain his growing madness.



CHAPTER 2

Outside the Castle Walls

Guard Towers

Three fortified towers stand watch over the main routes leading to and from Cruach Emyr. Each is manned by goblins, orcs, and their oruk commanders. Shadowy winged creatures called takers (*Norther: sciathan*) also reside in these towers and scour the skies by night. The goblin wolf riders and these winged horrors provide a rapid response unit that can be used to hunt down runaway slaves. The howling of wolves and the cackling of goblins in the night is a sure sign that another unfortunate has been taken by the Shadow. Because of the sciathans' camouflage ability and the distance at which they are kept from the regular legion, even the common troops of the tower and of Steel Hill do not know much about these vile beasts. They are an unknown threat, and one of Aushav's proudest achievements (for more information on the sciathans, see page 58).

Tol Selabhai

Situated on a rocky outcrop between the Be'neeya and Coinlin river valleys, the Slave Tower (*Norther: Tol Selabhai*) watches over the slave pens and the Road of the Damned. Two fists of orcs are garrisoned here, along with a fist of goblin warriors and several sniffers and wolf riders. The tower also houses a sciathan and its legate rider. The number of guards normally increases with the arrival of new slaves to the pens. The tower garrison is responsible for patrolling the area north of the city; a typical patrol consists of three orcs, six goblins, and a sniffer, and is led by an orc or oruk commander. Occasionally one or two wolf riders will also accompa-

ny the patrols as outriders. By night, the sciathan and its rider scour the valleys and hills surrounding Steel Hill. The remaining troops keep watch in the tower or rest while off duty. A tour of duty at the tower usually lasts for several arcs.

Tol Be'neeya

This tower overlooks the Be'neeya River from atop a ridge above Nalford Way, and guards the southern approaches to the city. The garrison, one orc fist and a few goblin sniffers and wolf riders, amuse themselves by harassing the farmers and merchants who use the road. The garrison is responsible for patrolling ten miles down the Nalford Way, but rarely venture out of sight of the tower.

Tol Tyre

East of Steel Hill, overlooking the Iron Road, Tol Tyre is the most distant and isolated military outpost of the city. In the past, the tower provided early warning of armies approaching from the east. A signal fire would be lit atop the tower and answered by a chain of watch beacons across the hills to warn the rulers of Cruach Emyr of an approaching force. Now the signal fires are utilized by the Shadow's forces to alert the city of insurgent and rebel activity.

The tower's stables, once used for horses, now house the lupine mounts of the goblins. A fist of orcs, a fist of wolf riders, and at least ten sniffers garrison Tol Tyre. Patrols from the tower range along the Iron Road and throughout the surrounding hills. A typical squad consists of four orcs and two sniffers. Longer range patrols also include a wolf rider or two. In a cave nearby, two of the deadly sciathan dwell amongst the bones and skulls of past meals. Their riders, goblin knights trained at Theros Obsidia, reside in the tower, and they conduct nightly sweeps of the river valley.



Ancestor Stones

The ancestor stones of Cruach Emyn are a legacy of a forgotten age, a place of power and a whisper of hope in these shadowed times. Great dolmens carved from blue granite, a stone not to be found within hundreds of miles, are arranged in two concentric rings. A large horizontal altar lies at their center. The stones are carved with intricate knots and whorls, worn faint by the wind and rain of many years.

Stepping inside the circle of stones brings a pervading sense of quiet. The sound of the rain and the wind that howls incessantly about Steel Hill drops to a whisper, and the noise of hammers and screams of the damned fade away completely. However, by remaining still, one can discern something else in their place: a low hum that is felt rather than heard.

The stones are an ancient enigma, existing outside of the present and oscillating between the future and past. In short, the ancestor stones are loosely tethered in time: part of them is in constant flux, existing either a few moments behind or in front of the present. Those who can tap this power are able to use the stones to great

Ritual of Idurthuras

The Ritual of Idurthuras is a special ritual magic attuned to the ancestor stones of Cruach Emyn. It allows those within the circle's radius to use its ability to exist outside of time. Once the ritual is cast, the target of the ritual may exist a few moments ahead of his surroundings, and therefore free from harm, for as long as he stands within the circle. However, using this ritual is a risky venture at best, as malevolent beings exist in the places outside of time.

Ritual of Idurthuras: The target is effectively removed from this reality whenever he steps into the Cruach Emyn's ancestor stones. He cannot be detected or affected by anything in normal existence. The effects of the ritual last for three arcs, after which the ritual must be performed once more. For more information on ritual magic see the MIDNIGHT core book, page 76; Casting time: 90 minutes; Concentration DC 19.

Adventure Hooks

Lamb to Slaughter

Someone or something is killing the people of Breantas on nights of the new moon. The victims are found brutally decapitated; the frightened locals have beseeched the Bloodguard for aid but they are unwilling or unable to help. A local merchant (or possibly even the Bloodguard) approaches the party and asks them to find the killer. The PCs track the string of murders to the slaughterhouse, where a sinister force is at work.

Twist: The murderer is a demon that is not under the Shadow's control. If the Bloodguard or legates become involved, they may attempt to capture and turn the demon to Izrador's service, giving the Shadow yet another weapon.

Twist: The killer is a member of the Bloodguard, collecting heads for some gruesome purpose that will empower his blood magic.

The Dead Wood

The trees of the Dead Wood are stunted and twisted, covering the battleground where loyal men of House Falon made a last stand against the vast armies of the Shadow. These ghost-haunted woods are plagued by undead that rise from the moss-covered bone heaps littering the ground. They are driven by an unknown, hateful will. Broken stones that were once part of the Fortress Wall stand upon a hill at the center of this gloom-ridden wild-wood. Here, the anguished spirits of the slaughtered clansmen have coalesced into a nexus of rage and bitterness. The PCs (perhaps already having proven themselves as friends to the insurgent clans) are approached by clansmen who have lost a kinsman, a talented but disturbed channeler who they claim has been drawn by supernatural forces into the feared Dead Wood. The PCs must rescue him from this grisly tomb.

Twist: The channeler is an adherent of the Shadow and went into the woods to harness its power.

Twist: The clansmen are ghosts of the wood sent by the malefic force of the Dead Wood to lure new prey into its depths; there is no channeler.

effect, such as to evade pursuers who are anchored in the present. It is this latter aspect of the stones' power that the druid, Cleite Fir, utilizes to avoid the Shadow's minions in Steel Hill.

The circle of ancestor stones is a potent power nexus, unusually protected from the effects of the zordrafin corith of the Temple of Shadowed Steel: part of the circle's aspect is constantly in the future, drawing upon magical energies the black mirror has yet to absorb. Nevertheless, the power of the stones has dwindled as Izrador's foul apparatus diminishes the once abundant flow of magic in the region. The ancestor stones have 20 spell energy, reduce the cost of creating any time or travel effect by two (minimum one), and recover one spell energy per day.

Ancestor Stones of Cruach Emyn

Spell Energy: 20

Feats Allowed: Brew Potion, Craft Greater Spell Talisman, Craft Spell Talisman, Craft Staff

Affinity: Time and protection effects 2

Recovery: 1

Morgatha's Cave

The kurasatch udareen, Morgatha, known also as the Raven Crone, has a dwelling among the crows and rooks that nest in the crumbling upper stories of the aptly named Rookery on Gibbet's Hill. The Rookery serves Morgatha well: with the orc legion close by and the ravens to serve as her spies, she is well guarded and well informed. However, the proximity of the Shadow Temple's black mirror means her channeling is much inhibited and her power sorely diminished. As a result, Morgatha spends much of her time in a cave hidden among the icy crags of the Highhorn Mountains, outside the black mirror's influence. From the dank recesses of this root-tangled chamber, the orc witch weaves potent spells and binds the spirits of the dead to serve her will.

Morgatha travels quickly between the city and her cave by transforming herself into a large raven. While in this form she is often accompanied by a murder of unusual crows, which are in fact her transformed cadre of elite oruk guards. These chosen warriors, called the Brandubh, are enhanced by dark magic: their skin is marked by black, ritualistic scars that bind dead souls into their skin and render them invulnerable to normal blades. The Brandubh are each armed with a cruelly spiked greater crafted vardatch that is coated in deadly poison; so fierce are the Brandubh that even their vicious brethren pale with fear at mention of their name.

The cave itself lies beneath a vile tree of dark power. This subterranean abode is accessed via a narrow crack at the base of the tree's gnarled trunk that resembles little more than a tooth-filled maw. Medium or larger creatures must make DC 30 Escape Artist checks to fit through this hole into the narrow, water-slick tunnel that coils, like a serpent, to the stygian grotto within. The tree, a craggy and twisted fire-blackened oak, grips a rocky spur that juts out over a deep, shadow-filled gorge. A palpable menace radiates from the bleak tree, which lives despite never bearing leaf. The bodies of men, women, and children hang from its branches as if they were the arms of a gibbet, swinging in the biting wind that scours the face of the mountain.

The tree squats upon a rocky spur far above the snow line and beyond the point where a normal tree should survive. The outcrop is reached by a winding trail called the Icy Stair. The trail's crude stone steps are cut into the mountain face and permanently sheathed in ice. The stair sometimes disappears into the mountain via dark tunnels. Legends say the tree was once a symbol of beauty and hope, perhaps the incarnation of a powerful nature spirit. Whatever the truth, beauty holds no sway here now, and if indeed a beneficent spirit once dwelt within the oak, it was long ago twisted and corrupted by shadow.

The Icy Stair descends several thousand feet to an old dwarven hold-fast that, with typical dwarven ingenuity, appears to have grown from the mountain rock. Long abandoned by the dwarves, who called it *Kubaldim*, this fortress is now home to a vicious band of goblins who serve Morgatha and her Brandubh. The goblins are responsible for acquiring sacrificial victims for the black tree; they scour the villages and homesteads of the Lia Rudh Emyr and bring their captives through the mountain passes to Kubaldim. There the unfortunates are kept in the lightless fortress until they are forced at spear-point to make the tortuous climb up the Icy Stair, to die freezing and terrified beneath the macabre, skeletal tree.

The cave that waits beneath the malevolent tree is part of a power nexus of nefarious design: white, maggoty roots intrude through the cavern's roof and drip a black viscous substance from their tentacle-like ends to pool in a shallow depression at the center of the cave. Together, the tree, cave, and pool form a powerful nexus of corrupt arcane energy. Morgatha utilizes the dark magic of the nexus to fuel her most potent and vile spells. The Black Cave power nexus has five spell energy, enough to work simple enchantments, and recovers one spell energy per day. However, at auspicious times the energy of the nexus can be swollen by sacrifice beneath the light of a gibbous moon. For each innocent hung by the neck from the branches of the grisly gallows-tree, the spell energy of the nexus increases by five (to a maximum of 40) and recovery increases by one (to a maximum of four) spell energy per day. This quickening of the Black Cave nexus can only be attempted when

a gibbous moon hangs low and clear in the sky, and lasts for three days per sacrificial victim, up to a maximum of one week. The Black Cave nexus is attuned to death and enchantment; as a result, the spell energy cost of creating any enchantment or necromantic spell effects is reduced by two (minimum one).

The Black Cave

Spell Energy: 5 (maximum of 40)

Feats Allowed: Brew Potion, Craft Greater Spell Talisman, Craft Spell Talisman, Craft Wondrous Item

Affinity: All enchantment and necromancy spells 2

Recovery: 1 (maximum of 4)

Slave Pens

To the north of Steel Hill, halfway between the goblins' warren-like caves and the city, lie the slave pens of Cruach Emyr. Run by goblin slavers, this stockade is a haven of misery and suffering to which slaves from all over Eredane are brought before being sold at the weekly market. The holding pens consist of deep pits into which the slaves are lowered for storage. These fill with rainwater, mud, and sewage, creating appalling conditions in which disease is rife. Fortunately, most slaves don't stay here long before being sold on to the slave-hungry industries of the city.

The compound, which consists of a motte-and-bailey encircled by a palisade, is guarded by goblin, orc, and even human mercenaries in the pay of the slavers. The garrison of Tol Selábhai looms darkly against the sky on the bluff above. A single gate framed by a rudimentary tower provides access to the camp via a wooden drawbridge over the ditch. The ditch is filled with sharpened wooden poles that lie beneath scummy water and whose tips are coated with a viscous, waterproof poison. The tower is little more than a platform that serves as a lookout and provides cover for archers. Atop the motte, a rough log-built fort is the home of the goblin and hobgoblin slavers.

The goblins are shrewd assessors of their slaves' values, separating those who will fetch the highest prices from those adequate only for the mines. Slaves are kept in the pits and are shackled at all times, usually in groups of four to six. Larger or more dangerous slaves are shackled with weighted chains or bound to stone pillars that stand between the pits. The goblins provide little food or water to their prisoners; they have only to keep them alive long enough to get them to market. The rumor is that the goblins sell slaves outside of Aushav's sanctioned auctions, albeit at an inflated price.

A highway of hard-packed earth known as the Road of the Damned runs past the slave pens on its way to Tarish and the mines. Trees and obscuring chaparral have been cleared for several hundred yards to either

side of the road for most of its length. This was ordered by Sharzun to hinder ambush attempts. The slave trains and caravans laden with iron or supplies that travel this road are usually well-guarded by orc legionaries or mercenaries of various races.

The Sprawl

The term “the Sprawl” is used disparagingly by the inhabitants of Steel Hill to refer to the three settlements that lie just beyond the city walls. The Sprawl was originally only the name for the charcoal burners’ shanty town; members of the other two river communities take umbrage when it is used to refer to their homes.

Durga

Clustered about three piers jutting into the river Be’neeya, Durga is a collection of warehouses, corrals, and impromptu markets that sprawl before Southbridge. Each pier is run by a different gnome trading family that oversees the organized chaos that characterizes the river trade. The largest dock is run by the Greengol family and is called the Green Pier. It stands at the southernmost part of the river port near the Nalford Way. The Shadow’s minions in Steel Hill use the Greengols’ boats almost exclusively to move their cargo. This has earned the Greengols a measure of trust and made them the richest and most powerful family among the river folk. Elders of the family act as unofficial leaders in Durga and most business on the river has Greengol association—consequently, the family is an excellent source of information on what is happening on the river. However, the family has seen (and received) the punishments doled out by the Shadow’s minions, and are therefore extremely cautious in whom they trust.

Most river traffic stops at the Durga docks. Many items, unavailable in the bleak markets of Steel Hill, can be found in the markets that have sprouted about the piers of Durga. The gnome and human merchants have no desire to enter the city and suffer harassment at the hands of the orcs and Bloodguard, nor to make the dangerous journey overland to Tarish. They value the fragile freedom of their riverfront bazaars and are quick to guard it. Durga’s leaders readily call for support from the Bloodguard or orcs when faced with trouble; because of their apparent loyalty they have thus far avoided undue scrutiny. None of the gnome families truly support the Shadow, however. The Greengols facilitate shipping for the powers of Steel Hill because it keeps their family safe and fed; it also draws attention away from the other two gnome families, leaving them free to engage in more clandestine activities.

Apart from the river traders, there are also a number of overland trading companies based out of Durga who move goods between Steel Hill and the outlying

villages and towns. Some of the better horse traders of the Lia Rudh Emyn can be found here, and although most horses sold are work animals, riding and cavalry mounts are occasionally available. Most warhorses, however, are raised on Clan Strachan lands to the south.

Milling is the other industry of note in Durga. Several water-powered mills dot the southern riverbank and most of the grain and wheat used in the city’s bakeries is milled here before being transported to the Market Quarter.

Breantas

Breantas is the name of a township on the eastern bank of the Coinlin River that has arisen around a collection of slaughterhouses and tanneries. Steel Hill’s most malodorous businesses can be found here alongside the simple hovels of those who work in them. Slaughterhouses, tanneries, and stock yards cluster about two rude streets off the Iron Road. Sheep are sheared here and their wool is woven; this is also the place where the animals are bought, sold, and slaughtered, and where their hides tanned. The stench is overpowering, especially on a rare hot day. The noise of terrified animals and the sounds of the slaughter are a constant cacophony during the day; at night the calls of wild animals in the surrounding hills compete with the chilling howls of the Fell that drift over the water from the Gardens of Death.

The Sprawl

The Sprawl is more properly the name given to the disordered shantytown that squats like a leprous beggar outside Ore Gate. This collection of hovels is home to the charcoal burners of Steel Hill, who struggle to provide fuel for the ever-burning furnaces of the city’s foundries. This struggle gets harder each day due to the rapidly dwindling woodland close to the city. In the past, for every tree felled to make charcoal, two saplings were planted in their place; careful husbandry meant the forest was not consumed faster than it could be regenerated. However, under Aushav’s years of misrule, replanting has been largely neglected, and the lands surrounding Steel Hill have been all but deforested. The charcoal burners are forced to go farther and farther afield in order to obtain the wood they need for their livelihood, and the Sprawl has begun to empty as these desperate folk drift away into the hinterlands of the north. The goblins and orcs now keep a close eye on the charcoal-burning community; desertion is punished by gruesome public execution or a one-way trip along the Road of the Damned to the Tarish mine.

Charcoal used in the foundries is brought into the city by cart through Ore Gate, or by way of baskets drawn up the walls using ropes and pulleys directly into the foundries’ yards. The baskets are quite large and,

with contacts in the charcoal-burning community and the city, could be used as a means to gain access to Cruach Emyr without having to pass one of the heavily guarded gates. However, once inside the city walls, escaping unnoticed from the walled and heavily guarded foundry yard may prove a greater challenge.

Tarish and the Great Mine

For more than a thousand years the iron mines of the Lia Rudh Emyr have produced the best quality iron ore outside of the Kaladrun Mountains. Steel Hill grew to greatness on the abundance of its ore and the skill of its smiths, who provided the vast majority of weapons and armor to the soldiers of the Fortress Wall. Now the Shadow controls Steel Hill, and the city's mines and foundries are equally crucial to the Night King Jahzir's war effort. Since the occupation, Cruach Emyr has become synonymous with suffering and death; a never-ending stream of slaves from across Eredane is brought to the great mine of Tarish, where they labor and die for the Shadow's cause.

The Great Mine

Mining operations before the Third Age were small-scale and scattered, yet provided enough ore to support the Dorn clansmen and the troops along the Fortress Wall. Eventually, the surface deposits of iron were exhausted and more complex mining techniques became necessary to access the buried metal, such as cutting simple, vertical shafts and galleries along the veins of ore. Using these methods, Clan Falon discovered

the great Tarish vein, a massive lode of iron that runs from the Lia Rudh Emyr into the heart of the Highhorn Mountains. Since this discovery more than 150 years ago, mining in the region has been focused within an enormous mine called the Great Mine or Tarish Mine.

The Great Mine extends six miles into the mountains and consists of a central shaft called the Bore and several levels cut off at various depths that follow the veins that branch out from the main lode. The Bore descends at a gradual incline and has rough rock walls and ceilings reinforced by heavy wooden bracing. The floor is relatively smooth, worn by years of passing ore sleds. The main shaft is between five and eight feet across and six feet high for most of its length. Every 500 feet or so, the Bore widens to an approximately thirty-foot diameter; these nodes are used as resting points for slave crews hauling ore and to provide passing points for the ore sleds, which cannot otherwise pass in the narrow shaft. Some of these caverns have side chambers for the storage of lamp oil, water, and extra support beams.

Narrow channels cut into the floor on either side of the passageways direct water runoff into the lowest portion of the mines, where it cascades down a natural chimney into unexplored depths. This chimney, called the Shadow's Eye, is said to lead to a great, lightless cavern whose floor is submerged beneath a vast, black lake. None know what dwells in such a place, but the slaves talk of a cold wind that blows up from the Shadow's Eye, carrying sounds that could be voices.



Mine Tales

A number of disasters have beset the Great Mine in the Last Age. Most recently, a pocket of noxious gas was discovered in the peripheral tunnels of the Pit. The gas killed many slaves and their guards, and because the vapors prevented the survivors from recovering the dead, many rose as Fell. The fighting was brutal, and hundreds died before the undead were finally exterminated. The episode has left great fear among the guards and the slaves. Goblin overseers' check on the slaves hourly, counts are made of all slaves at meals and shift changes, and the slaves readily cooperate, for they understand that they are easy meat for the ravenous dead.

The mines also suffer frequent cave-ins. The most severe cave-in of recent memory occurred some thirty years ago. As the slaves followed a rich vein off the main load, they entered an area where the surrounding rock was brittle, making mining easier but shoring more difficult. Fethwik wasn't informed of the problems, and the goblin overseers didn't request enough shoring. The shaft wound its way almost a mile from the main tunnel before disaster struck. About halfway back towards the main shaft, the goblins had stored barrels of lamp oil, which somehow caught fire, creating tremendous heat and destroying the shoring throughout the area. The tunnel collapsed, trapping several scores of slaves and goblins. Fethwik was summoned and, after determining that those trapped weren't worth the effort to save, ordered the area abandoned.

Those who venture near the fallen tunnels say that you can still hear the slaves trying to dig their way to freedom. While most scoff at the tale, the goblins maintain a well-armed guard post at the entrance to the collapsed eastern mine.

There are two other natural caverns in the Great Mine worthy of note: the first, called the Grand Chamber, is 600 feet long and 300 feet wide; the other, the Cavern of Stars, is approximately 150 feet by 100 feet, and contains an abundance of precious gemstones that glitter like stars in the lamplight. However, such mineral wealth is all but worthless in the Last Age, and the miners take no note of what would have been a kingdom's fortune in happier days. Both caverns have iron gates that bar entrance to the lower mines; these are rel-

atively new, installed after two violent slave uprisings, and allow the lash masters to seal off the mines during uprisings until reinforcements arrive.

Although there are a number of smaller branching veins off the main lode, most of the slaves labor in the lowest portion of the mine called the Pit. This labyrinthine excavation is a honeycomb of caves extending more than four square miles. The caves and tunnels of the pit have rough rock walls and floors and can be as narrow as four to five feet, with ceilings no more than six feet in height; it is a dangerous and cramped maze where cave-ins are frequent and the death toll is high.

The tunnels and caverns of the Great Mine are dark and damp, and the air is thick with rock dust and human torment. Excavation of the iron ore is conducted using picks, spikes, and hammers; the aim is to break the rock into pieces small enough to move. Rock debris is left where it falls or pushed out of the way into numerous crevasses and sink holes. Rock containing ore is loaded onto sleds and pulled out of the mine. The sleds are moved by brute force in the lower levels and winches in the upper mines. Light is provided by oil lamps. There are lanterns at frequent intervals in the upper mines, but in the lower tunnels miners have to carry their own means of illumination. Oil is not wasted, so areas not currently being worked are usually pitch black. The mines are also extremely noisy, especially in the Pit: the sounds of hammer and pick echo through the passageways along with other, more mysterious and sinister sounds. Slaves take to wrapping their ears or filling them with wool; sometimes it is better not to hear what the mines have to say.

The Tarish Mine is run by Fethwik One-Eye, an exceptionally sadistic but cruelly efficient dwarf of the Dorin Clan. Old One-Eye has overseen the mine for the last 60 years and works the mines hard, extracting ore for the Shadow's war efforts no matter the cost in human life or suffering. In this time he has earned the enduring hatred of the slaves and the majority of his minions. Fethwik lost his eye during a slave uprising 20 years ago. He was saved from the murderous slaves only by the blind chaos of the uprising and the timely arrival of an orc fist.

Life in the mines, if you could call it such, is utter misery. The work is back-breaking, food is scarce, and the water is frequently contaminated. Sanitary conditions are appalling; latrines are non-existent or little more than narrow cut-outs in the rock. If you can't work, you aren't fed. If you are hurt, there is no one to heal you, so an injury is normally a death sentence. Many slaves die under these conditions and several go mad, either becoming catatonic or attacking their fellows and the guards with savage ferocity. A strong man can last a year or more in the Tarish Mine, but most last less than six months. There is always a shortage of miners, which keeps the slavers busy; so many slaves are brought to the Steel Hill mines that the road they travel to Tarish is called the Road of the Damned.

Tarish Town

At the foot of the trail leading to the Great Mine, a cesspool of corruption and effluence has gathered into what could loosely be called a town. Tarish is a collection of taverns, brothels, and combat pits that feature everything from cock fighting to gladiatorial combat. This community existed long before Steel Hill fell to the Shadow, and has always served the less savory needs of the miners, smiths, and soldiers of the area. After the Betrayal, Tarish became all the more dark and dangerous.

The town's populace is made up of those who run the mines and its supporting industries, periodically burgeoned by orcs, bloodguards, freemen of the city, and itinerant traders. Desperate folk come to Tarish, looking for ways to feed their families and also gain enough tradable wealth to leave the North. Most never leave Tarish, let alone the region.

Each establishment in the town has some hired muscle to keep order. Most of Tarish's residents don't want to attract the attention of the orcs or Aushav's guards, so disputes are settled quietly and often lethally. Violent drunks or other troublemakers wake up in one of the fighting pits, or not at all. If an orc or Bloodguard is murdered, the body is rarely found.

Like the landscape around Cruach Emyrn, the terrain surrounding Tarish bears the scars of its industry. Trees and brush are scarce, having been harvested by the charcoal makers. The hillsides are dotted with air shafts, pump houses, and channels cut into the rock that direct rainfall away from the mines. Farther out, the landscape is littered with old shafts, broken masonry, and the crumbling buildings of abandoned mining works. Any salvageable wood has long since been scavenged for newer excavations or for charcoal. On the higher slopes, herds of sure-footed goats and sheep graze upon the wiry grass, thorny gorse, and brambles. These herds attract the usual predators and scavengers (mountain lions, wolves, and Highhorn orcs) and are closely shepherded by clansmen. The orcs and members of Aushav's court entertain themselves with hunts for large game animals and fierce predators, though occasionally they ride down released slaves instead to satiate their cruel lusts.

Stockade and Tarish Keep

Since Aushav's rise to power, the mining operation at Tarish has been expanded and fortified. A stockade surrounds a mining compound that consists of smelt works, a stone keep, a shrine to Izrador, a cistern and, cut into the cliff, caves stocked with food, tools, and lumber. The keep holds a garrison of some 300 goblins and orcs.

Beneath the keep, the goblins have enlarged the natural caverns that connect with the mines. The slaves of the Great Mine are occasionally allowed to rest and

Adventure Hook: Better Red than Dead

The party is hiding in the narrow alleyways of Tarish when they are surrounded by filthy urchins. A one-armed man approaches the party and tells them that the Lord of Rags asks of them a boon. The beggar king's request is for the PCs to deliver, within a week, two Bloodguard uniforms. If the PCs fail or refuse, the man will deliver a thinly veiled threat, saying that he will be unable to ensure their continued safety around Steel Hill.

Twist: The Lord of Rags plans to use the uniforms in an attack on an orc guardhouse, with the intention of agitating the uneasy truce between the orcs and the Bloodguard.

Twist: The Lord of Rags asked the PCs to do the job in Tarish because he doesn't want to draw attention to his operations in the Winde. If the PCs do draw attention while acquiring the uniforms, the Lord of Rags will wait until he receives the uniforms and then betray the party to the Bloodguard in order to deflect attention from his people.

eat in these dismal caves. Sodden straw covers the floor, doing little to soften the hard rock and providing a haven for plagues of lice and other vermin. The slaves are chained in pairs, making rest difficult and privacy impossible. Near the main sleeping chamber, a great, natural shaft descends endlessly into the bowels of Eredane. This chute is used by the slaves as a latrine, and it is not uncommon for those who are beyond desperation to fling themselves into its abyssal depths, dragging their unfortunate chain-mates with them.

Smelt Works

Sleds of ore and rock extracted from the mine are pushed from the mine entrance to a ledge and tipped onto large piles of similar material in the smelt works below. Before the ore can be smelted, it is first crushed and washed to separate it from the rock. The huge crushing machines used to break up the rock consist of pairs of massive stone cylinders connected by gears to a four-pronged crank, which is turned by oxen, carthorses, or even slaves. Fragmented rock and ore is collected in wooden troughs beneath. Next, the ore is washed to get rid of the lighter stone, and this slag is discarded onto hills of broken rock that grow year by year beside the town.

The ore is smelted and cast as crude ingots. Four large smelting furnaces are used to soften the iron. Each is fuelled by wood and charcoal, the temperature fanned white-hot by large bellows worked by sweating slaves. The heat from the furnaces is incredible, and the air is thick with soot. The water used in the cooling process is taken from the stockade's cistern or, in the arcs of spring, water runoff from the mountains. Freeman human smiths, aided by slaves and overseen by dwarves of Dorin clan, run the smelting operation of the Tarish mine.

Record House

Meticulous records are kept of all shipments, and the resident legates review these weekly. Two years ago, Aushav arrested, tortured, and then hung the entire shipping staff, including the legates, because of suspicions that they were siphoning off supplies to the resistance. Iron bars, wood, coal, and basic supplies are all kept in the warehouses. When a shipment is ready for delivery to Steel Hill, troops are dispatched from the keep to escort the caravan.

Kregar's Complex

None have sole, sanctioned authority in Tarish. However, the unspoken master of the mining town is

Adventure Hook: An Eye Toward Freedom

The PCs have been enslaved and sent to the mines. The desperate prisoners around them talk of escape, debating how they might break free. Talk quickly turns to the guards' numbers and the mine's defenses; chained and without arms or armor, the situation seems hopeless. Then an older slave whispers: "There is a way out of the mines . . . through the Eye! But then, that's just a different way to die." The Shadow's Eye does offer a way out, if the party can survive the descent to the gelid lake and subsequently find their way to the surface.

Twist: The PCs are chained together with NPCs, and their chain-mates are too afraid to risk escape. They will resist and may shout for the guards.

Kregar, a vicious and wily oruk who made his way as a gladiator in the fighting pits. Kregar proved as skilled at business and politics as he was at wielding a blade, quickly gaining control of the notable businesses in Tarish. He stays in power through the network of contacts he has built up within the major factions, and directs his kingdom of taverns, fighting pits, and brothels with an eye for coin and a stomach for blood that leaves others gasping. Greedy and without compassion, the brutal oruk supports neither the Shadow's minions nor the insurgents; he simply bleeds wealth from both. He does have one weakness, however: he hates legates passionately. Those priests who poke their noses into Kregar's business usually disappear.

Alarin's House

Besides Kregar, there are several other people in Tarish who pull on the reins of power. The Sarcosan Alarin is one such. Alarin is known for his smuggling activities and claims that he can acquire any manner of contraband, but specializes in poison and weapons. Like Kregar, Alarin has no politics; as long as the customer pays his price, she gets what she wants. There are whispers that Alarin has some connection to Aushav, and even that he is one of Aushav's rare bastards (it is generally true that most women who share the Prince's bed are never seen again). Influence with Aushav would explain how Alarin so quickly gained control of smuggling in the area, and how he is able to get the best armor and weapons out of Steel Hill.

The Honey House

Essylt the Whoremistress is the owner and proprietor of the Honey House, Tarish's most famous brothel. Essylt first came to Tarish as a young girl just entering her womanhood; she hoped to find work that would help feed her family. Predictably, the young beauty soon found herself working in one of the town's many brothels. She became tough and shrewd, and the other whores began to turn to her for help and advice. Over time, she built her position and standing, eventually winning her freedom and starting her own establishment. Now in her middle years, Essylt is still beautiful, and is known as the "Whoremistress of Tarish."

Essylt loathes and fears Kregar, but works begrudgingly with the oruk to limit the excesses of the ores and the Bloodguards, to ensure her authority, and to safeguard the continuation of steady patronage. However, unlike Kregar, the Whoremistress has taken sides in the war against the Shadow—a fact her associate has yet to realize. Essylt provides information to the resistance and smuggles women through the region. She normally gets the pick of the female slaves at the market, and if notified by the resistance, Essylt can get a woman out of the slave pens, into Tarish, and safely out again in a matter of days.

CHAPTER 3

Politics and Power

Cruach Emyn's political hierarchy is complex; though it is ostensibly ruled by the traitor Prince Aushav, the reins of power are in fact pulled by many hands. The legates of the Temple of Shadowed Steel squabble among themselves and with Morgatha for ecclesiastical supremacy; Sharzun, Lord Commander of the orc legion, chafes under Aushav's rule and vies with High Captain Githuran for military authority in Steel Hill. Dwarves of Dorin Clan run the mines and foundries of Steel Hill, effectively controlling the lifeblood of the city, but follow their own enigmatic agenda. And among these major players, smaller factions struggle to survive or stake their claims on the power that beats within the city like a black demonic heart.

Prince Aushav and the Blood Riders

Aushav Falon has ruled from the Hill since he betrayed Eden the Maidensword and slaughtered the city's loyal clansmen. The Bloodguard, formed from those who supported his coup, have become Aushav's elite soldiers and bodyguards. Their commanders are knights of dark renown: the feared blood riders. Over one hundred years has passed since the Betrayal and the intervening decades have seen Aushav's sanity deteriorate at a quickening rate. As the traitor prince becomes increasingly more demonic, even his loyal Bloodguard find reason to doubt him.

The current commander of the Bloodguard and High Captain of the city is Bazan Githuran. Bazan runs the Bloodguard with an iron hand; sloppiness and ineptitude are not tolerated in the ranks, and on more than one occasion Bazan's own blade has ended the life of one of his men for behavior unbecoming of a Bloodguard. Despite Bazan's draconian leadership style, his men apparently worship him and will follow

his orders to the death; Githuran's Bloodguard embodies a sense of duty and code of honor that, albeit on the wrong side of right, is hard to find in the Last Age and appeals to a deep-seated need in the men of the North. The Erenlander is utterly loyal to Aushav, but has grown increasingly worried about the prince's erratic behavior.

Their great rivals are the orc legionnaires, who are seen by the Bloodguard as an occupying force despite the fact that they supposedly serve the same side. The antipathy between the two military forces is a palpable hatred that is barely kept in check in the presence of their commanders and frequently seeks outlet in their absence. The Bloodguard would like nothing better than to see Steel Hill solely under its authority and the "filthy tuskers" driven beyond the walls. It is unclear what Aushav thinks, but in recent years the prince has involved himself less and less in the life of his city, and is rarely seen outside the Claw. When he does go abroad, he is never without a cadre of elite Bloodguards.

Forge Masters of Steel Hill

Black tales gather about the forge masters of Cruach Emyn like crows on Gibbet's Hill; they are of the fallen clan of Dorin, called Black Blood (*Old Dwarven: Odrud*) by other dwarves. Four Odruds, led by Halding Ironhammer, run the day-to-day operations of Steel Hill's foundries. Fethwik One-Eye, a particularly mean and twisted dwarf even by Black Blood standards, runs the mining and smelting operations at Tarish.

Halding Ironhammer is Lord Smith of Steel Hill, and in his view the city exists only to provide manpower and raw materials for the manufacture of arms and armor to supply Jahzir's armies. Ironhammer is a hateful dwarf whose very beard bristles with malice and spite. He loathes dwelling in this city of men and orcs.

Having to direct incompetent Dornish smiths and pay lip service to Aushav and the legates of the Temple of Shadow keeps his mood perpetually foul—and Ironhammer makes his feelings well-known. None, however, not even insane Aushav, would dare harm the Odrud dwarf, for it is well known that the remaining few of the Black Blood are highly prized by Jahzir and his dark master.

Despite his hatred of the legates (which is no more intense than his hatred for anyone else), it is rumored that Ironhammer is working on a secret project with High Legate Dorgath Blackhand. The doors to the Hall of the Master Forge have been shut against all but the Odrud and the most trusted indentured smiths. Dorgath has been seen entering the foundry on a number of occasions, accompanied by a guard of the feared sword brethren. It is whispered that during these visits the sword brethren are made to wait outside, and that a strange sickly light can be seen coming from beneath the doors to the hall. Whatever Ironhammer and Blackhand are up to, it is assuredly ill news for the beleaguered forces that still stand against the Shadow.

Men of the North

House Falon

The betrayal of Eden the Maidensword and Steel Hill split House Falon into two opposing factions. The Traitor Prince used his own mercenary followers to replace those members of the house clan who were killed or fled. As a result, the men of House Falon are now almost completely of Erenlander or mixed Sarcosan stock. Strachan and Kalle were the only Dornish clans that supported the Traitor Prince's coup, and therefore are the sole northern clans still in the city. Before the betrayal, both clans were small and had no significant role in house affairs. Since then, they have become rich by seizing or receiving the lands of their banished kinsmen who still resist Aushav and the Shadow.

Clan Strachan's holdings lie to the southwest of Steel Hill and include vast farmlands and pastures. Clan Kalle, historically a small, city-based clan, remains so, although they have since acquired lands in the Lía Rudh Emyn that once belonged to Clan Banoch. The men of Strachan and Kalle are allowed to bear arms in the city as long as they display their house colors.

The four remaining clans descended from House Falon (clans Fathan, Banoch, Caine, and Lannal) focus on survival and finding some security for their people, but continue their resistance to Aushav. The Fathans and Caines fled west, and now reside in the mountains and tangled woods of the southern Lía Rudh Emyn. These clansmen cooperate with House Redgard, often fighting alongside that defiant house. The Banochs and Lannals escaped north into areas abandoned since the ending of the Second Age. As the orcs move farther south, these clans reoccupy the small, isolated villages in their wake.

Warriors of these outcast clans say that they have survived, and even prospered, due to the protection and guidance of Cendara. This mysterious being claims to be an ancient spirit of the Dorns, and has given the clans renewed hope. Bannoch and Lannal have formed a small but efficient fighting force in her name. Their agents have infiltrated Steel Hill and Tarish town, where they urge those who would live free to flee the city and join the growing numbers of the Cendaran, as these spirit-led warriors call themselves.

Slaves and Freemen

The city of Steel Hill retains a large human population that falls into three groups: slaves, indentured servants, and freemen. Slaves are used in most of the city's industries and in the mines. They live in appalling conditions, usually at or near their places of work, and suffer brutal treatment. It is not uncommon to see a slave beaten or even murdered in the streets.

Indentured servants are laborers who have some skill or trade and retain limited rights in return for service to their employer who owns their debt bond. Indentured servants are paid barely enough to feed themselves and their families, and usually have quarters in the city or at their places of work. Most live in the Winde and work in the Anvil, Market, or March wards. Indentured servants are forbidden to leave the city without their masters, and must carry recognizable symbols of their bond-owners at all times.

Major and minor nobles of clans Falon, Kalle, and Strachan make up most of the freemen in Steel Hill. The remainder are individuals who, through political connections or valued skills, can maintain a semblance of independence. Some of the leading smiths, tavern owners, and minor merchants are freemen. Freemen can live anywhere within the city, but the majority live either on the Hill or in Market Ward. Outside the city, the settlements are made up of a mixture of slaves, indentured servants, and freemen.

Steel Cant

There has emerged a new language among the slaves and indentured artisans of Steel Hill. This language is called Steel Cant, a form of simple sign language that consists of facial expressions, moustache tugging, eyebrow scratching, and hand signals. The enslaved and indentured population use it to speak in plain sight, both of little things they wish to keep from prying ears and of deadlier secrets of contraband and resistance.

Informants in the pay of the Shadow's servants, such as Gránna the Ugly, landlord of the Roasting Ox Tavern, are unaware of the existence of Steel Cant. However, users of the secret language should beware; the city is full of desperate individuals who would do anything to survive or keep their families alive a little longer.

It is only a matter of time before the agents of the Shadow learn and master the silent language of the streets.

Any character who finds someone willing to teach it to them can learn Steel Cant for one skill rank. Only natives of Steel Hill may take it as a bonus language during character generation. When using Steel Cant to communicate in plain sight, the speaker need not worry about most casual observers. Anyone watching the speaker with more than casual intent, however, may make a Sense Motive check opposed by the speaker's Bluff check to notice that some signal or code is being used. If the observer knows Steel Cant he may make a Spot check opposed by a speaker's Bluff check to notice it being used around him, even if he is a casual observer, and need not make a Sense Motive check if he watches the speaker with more than casual intent.

The Mines and Tarish Town

The mines and foundries are the most valuable resource in the north; whosoever controls them will wield great power and influence. Unsurprisingly, a number of pre-eminent individuals and organizations vie for control of this area.

As in Steel Hill, the Shadow's forces are inarguably divided in Tarish; each faction follows its own agenda, cooperating with the others only as necessary. The orcs, tasked by Jahzir to keep the mines open and weapons flowing south at any cost, are supported, albeit begrudgingly, by goblins from the local tribes. The legion's forces are exceptionally well equipped and Bazan Githuran suspects that they are building a cache of quality weapons and armor. Sharzun hopes to position himself to replace Prince Aushav when the opportunity arises. After all, Aushav's control of the Tarish area is more theoretical than practical. His Bloodguard maintains a contingent at the mine's stockade, as they are fearful of treachery by the orcs and suspicious of Dorin Clan's motives.

The Order of Shadow also has a presence in Tarish. A small group of legates, a sword brother, and several temple guards nominally tend a shrine to Izrador. However, all know they are there to keep an eye on the happenings of the area: the Order's luminaries, jostling for position and power within and without their order, recognize the importance of the mines in their struggle.

In addition to the Shadow's servants, Roland Redgard's resistance fighters have a presence in and around the mines. The insurgents wage a war of attrition against the Shadow, and although they have had some small successes, their attacks are viewed as more of a nuisance than a threat. It is safe to say that Izrador's own servants have inflicted the most damage to his cause.

Of course, several minor actors exert influence among the high-level power plays of legates and soldiers. The combined efforts of Alarin, Essylt, and Kregar influence the functioning of Tarish as much as any major faction.

The local power mongers are not the only ones interested in this region. There are those in the Shadow who would see Aushav removed so they can claim Steel Hill and its mines. Rumors suggest that at least two of the other Night Kings and several of the other traitor princes have active agents in the area.

Morgatha the Raven Crone

Morgatha is a kurasatch udareen of the Mother of the Blooded Claw tribe and, as such, is nominally responsible for their spiritual guidance. She commands the fierce loyalty of the orcs of the Splintered Skull legion, who are largely drawn from her tribe's ranks; their Lord Commander, Sharzun the Bloodaxe, owes Morgatha much. However, even Sharzun is cautious in his dealings with the witch, knowing that she keeps her own counsel and plays a long and hidden game. The true motivations of this conniving hag are a mystery, even to her closest allies. Morgatha spins multiple webs of intrigue, and for her Machiavellian efforts she has earned the enmity of many powerful foes in Steel Hill.

Morgatha is despised by the legates of the Temple of Shadowed Steel, who feel she encroaches upon their territory as the ecclesiastical representatives of Izrador, but they fear to act against her. Dorgath and his legates are right to resent and fear Morgatha, for she conspires to control and, ultimately, destroy them. Morgatha realizes that Dorgath is but a weak-willed fool, and prefers his known ineptitude to an unknown and possibly more dangerous replacement from Theros Obsidia. It therefore behooves her to keep Dorgath in power until she is ready to openly take control herself. To this end, the Raven Crone has thwarted Vylaria's investigations into Dorgath and his incompetent leadership of the Order at Steel Hill. Vylaria is utterly under Morgatha's spell, but so subtle is the web that the enchantress spins, the young preceptor believes it is *she* who uses the kurasatch udareen for *her* ends. Some part of Vylaria's mind must guess that she is being duped, however, and this manifests with increasing regularity as violent outbursts. Morgatha, suspecting that her hold over Vylaria is precarious and slipping, now seeks a more permanent resolution to her dilemma.

The dwarves of Dorin Clan give Morgatha another reason for concern: they are tight-lipped and close with their business and, as of late, have conducted clandestine meetings with Dorgath. The fact that she has been unusually unsuccessful in discovering the nature of their liaisons has further angered and worried the witch.

Morgatha has also crossed swords with Cleite Fir on more than one occasion. She has tried to trap the elusive druid several times; each time she has been foiled. The wily druid's cloak of raven feathers shields him from the eyes of her prying spies, and the spirits Morgatha summons are strangely quiet on the topic of the Guardian of the Stones. It is the effrontery of Cleite Fir's cloak, fashioned from the feathers of her own min-

ions, that particularly aggravates Morgatha, and she would give much for information on her hated enemy.

Finally, although she has had no direct conflict with the Traitor Prince of Steel Hill, Morgatha watches Aushav Falon with care. The witch, perhaps more than any other in the city, guesses at the extent of Aushav's power, and more importantly, his madness. She knows

Aushav has somehow tied himself to the warded gates of the Gardens of Death: the bonds of power linking them glitter darkly to her mage sight, despite the draining effects of the zordrafin corith. However, she does not understand Aushav's purpose in doing this, nor how he has achieved the bond.

A Splintered Church

The Order of Shadow was born in the First Age in the remote monastery of Bandilrin, when the Shadow's hand rested upon the soul of Beirial the Betrayer and stained it with Evil. Since that time, Izrador's church has grown into an insidious network of black priests and collaborators, a complex, fractured hierarchy of stratified and intrigue-bound cults, sects, and sub-orders. In the last century, the number of these has proliferated with alarming speed, thanks in large part to the Order's stability and freedom to focus inward rather than outward. Since the raising of Theros Obsidia and the coming of the Night Kings, the Order has seen its political and military power increase, along with its spiritual hegemony. As the human lands came under the Shadow's subjugation, the Order accrued great wealth and power upon which the legates descended in a feeding frenzy, trying to grasp what jurisdiction and influence they could.

Several divisions of the Order of Shadow are present in Cruach Emyr; a brief description of each follows, along with suggestions for creating legates from these sub-orders.

Voices of Shadow: One of the most numerous but least powerful of the sub-orders, the Voices of Shadow serve as acolytes and assistant priests in the Temples of Shadow. They are record keepers, overseeing the city's scribes and preaching the word of Izrador to the faithful. The presiding Voice of Shadow within a temple is called the Voice of the Master; in Steel Hill, this office is occupied by a fanatical Erenlander called Parend Shadowtongue.

Voices of Shadow usually advance only in the Legate class. They gain access to the Knowledge domain instead of Destruction, and tend toward that domain as well as either the Evil or Magic domains.

Keepers of Obsidian: The Keepers of Obsidian maintain and protect Izrador's network of black mirrors, the instruments through which he collects arcane energies. The lower ranks of the Keepers are responsible for renewing Izrador's sacred mirrors using the blood of living sacrifices, which is poured into the basin-like altars that hold

the loathsome substance of the mirror. Because of their pivotal role in Izrador's powerbase, the high priest at a Temple of Shadow containing a black mirror is often a Keeper of Obsidian.

Keepers of Obsidian usually advance only in the Legate class. They gain access to the Protection domain instead of War, and tend toward that domain as well as either the Evil or Death domains.

Sisterhood of Tender Mercies: Based at a monstrous convent outside Highwall that echoes the architecture of Theros Obsidia, the Sisterhood arose in response to the corruption rife within the Order. They travel the land in groups called commanderies, which consist of eight sisters led by a commander called a preceptor. The sisters are consummate torturers, and rightly feared both within and without the Order. Their murderous inquisitions have claimed the lives of both legates and branded heretics. Firmly aligned to the Devout, the Sisterhood enjoys special patronage that protects them from the great resentment they have earned from their fellow, mostly male, legates: the Priest of Shadow himself is patron to the sisterhood, and the sisters are thus also known as Sunulael's Handmaidens.

Sisters of Tender Mercies advance primarily as Legates, but sometimes take levels in Fighter or Rogue as well. The sisters gain a +2 profane bonus to Intimidate checks when using torture, and Exotic Weapon Proficiency (whip) as a bonus feat.

Eyes of Izrador: Not truly a branch of the Order, the Eyes of Izrador are an insidious network of spies and informants who work for the Order and, in particular, for the Sisterhood of Tender Mercies. The identity of an "Eye" is often unknown, even to others in the organization. These agents tend to operate through a master spy called the Master of Whispered Secrets. In Steel Hill, this individual is known only as Shaylan.

Members of the Eyes of Izrador are usually rogues and fighters; more experienced Eyes often have levels in the assassin prestige class. They may also have one or more legate levels, although this is unusual.

The Order of Shadow

Steel Hill's priesthood is as riddled with plotting factions as the Order at large. In fact, due to infighting and weak leadership among the legates, the Order wields less power in this city than elsewhere in Eredane. Aushav and the Bloodguard regard the legates with indifference or contempt. Morgatha works diligently to drive the knives of discord and mistrust deeper into their hierarchy, ensorcelling those who might do her harm or who can act as pawns in her game. The witch has convinced Sharzun and his warriors that they would not be defying Izrador's will by turning against the legates, citing that they are weak and ineffectual. Consequently the orcs, normally subordinate to the Order of Shadow, are more daring in their autonomy in this remote outpost. Only wary respect of the sword brethren's martial skills and fear of Theros Obsidia's wrath maintain the city's fragile status quo.

The incumbent High Legate, Dorgath Blackhand, is a staunch Cabalist that boasts of powerful allies in the Black Tower. He has gathered other Cabalists about him, and their kind dominates the priesthood of Cruach Emyr. Dorgath's supporters have largely shielded him from the criticisms of ineffectual leadership and weakness over the years, but the legates have become increasingly angry at the erosion of power the Order has suffered in Steel Hill. To expose Blackhand's incompetence, a group of legates, secretly adherents of the Devout, sent word to Theros Obsidia, requesting the attentions of a commandery of the Sisterhood of Tender Mercies. The arrival of Vylaria and her Devout sisters in Steel Hill sent a shockwave through the priesthood. Steel Hill quickly became a microcosm of the continent-wide conflict among legates between the Cabalists of the old Order and the Devout who embrace Sunulael's ecclesiastical authority. At first, seeing their doom writ large, many Cabalist legates jumped ship and openly declared themselves of the Devout. Since the sudden faltering of Vylaria's inquisition, however, as the Preceptor fell under Morgatha's spell, the legates of Steel Hill have fallen into a terrified fugue. They are painfully divided and seem to simply be waiting for the sword to fall. The sword brethren are the exception; while principally of the Devout, they have so far maintained a neutral stance and stayed aloof from the squabbles of their spiritual brothers, making them the only truly effective representatives of the Order in Steel Hill.

Resistance in the North

A number of resistance groups operate in the Lia Rudh Emyr, including members of Roland's Raiders and the near-mythical band of riders known as the Brotherhood of the Hunt, led by the enigmatic Horned Man. Farther to the north, clansmen gather about the banner of the mysterious spirit called Cendara.

The Cendaran

A year ago, word reached Steel Hill of a cult of Dornish barbarians who were actively recruiting young Dorns into their fold. The cult, calling themselves the Cendaran, centers on the worship of a spirit known as Cendara who claims to be one of the legendary First Dorns—the ancestors of the entire Dornish civilization. Whatever the truth of the matter, her power is undeniable. Reports have her destroying an entire orc patrol with a whisper and whisking two score of her followers, who were about to be engaged by Ghothmub's war-band on the banks of the Coinlin River, into thin air. Following this humiliation, Ghothmub has been hell-bent on hunting the Cendaran down and killing them to a man.

The Eyes of Izrador recently captured a Cendaran agitator who had been trying to recruit clansmen in the city. Intelligence gained from this unfortunate young warrior revealed that the cult is operating to the northeast of Steel Hill, based near an ancestor ring outside an ancient village that has lain empty for nearly 500 years. Ghothmub caught wind of the Cendaran's capture, and is apoplectic with rage because the legates will not reveal the information they learned during their interrogation. Vylaria has yet to share the information with even her own fellow legates, possibly hoping to use it to her advantage against the Cabalists. At the moment, the only thing prolonging the existence of the Cendaran is the jockeying for power within the order; were the sword brethren or the legion to gain the information, the Dornish warriors would be slaughtered.

Cleite Fir

The enigmatic figure known as the Man of Feathers (*Norther: Cleite Fir*) is a near-mythical figure in Steel Hill and is, to many, the patron guardian of the city. He appears as an itinerant wanderer who wears a cloak fashioned from raven feathers. This cloak, each feather of which is said to be from a different bird, gives him his name and protects him from the eyes of Morgatha's evil spies. The Raven Crone's hatred for Cleite Fir is an incandescent flame, fanned in no small part by the effrontery of his feathered cloak.

Cleite Fir is said to be a druid of great power, beloved of the ancestor spirits and the guardian of ancient secrets. He is a mysterious character, and while it is unclear to whom or what he is allied, it is undoubted that he contests the Shadow's rule in the Lia Rudh Emyr. The Man of Feathers often appears within the city, whispering words of encouragement to the enslaved population; yet the servants of the Shadow seem powerless to apprehend him, for he can move through the swirling mist and smoke that chokes the air of Cruach Emyr and disappear without trace.

Where he goes, or where he comes from, is as much a mystery as most things that concern Cleite Fir.

There are, though, those who know *something* of the druid: to these few, Cleite Fir is known as the Guardian of the Stones (referring to the circle of ancestor stones south of the Cruach Emyn) and Bearer of the Staff of Amber Tears. These sacred duties are ancient callings, as old as the stones themselves, and Cleite Fir is merely the latest in a long unbroken line of such men and women.

Cleite Fir has not yet mounted significant overt resistance to the Shadow's chokehold on Steel Hill. However, the city's masters consider Cleite Fir to be extremely dangerous: he brings hope to the people and makes a laughing stock of the orcs and Aushav's Bloodguard. For these crimes he is among the most wanted men in the region.

The Horned Man and the Brotherhood of the Hunt

A tale of hope whispered among the slaves and indentured servants of Cruach Emyn concerns the Horned Man and his Brotherhood of the Hunt. Such whispers hold that the Horned Man is no other than Cullan Ironhand himself, returned for vengeance.

For the past several months, a group that many are now openly calling the Brotherhood of the Hunt has harried the Shadow's forces between Steel Hill and the mines. Their leader is, allegedly, a giant of a man who wears a great horned helm. The tales become more fanciful with each retelling: the latest have this Horned Man tow-



ering over eight feet tall with legs like tree trunks and wielding a greataxe wrought of ice, striking dead twenty orcs with a single sweeping blow. No matter the truth in these tales, something has made the masters of the city nervous: numerous sorties of blood riders and orc fists have ridden north in haste after a call for reinforcements, only to return disheveled and sullen, bearing angry scowls rather than insurgents for the city's hungry gibbets.

The Horned Man was indeed Cullan Ironhand, an unfortunate smith whose tale is told in song by the freemen of the north. The brave man was mortally wounded while defending his son from an orc. In an attempt to save Cullan's life, the druid Cleite Fir plucked the smith from the castle's dungeons using the magic of his staff and summoned the ancient spirit of the River Be'neeya. She could not save Cullan, but offered him a way to realize his revenge on Aushav and the cruel masters of Steel Hill. Be'neeya fetched an ancient helm, lost for millennia in the gelid waters of her element, which could hold Cullan's life-force and allow him to walk the mortal realm at certain times. Although Cullan's mortal form perished that night, his spirit remained, bonded to the strange horned helm. The man that had been Cullan gained supernatural powers, including the ability to form a physical body from the ethereal mists of the Lía Rudh Emyn, but only during the time of the Hunter's moon.

Cullan, now the Horned Man, rides upon a spectral steed given flesh. He is accompanied by nine ferocious warriors, fellow lost souls, and together they wreak a bloody toll on the forces of the Shadow. The orcs and Bloodguard are at a loss as to what to do—the elusive horsemen strike with swift, terrible violence, leaving none of the Shadow's forces alive; yet they leave no tracks or sign of their passing. The only witnesses are slaves who are spared, but not rescued. Those

who are recaptured swear under the torturer's knife that the whole troop appeared and vanished into the mist with only the baying of hounds to mark their passing.

The Lady of the River

The Be'neeya River is the major artery of trade in northwestern Erenland and provides for much of the commerce flowing from Steel Hill and Bastion down to the Sea of Pelluria. The river is named after the powerful water spirit that once lived in its upper reaches.

The spirit of Be'neeya is most closely associated with Steel Hill, and influenced much of the city's

history from its founding until the beginning of the Last Age. Be'neeya was known to be capricious and struck out at Dorns and the Shadow's minions alike. During the First Age, even before Steel Hill existed, the Dorns of the Lía Rudh Emyr learned to live with and appease the capricious spirit. Be'neeya's greatest contribution to the city, however, came during the battles of the Second Age, when orcish hosts besieged Steel Hill. The river became a raging torrent, destroying orc encampments and supply trains along the riverbanks. The orcs were forced east of the river, allowing the forces of Erenland free movement to the west. Be'neeya also calmed and lowered the river to allow Erenlander and elven forces to cross the river and attack the rear of the Shadow's horde. The battles of this Age would have been far worse but for Be'neeya.

Be'neeya disappeared somewhere between the end of the Third Age and the beginning of the Last Age. Some believe that she was destroyed by the Shadow to ensure his swift conquest of the Northwest. Others suggest that Be'neeya knew that the Shadow would succeed, and retreated to a place of safety. Since the start of the Last Age, there have been reported sightings of Be'neeya, but none can confirm that the spirit still exists. Although Be'neeya may be dead or fled, fisherman and traders still make offerings to her out of sight of the legates to gain her blessing for a bountiful catch or safe passage.

Roland's Raiders

The riders of Roland's resistance have fairly straightforward objectives: they must obtain weapons and iron to give others who fight against the Shadow; steal other supplies necessary to feed and clothe themselves; limit the flow of weapons and armor out of Steel Hill so that it cannot be used for ill; rescue slaves and smuggle them from the region; and hamper the mining operations as much as possible. Roland realizes that he cannot permanently close the mines, nor could his forces ever hope to hold them for long, and so harassment of the Shadow's operations and targeted assassinations tend to be the limit of the raiders' operations.

The Raiders have set up a small base in an old abandoned mineshaft close to the Great Mine. They use the mineshaft as an observation post and staging point from which to smuggle people into and out of the area. The shaft descends 80 feet and has handholds carved into the rock for access. It has its own water supply and good ventilation, such that smoke from fires within is diffused by the time it gets to the surface and does not call attention to the mineshaft's location. Up to 60 men can dwell there in cramped comfort on their enemies' doorstep, all the while conducting raiding, scouting, and rescue missions.

This resistance cell has established a network of sympathizers in Tarish who smuggle iron ore from the mine. Agents in the smelt works also ensure that a quantity of iron ore is discarded with the slag dumped over the stockade wall. The Raiders then use the army of orphans that dwell in Tarish to search the slag piles for

the metal. The mine overseers don't bother the urchins, who hand over enough ore to the mine officials to assuage suspicion and be allowed to continue their visits to the slag heaps. For their part, the urchins receive coin and food from both the Raiders and the mine masters.



The Lady

At the end of the Second Age, a young maiden of House Falon learned she must marry outside the House to further a political alliance. The girl was already in love and could not countenance marriage to a stranger. Having nowhere to turn, she fled her family's holdings and threw herself into the gelid waters of the River Be'neeya. It is said that Be'neeya took pity on the lass, embracing her to make her passing painless.

Since that time, the river spirit has often taken the tragic maiden's form, appearing as a tall, willowy girl of Dornish descent with pale skin and captivating eyes of an unbroken brilliant blue. If the spirit-woman is seen crying it means death or some great disaster is to follow. However, when she is seen with flowers or birds, it signals that the spirit is pleased, and those who sight her can be assured of some boon or good fortune.

CHAPTER 4

Muster of Steel Hill

While geographically insignificant and thought of by many as a backwater locale, Cruach Emyn is in fact a terribly important resource for the Night Kings and their dark lord. To find proof of this assertion, one need simply look at the number of surprisingly powerful individuals that make their homes here, whether in service to Izrador or for their own purposes. The names and game statistics of this chapter are designated as **Open Game Content**. The background and descriptive text is designated as closed content.

Prominent Personalities

Aushav Falon, Traitor Prince of Cruach Emyn

Shadow Corrupted Male Sarcosan Rog3/Chn12 (Hermetic): CR 19; Medium Humanoid (6 ft. 6 in. tall); HD 15d8+48; hp 115; Init +5; Spd 30 ft. (6 squares); AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 17; Base Atk +11; Grp +14; Atk +14 melee (1d6+3, claw); Full Atk +12/+12 (1d6+3, 2 claws); SA sneak attack +2d6, spells; SQ -30% XP cost to learn new spells, art of magic, black shroud 3/day, cold resistance 20, damage reduction 10/silver and magic, darkvision 60 ft., evasion, fast healing 7, lorebook, potent, Sarcosan traits, shadow's luck, spells, trapfinding, trap sense +1; AL CE; SV Fort +10, Ref +11, Will +10; Str 16, Dex 13, Con 17, Int 18, Wis 7, Cha 8.

Skills: Appraise +6, Bluff +4, Concentration +21, Decipher Script +10, Disguise +5, Gather Information +9, Handle Animal +9, Hide +7, Intimidate +17,

Knowledge (arcana) +22, Knowledge (central Erenland) +22, Knowledge (nobility & royalty) +22, Knowledge (Northlands) +22, Knowledge (southern Erenland) +22, Knowledge (religion) +22, Listen +4, Move Silently +7, Ride +11, Sense Motive +10, Sleight of Hand +6, Spellcraft +14, Spot +4.

Feats: Craft Wondrous Item, Empower Spell, Greater Spellcasting (evocation), Improved Initiative, Magecraft, Multiattack, Silent Spell, Spellcasting (conjunction), Spellcasting (divination), Spellcasting (enchantment), Spellcasting (evocation), Spellcasting (necromancy), Spellcasting (transmutation), Spellcasting (universal), Still Spell, Toughness.

Spells Known (7 0-lvl spells/day; 16 points of spell energy/day; DC 17 + spell level): 0—*acid splash, cure minor wounds, detect magic, mage hand, open/close, read magic, resistance*; 1st—*comprehend languages, identify, mage armor, magic missile, true strike, unseen servant*; 2nd—*darkness, detect thoughts, false life, flaming sphere, gust of wind, web*; 3rd—*arcane sight, dispel magic, lightning bolt, vampiric touch*; 4th—*arcane eye, black tentacles, enervation, resilient sphere, scrying*; 5th—*call lightning storm, cloudkill, faithful hound, telekinesis*; 6th—*acid fog, chain lightning, contingency, disintegrate, greater dispel magic, transformation, true seeing*.

Languages: Colonial, Courtier, Erenlander, Norther, Black Tongue.

Possessions: Fine silk clothing, bracers of armor +3, greater spell talisman (transmutation), spell talisman (lightning bolt), dagger +1.

Aushav Falon was born in the city of Alvedara, the only child of Tadhg Falon who was the brother of Lord Ardloeg, ruler of House Falon. Tadhg's wife, Aushav's mother, was Vashti Parveneh, the daughter of a powerful noble family in Alevedra. The Falons saw this match as an important political alliance, bringing them influence at court and resources to support their

Tapestry of Flayed Souls

This wall covering is made of blood-soaked leathery hides that are badly stitched together and bear numerous wheals and scars. The frame that holds the tapestry is approximately 15 feet tall by 10 feet wide, constructed from yellowing bones and lashed together with sinew. Indistinct faces and gaping mouths form and move across its surface before fading away. Any who would use the tapestry must speak the words of power that were woven into its fabric, known only by Aushav. The tapestry has the following powers.

—At will, the spirits of the tapestry may attempt to *scry* on any creature, object, or location as per the spell. Creatures that succeed at their Will save may not be scryed upon by the tapestry for one week.

—Once per day the spirits of the tapestry can be made to reveal the location of an object as per the *locate object* spell, but with a range of 10 miles.

—Once per week the spirits of the tapestry can be made to reveal the location of a creature as per the *locate creature* spell, but with a range of 10 miles.

—Once per week the spirits of the tapestry can be induced to read the thoughts of a creature previously located by the tapestry's spirits. This

power functions as the *detect thoughts* spell with unlimited range. The sentience of the tapestry relays the information it gathers using its own words, sometimes applying its own interpretation. A successful level check (1d20+1 per HD of the user; maximum +25) against DC 20 is required to force the spirits to accurately relay the information they gather.

—Once per week the spirits of the tapestry will accurately answer one short question regarding a creature or object, as per the *legend lore* spell.

Every time a power of the tapestry is invoked, the trapped souls become restless, and their resentment of the living boils to the surface. Each use of the tapestry has a chance (cumulative 5%) of causing the spirits to become incoherent with rage, at which point the voices will scream and wail, performing no other services until they are appeased with blood. The mouths can only be appeased by being fed every last drop of blood from seven living, sentient creatures of size Medium or larger. The tapestry will not function again until the blood price has been paid.

Strong abjuration and divination; CL 15th; *locate object*, *locate creature*, *detect thoughts*, *legend lore*, *scry*; Weight 243 lb.

defenses in the North. It was hoped that one day Aushav would follow in his father's footsteps, continuing his ambassadorial role at the court of the High King.

Despite loving parents, the finest of educations, and considerable wealth, Aushav grew to be a petty-minded, dislikeable youth. The company he kept was less than desirable for one of his standing; his associates ranged from inconsequential sycophants spawned by minor noble houses to lowlife thugs, charlatans, and thieves. He used his family's wealth and influences to satisfy his every desire, rather than to maintain their honor or further the good works supported by his parents. Aushav's scandals were an embarrassment to House Falon, and did much to counteract the goodwill accrued by his father at court.

In 886 Third Age, Aushav's mother died unexpectedly. Aushav was stunned by her sudden passing and wallowed in self-pity, becoming obsessed by death and his own mortality. This mania grew until he bent all his energies towards cheating death. Aushav researched all manner of arcane lore, consulting with any who claimed to have knowledge of the Art. Such was the intensity of the young man's obsession that his father requested to be relieved of his ambassadorial duties, and

returned to Steel Hill with Aushav in tow; in the Falons' traditional home city, he hoped Aushav would be free of both the malign influence of his sordid contacts and melancholy memories of his mother.

Aushav's arrival in Steel Hill did not go well. The clan leaders didn't warm to their arrogant, and by now decidedly odd, southern kinsman. Aushav was well past the age when most Dornish nobles had been leading troops along the Fortress Wall, and his lack of military experience earned him the contempt of his northern kin. The petulant lordling was excluded from war councils and all but the most unimportant political meetings, further alienating him and deepening his resentment of his countrymen.

Aushav would perhaps have remained little more than a tragic line in the troubled history of the Dorns, destined to die unknown and unloved by any except his father, but for two unfortunate events: the first was the untimely death of Lord Ardloeg's only son and heir to the Falon seat during battle on the Fortress Wall. The second was the death of Tadhg Falon himself. Lord Ardloeg named his daughter, Eden, as heir; Aushav, being the eldest surviving male of the line, felt that he should have been named instead, and was quick to

clutch this new insult to his breast. The death of his father completed Aushav's isolation, but at last gave him unfettered access to his family's wealth. When the Sarcosan-raised lord, ignorant of northern ways, tried to buy his way to power, his Dornish kinsmen were insulted. It was not long before he was all but ostracized from the clan.

Now truly alone, Aushav began to hear whispers in the dark. Voices that told him *he* was destined to rule: had not his birthright been *taken* from him? It seemed that the barbaric northerners either did not or could not understand true greatness! This honeyed voice seduced the lonely, frightened man with grand promises if he would only do one, small, thing; one tiny sacrifice was all that it would take to gain everything he desired. So it was that Aushav Falon gave his soul to Izrador. And in return he was given eternal life, and victory and dominion over his enemies and their lands.

Bazan Githuran, High Captain of Cruach Emyr

Male Erenlander (House Falon) Ftr7/Blr5: CR 12; Medium Humanoid (6 ft. 4 in. tall); HD 12d10+24; hp 84; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 28, touch 12, flat-footed 27; Base Atk +12; Grp +16; Atk +19 melee



(1d10+8/17–20/x2, +2 *bastard sword*) or +17 melee (1d8+4, masterwork Dornish horse spear [lance] or 1d10+6, Dornish horse spear [greatclub]; Full Atk +19/+14/+9 melee (1d10+8/17–20, +2 *bastard sword*) or +17/+13/+7 melee (1d8+4, masterwork Dornish horse spear [lance] or 1d10+6, masterwork Dornish horse spear [greatclub]); SA —; SQ blood magic 2/day, deadly charge 2/day, Erenlander traits, unstoppable; AL LE; SV Fort +12, Ref +4, Will +7; Str 19, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 16.

Skills: Handle Animal +18, Intimidate +18, Knowledge (northern Erenland) +2, Knowledge (warfare) +8, Profession (soldier) +8, Ride +16.

Feats: Cleave, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (*bastard sword*), Great Cleave, Improved Critical (*bastard sword*), Leadership, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Ride-by Attack, Spirited Charge, Trample, Weapon Focus (*bastard sword*), Weapon Specialization (*bastard sword*).

Languages: Erenlander, Norther, Black Tongue, Orc Pidgin.

Possessions: Fine clothes of black cloth, supple, knee-length black leather boots, black +2 *spiked full plate*, +1 *heavy steel shield of light fortification*, steel full-helm, ornate +2 *bastard sword*, masterwork Dornish horse spear, blood-red *cloak of Charisma* +2, vial of *cure moderate wounds*, 2 vials of *cure serious wounds*, broad girdle, large belt pouch with 200 gilden coins, heavy warhorse, chainmail barding.

Bazan Githuran was born on the northern Pellurian shore, the youngest son of a poor fisherman. Largely ignored as a child, Bazan longed to escape the drudgery of his parochial existence. At the earliest opportunity the boy left the fishing community of his youth, signing up as a scullion for one of the merchant coasters that transported weapons south from Steel Hill and took supplies back again. Then, when little more than thirteen summers, he picked up a sword from a fallen guard and helped repel insurgent attackers on the Iron Road. That day, he demonstrated a natural skill and cool head in battle far beyond his experience or years. The caravan master was quick to train the boy, and within a few years Bazan was leading the merchant's men, successfully protecting his wagons for several years. The youthful Bazan loved the simmering danger and decadent grandeur of Steel Hill, and on his frequent visits had observed the red-cloaked soldiers of Prince Aushav's Bloodguard; something about them and their frightening commanders called to the young man. At the age of 18, Bazan Githuran left the merchant's employ and joined their ranks.

Bazan was quick to advance through the ranks of that elite group. His sword arm was unbested, and he grew strong and skilled under the tutelage of hard taskmasters. Eventually he came to the attention of his blood rider captain, who recognized his potential and took him as a protégé. Within five years of joining the

Bloodguard, Bazan walked the torch-lit secret corridors beneath Castle Falon to drink blood and swear unholy allegiance to his fellow blood riders, his Prince, and almighty Izrador.

Bazan's ascendance within the blood riders was as quick as it had been in the common Bloodguard, and when his predecessor died in a skirmish with Dornish rebels, he at last took the position of High Captain. Bazan has led the Bloodguard ably and well for the past 10 years. He gained his position due to his competence and complete dedication to Prince Aushav; but now doubt begins to gnaw at his heart. Bazan fears for his liege and the spiraling madness that consumes him; he sees the rising tide of chaos that threatens to overwhelm all men of the Lía Rudh Emyr if someone does not pull the disparate factions of power together. Even knowing this, he cannot bring himself to conspire with any others; he despises Morgatha and her ilk, and he holds no love for the legates and their Order, considering them as debased and dishonorable as the orcs. While there is no doubt that Bazan is a merciless warrior and brutal murderer, he is nevertheless an honorable man. Unfortunately for him and the resistance, the cause that won his loyalty was an evil and ignoble one.

Cleite Fir

Male Dorn Chr5/Drd6: CR 11; Medium Humanoid (6 ft. 6 in. tall); HD 5d6+6d8+22; hp 65; Init +1; Spd 30 ft (6 squares); AC 12, touch 11, flatfooted 11; Base Atk +9; Grp +10; Atk +11 melee (1d6+2, *staff of Amber Tears* +1); Full Atk +11/+6 melee (1d6+2, *staff of Amber Tears* +1); SA spells; SQ art of magic, Dornish traits, druidcraft, improved spellcasting, master of two worlds, nature sense, spells, trackless step, whispering world, woodland stride, venom immunity; AL NG; SV Fort +8, Ref +4, Will +13; Str 12, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 18, Cha 10.

Skills: Bluff +7, Concentration +10, Handle Animal +5, Heal +9, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (nature) +17, Knowledge (Northlands) +8, Profession (herbalist) +15, Sense Motive +6, Spellcraft +9, Survival +15.

Feats: Brew Herbal Concoctions, Craft Wondrous Item, Magecraft, Spellcasting (divination), Spellcasting (evocation), Spellcasting (illusion), Spellcasting (lesser conjuration), Spellcasting (transmutation), Spellcasting (universal).

Spells Known (7 0-lvl spells/day; 15 points of spell energy/day; DC 14 + spell level): 0—*cure minor wounds, dancing lights, flare, know direction, light, purify food and water, resistance*; 1st—*disguise self, endure elements, entangle, goodberry, mage armor, obscuring mist, shillelagh, speak with animals*; 2nd—*alter self, barkskin, disguise ally*§, *fog cloud, misdirection, protection from arrows, pyrotechnics*; 3rd—*cover the scent*§, *displacement, meld into stone, nondetection, silver wind*§; 4th—*gaseous form, hallucinatory terrain,*

locate creature, polymorph, stonewalk, scrying; 5th—*cloudkill, control winds, transmute rock to mud.*

§ Described in MIDNIGHT: *Against the Shadow.*

Languages: Black Tongue, Druidic, Erenlander, High Elven, Norther, Orcish Pidgin, Trader's Tongue.

Possessions: Poorly fashioned clothes made from fur, cloth, and leather (equivalent to padded armor), knee-length fur boots, *Raven's Cloak* (grants the wearer the benefits of continual *nondetection* and *hide from animals* effects at CL 18th), *Staff of Amber Tears* (see Sidebar), wide belt, large belt pouch containing material components for spells, small leather pouch containing herbs, leather satchel containing seven *goodberries*,

Staff of Amber Tears

This gnarled wooden quarterstaff is fashioned from entwined roots whose tapered ends grasp a large, tear shaped piece of amber. Entrusted to the druids that guard the ancestor stones of Cruach Emyr, the Staff of Amber Tears has been in their possession for millennia. The age of the staff and the fate of those who crafted it is unknown, but the druids believe it was created by the elthedar soon after the Sundering. The druid, Cleite Fir, is the current bearer of the staff.

The *staff of amber tears* has the following supernatural powers, each with a caster level equal to the Hit Dice of the bearer:

3rd Level: The bearer of the staff gains the effects of a continual *longstrider* spell.

5th Level: The bearer may use *locate object* once per week.

7th Level: The staff gains a +1 enhancement bonus.

9th Level: The wielder may use *haste* and *slow*, each once per day.

11th Level: The staff can be made to weep a tear of amber that quickly hardens. Only one tear can be in existence at any one time. When the tear is placed under the tongue and activated as a standard action, it grants its user the effects of *freedom of movement* and *greater invisibility* spells at caster level 11th. The tear grows smaller each round it is retained under the tongue, disappearing altogether after 11 rounds.

13th Level: The staff's wielder can enact the *ritual of Idurthuras* even if not of sufficient level to cast the spell. Qualified casters may join in the ritual as normal.

bonemoss infusion (2 doses), *bonemoss salve* (2 doses), *emphalo stalk slave* (2 doses), *emphalo stalk infused oil* (1 dose), and 2 man-days of rations.

Little is known of Cleite Fir's past. Refer to the Power and Politics section for further information on this enigmatic channeler.

Dorgath Blackhand, High Legate of Scath na'Cruach

Male Erenlander Lgt11 (Keeper of Obsidian): CR 11; Medium Humanoid (5 ft. 9 in. tall); HD 11d8+11; hp 75; Init +2; Spd 20 ft.; AC 19, touch 13, flat-footed 17; Base Atk +8; Grp +8; Atk +9 (1d8, masterwork heavy mace); Full Atk +9/+4 melee (1d8, masterwork heavy mace); SA spells; SQ astirax companion, rebuke undead 6/day, spells; AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +10; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 12, Wis 17, Cha 8.

Skills: Bluff +3, Concentration +15, Diplomacy +1, Intimidate +1, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (central Erenland) +1, Knowledge (religion) +15, Sense Motive +7, Spellcraft +14.

Feats: Empower Spell, Extend Spell, Extra Turning, Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (abjuration), Spell Focus (necromancy).

Languages: Black Tongue, Dorn, Erenlander.

Spells Prepared (6/6+1/5+1/5+1/3+1/2+1/1+1; base DC = 13 + spell level; †abjuration and necromancy spells are DC 14 + spell level): 0—*detect magic*, *detect poison*, *guidance*, *read magic* (x3); 1st—*bane*, *cause fear*†, *comprehend languages*, *cure light wounds*, *entropic shield*, *protection from good*†, *sanctuary**†; 2nd—*augury*, *cure moderate wounds*, *darkness*, *deseccrate*†, *enthrall*, *hold person*; 3rd—*bestow curse*†, *blindness/deafness*†, *cure serious wounds* x2, *invisibility purge*, *protection from energy**†; 4th—*empowered cure moderate wounds*, *extended magic vestment*, *poison*†, *unholy blight**; 5th—*flame strike*, *spell resistance**†, *symbol of pain*; 6th—*antimagic field**†, *harm*†.

*Domain spell. *Domains:* Evil (cast evil spells at +1 caster level), Protection (protective ward grants +11 resistance bonus on next save, 1/day).

Possessions: Rich robes of ermine and velvet (white and purple), soft leather boots, +1 *breastplate*, masterwork heavy mace, +1 *ring of protection*, *potion of blur*, *potion of gaseous form*, scroll of *command*, scroll of *cure moderate wounds*, scroll of *glyph of warding*, scroll of *neutralize poison*, scroll of *restoration*, scroll of *commune*, gold symbol of Izrador, belt pouch containing 140 gilden coins, 500 gp worth of fine alcohol, jewelry, maps, perfumes, silks, and spices.

Dorgath was a spoiled child of legate parents and was sent to Theros Obsidia at an early age. In that black tower, he was quickly disabused of an overweening manner by his fellow neophytes and the Masters. They

would probably have murdered him early on if not for his surprising aptitude for magic, which suggested that he was favored by Izrador. Despite such divine providence, Dorgath was universally despised and largely shunned by his fellow legates. Consequently, he spent much of his years as a neophyte alone. Dorgath took to wandering the labyrinthine libraries and catacombs beneath the black tower, learning all he could of Izrador's teachings, wallowing in self-pity and nursing hatred for his fellows.

Then, one bleak day in the arc of Hanud, life changed for Dorgath. In his meanderings, the young legate came across an area of the catacombs he hadn't previously seen, and almost stumbled into a sinister and clandestine meeting. Dorgath recognized several of his Masters and a few of his peers among the gathered legates, tormentors all. From his hidden vantage, he heard their schemes and how they planned to bring ruin upon the Cabal. In this whispered discourse, Dorgath heard a name he recognized. At this point in his career, Dorgath was neither Cabalist nor Devout, nor did he truly understand what the two schismatic factions of the Order were about—did they not all serve the same glorious god? Nevertheless, the young legate saw advantage here, and the possibility of winning powerful friends among the Cabal, not to mention settling a score or three with his tormentors. With no further thought Dorgath hurried to the named Cabalist's chambers, to reveal what he had heard.

Dorgath never discovered what happened as a result of his tale-telling, but he never again saw those legates who had gathered in the catacombs again. It was only later that he realized with cold, dawning dread that if his black-handed treachery was ever discovered, he would likely look upon his vilified and lonely existence to date as a halcyon by comparison.

In the following spring, Dorgath was sent north to take up his devotions at the Temple of Scath na'Cruach in Steel Hill. Dorgath understood that this was a great honor; the city's temple was old, and its zordrafin corith was on the cusp of becoming a red mirror. The callow youth arrived in Steel Hill, a Cabalist stronghold, and took a relatively senior position in the temple's hierarchy. Within a few years he had progressed even higher, not by skill or merit, but by backstabbing and betrayal. In Cruach Emyn he gained the appellation "Blackhand" for his treacherous acts of self-aggrandizement. However, despite Dorgath's apparent skill at furthering his own position at the expense of others, his success could largely be attributed to serendipitous opportunity, well-suited to Dorgath's base cunning, rather than to design. Dorgath was no politician, and did not play the great game well. Indeed, the shallow legate wasn't even ambitious; all he cared about was living an opulent lifestyle, with all the benefits his power and position could bring. And for a time, the remote position of Steel Hill allowed him this luxury.

The treachery he committed in Theros Obsidia still haunts Dorgath, however, and he is filled with terror when he thinks of what the Devout would do if they ever discovered his involvement in that episode. Dorgath reacted with fright at the arrival of Vylaria, a preceptor of the Sisterhood of Tender Mercies and unashamedly of the Devout. Since her arrival, Dorgath has all but withdrawn from public life. However, recent secret meetings with the dwarves of the Black Blood clan suggest the cowardly legate has some plan he believes will tip the balance back in his favor.

Morgatha, the Raven Crone

Female Orc Chr14 (Charismatic): CR 14; Medium Humanoid (6 ft. 1 in. tall); HD 14d6+14; hp 51; Init +2; Spd 30 ft (6 squares); AC 13, touch 13, flat-footed 11; Base Atk +10; Grp +8; Atk +8 melee (1d4–1, +1 dagger of venom); Full Atk +8/+3 melee (1d4–1, +1 dagger of venom); Face/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA spells; SQ art of magic, empathic link, force of personality, orc racial traits, *scry* on familiar, share spells, spells, summon familiar; AL NE; SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +11; Str 6, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 17, Wis 14, Cha 21.

Skills: Appraise +6, Bluff +17, Concentration +17, Craft (alchemy) +11, Craft (jewelry) +13, Diplomacy +15, Handle Animal +9, Heal +6, Intimidate +24, Knowledge (arcana) +18, Knowledge (nature) +13, Knowledge (Northern Marches) +7, Knowledge (religion) +15, Profession (herbalist) +19, Sense Motive +16, Spellcraft +12, Survival +8.

Feats: Alertness (when within 5 ft. of familiar), Brew Herbal Concoctions, Brew Potion, Magecraft, Craft Spell Talisman, Craft Greater Spell Talisman, Extend Spell, Heighten Spell, Spell Focus (necromancy), Spell Focus (enchantment), Spellcasting (conjuration), Spellcasting (divination), Spellcasting (enchantment), Spellcasting (necromancy), Spellcasting (transmutation), Spellcasting (universal).

Spells Known (8 0-lvl spells/day; 19 points of spell energy/day; DC 15 + spell level; † enchantment and necromancy spells are DC 16 + spell level): 0—*arcane mark*, *daze*, *detect magic*, *guidance*, *mage hand*, *mending*; 1st—*charm person*†, *hypnotism*†, *identify*, *mage armor*, *obscuring mist*, *ray of enfeeblement*†, *sleep*†; 2nd—*alter self*, *animal trance*†, *blindness/deafness*†, *enthrall*†, *locate object*, *scare*†, *speak with animals*, *web*; 3rd—*clairaudience/clairvoyance*, *dominate animal*†, *hold person*†, *stinking cloud*, *suggestion*†; 4th—*bestow curse*†, *confusion*†, *contagion*†, *detect scrying*, *fear*†, *locate creature*, *modify memory*†, *polymorph*, *scrying*; 5th—*cloudkill*, *dominate person*†, *mind fog*†, *prying eyes*, *telepathic bond*; 6th—*circle of death*†, *geas/quest*†, *mass suggestion*†, *symbol of fear*†; 7th—*finger of death*†, *symbol of weakness*†.

Rituals: *telepathic bond*, *dominate person*.

Languages: Black Tongue, Old Dwarven Pidgin, High Elven Pidgin, Orcish, Norther, High Elven,

Colonial, Erenlander.

Possessions: filthy rags, tattered *cloak of Charisma* +2, *greater spell talisman (enchantment)*, *ring of protection* +1, +1 *dagger of venom*, *potion of invisibility*.

Cra'ak, Raven Familiar; CR 7; Tiny Animal; HD 7d8; hp 25; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 10 ft., fly 50 ft.; AC 21, touch 14, flat-footed 19; Base Atk +10; Atk +12 melee (1d2–5, claws); Full Atk +12/+7 melee (1d2–5, claws); Face/Reach 2-1/2 ft./0 ft.; SA —; SQ empathic link, deliver touch spells, improved evasion, share spells, speak with master, speak with birds, SR 19; AL NE; SV Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +11; Str 1, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 6.

Skills: Listen +6, Spot +6.

Feats: Weapon Finesse (claws).

Morgatha started life in the frigid north, born into the tribe of the Mother of the Blooded Claw. She was part of a large brood struggling for scraps of food and power. Morgatha was a tiny orc child, born with weak limbs and a warped spine, but she did not suffer from most orcs' lack of presence or sense of self. She survived, and even prospered, using her two special gifts: the spark of magic, and the quick mind and convincing presence necessary to easily manipulate her brood mates. By the time her "blood thickened," Morgatha had



recruited the other younglings as her agents and used them to eliminate all those who could be rivals.

Morgatha's actions and inherent power brought her to the attention of the kurasatch udareen. She was sent to the caverns of the priest-mothers, there to serve and study the sacred lore of the dark god. Morgatha learned the secrets imparted by the ancient high priestesses and demonstrated great aptitude for dark magic. After long years of arduous trials, Morgatha returned to her tribal lands as a kurasatch udareen and took up her place among the worthy priest-mothers of her people. Yet this honored role seemed insufficient to the witch; she felt that Izrador meant for her to do more, to be more, than just the mother of yet another bloodline.

So, when the warriors of the Mother of the Blooded Claw marched to join their brethren in the killing fields of Erethor, Morgatha accompanied them as their spiritual guide. The war raged endlessly on, as it had for countless years, and many of her people died to elven blade and arrow. But the elves were not the only danger on the war front: the sly legates of the Order of Shadow, long having thought they were superior to the kurasatch udareen, played their petty games of intrigue and power; they fought not for Izrador's glory but for their own aggrandizement. Morgatha did what she could to spoil the legates' plans and chose a protégé, the oruk Sharzun, to aid her. Sharzun was the strong arm to complement her consummate powers of enchantment. It appeared that the witch had chosen well: Sharzun led his warriors to many victories, each a tithe bloodily taken from the elves and every one a thorn of aggravation in the legates' sides.

As the years of war passed in the shadow of the Witch Queen's domain, Morgatha felt a calling from the north; not the frozen north of her birth, but closer at hand in the brooding peaks of the western mountains. Morgatha left Sharzun to journey into the lands of the Lía Rudh Emyn, seeking out the source of this strange summons. Among the snow-clad peaks of the Highhorns, she found a singular tree, an evil hulk that pulsed with dark power; beneath it she discovered a hidden cave, and in this ancient nexus of power she made her lair.

While Morgatha courted spirits of power in the cold mountains, her enemies in the Order of Shadow moved against her. Sharzun barely escaped Erethor with his life, and his forces were decimated. Knowing they had lost the battle, Morgatha decided to regroup, using Steel Hill as a base. She needed to marshal her strength and take time to plot her revenge.

Since that time, Morgatha has become powerful in Steel Hill, though she largely manipulates from behind the scenes. Using her familiar as an intermediary and flock leader, and calling upon the black tree's powers, she has performed a ritual to sway the flights of ravens and rooks that mob the valleys, bending them to her will and making them her willing spies. While the ritual granted them little more intelligence than most birds,

each of the creatures can remember a few overheard words and can project into Morgatha's or her familiar's mind the appearance of the words' speakers. Given that there are so many ravens and rooks (and seemingly more arriving every day to serve the witch), there is little that occurs in the city or its domain of which the Raven Crone does not have at least some inkling. Sharzun, ever her faithful servant, now commands Cruach Emyn's garrison, and only Prince Aushav and the Bloodguard truly stand in her way. The legates of Scath na'Cruach are ineffectual and weakly led, and although the sword brethren pose a threat, they are too few to cause real problems outside the temple ward.

Ultimately, Morgatha seeks to humiliate the Order, and she has succeeded to an extent by isolating Dorgath and his cronies and subjugating Vylaria, the Order's much vaunted preceptor. However, the witch wants more than this: she wishes to rule Steel Hill, to be the iron mind behind Sharzun's iron fist, to make the city the home of the Mother of the Blooded Claw tribe. The humans, Aushav's followers in particular, would serve the orcs, and she would become high priestess, unfettered by the sneering arrogance of the Order's legates.

Sharzun the Bloodaxe, Lord Commander of the Splintered Skull Legion

Male Oruk Ftr12: CR 14; Large Giant (9 ft. 3 in. tall); HD 3d8+12d10+60; hp 149; Init +5; Spd 20 ft.; AC 19, touch 11, flat-footed 18; Base Atk +14; Grp +25; Atk +25 melee (3d6+16/19–20/x3, +2 *wounding greataxe*) or +15 ranged (1d8+7, javelin); Full Atk +25/+20/+15 melee (3d6+11/19–20/x3, +2 *wounding greataxe*) or +15 range (1d8+7, javelin); SA —; SQ darkvision 60 ft., light sensitivity, orc/ogre blood; AL NE; SV Fort +14, Ref +6, Will +8; Str 24, Dex 12, Con 18, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Skills: Climb +7, Intimidate +14, Jump +8, Knowledge (warfare) +3, Listen +4, Profession (soldier) +16, Spot +4.

Feats: Cleave, Diehard, Endurance, Great Cleave, Greater Weapon Focus (*greataxe*), Greater Weapon Specialization (*greataxe*), Improved Critical (*greataxe*), Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (*greataxe*), Weapon Specialization (*greataxe*).

Languages: Black Tongue, Erenlander, Norther, Orcish.

Possessions: Well-made, sturdy clothes of heavy cloth and tanned leather (black and gray), heavy hobnail boots, black +2 *banded mail*, thick leather belt, well-made armor greaves, +2 *wounding greataxe*, large fighting knife with jeweled pommel, large belt pouch containing 100 gilden coins, *amulet of health* +2 (red teardrop shaped quartz, capped with silver and hung on a silver chain), +1 *ring of protection*, 3 potions of *cure*

moderate wounds, black raven's feather (Quaal's feather token: bird)

Sharzun was the same as countless others of his race: vicious, cruel, and born with a belly full of rage. It was during his years in the Erethor Forest on the front lines of the war effort against the hated fey that he came into his own and distinguished himself from the horde. The war-band in which Sharzun served was led by a strong but largely incompetent orc by the name of Skaar. This dim-witted brute was the pawn of the legate Halgrim, whose plotting ways were well known (and feared) in the Legion of the Cowl.

For reasons best known to himself, Halgrim sent Skaar's warband on a suicide mission against a particularly well defended elven settlement; the legate intended Skaar's force to fail. As the arrows rained death onto the orcs, Sharzun watched his commander panic and blunder deeper into the elvish trap. Fearing for himself and his warriors, Sharzun tried to convince Skaar to retreat; the War Captain reacted violently to this insurrection, and promised the oruk a painful death on their return to camp. It took only a single blow of Sharzun's massive axe to nullify this promise and transfer leadership to himself. He quickly took control and developed an impromptu strategy using false retreats and the fact that his troops looked half-dead already. When the elves sent scouts out to track the orcs' trail, they found themselves surrounded by barely living but still quite enraged orcs. The wounded orcs died under a hail of arrows, but not before gutting the elves and pushing them deeper into the forest, where Sharzun and the rest of his troops waited. The pitiless oruk then used the still-living elves as both bait to draw out more elven warriors, desperate to save their fellows, and as living shields at whom the elven archers could not bring themselves to fire. This nobility cost them their lives and their fortress. This was the first time, but not the last, that Sharzun demonstrated a primal cleverness and rare military acuity that could turn the tide of many a seemingly lost battle.

Halgrim was not pleased that Sharzun had ruined his plans, and he sought to exact a terrible revenge. However, the young soldier had a hidden ally; the aged kurasatch udareen of his tribe, Morgatha, had been observing Halgrim's machinations for some time, and recognized great potential in the young oruk who had snatched victory in the face of overwhelming odds. Warning Sharzun of Halgrim's plans, Morgatha helped him set a deadly trap for the sly legate. It was a trap the priest didn't escape.

Sharzun continued his tour of Erethor, leading his warriors from one hard-won victory to the next and inspiring a fierce loyalty in those that survived. Among these was a redoubtable half-ogre/half-troll called Azorl the Tusk who, after a particularly savage battle, swore a blood-oath of fealty to Sharzun, vowing to stand by his side as long as he could draw breath. Morgatha let him



make his own decisions and follow his instincts, but was always ready to whisper wisdom in his ear or expose his enemies' secrets for him, should either be necessary. With this capable assistance, Sharzun rose quickly through the ranks of Jahzir's army.

In his eighth year in Erethor, Sharzun's earlier conflict with the Order of Shadow returned to confront him. New legates replaced Halgrim after his death, and they hungered to repay the grievous insult paid to their order. The legates chose their time well, waiting for the witch to be absent from her champion's side (Morgatha had journeyed into the north to tend, surreptitiously, plans that would consolidate her power base in years to come). Halgrim's successors struck with swiftness and force: only Morgatha's wards and the presence of Azorl saved Sharzun from their black fury. Even so, the oruk was sorely wounded and forced to flee into the Eris Aman. He was joined shortly after by most of his warband, still loyal despite lies of Sharzun's treason and cowardice that the legates had spread within the army. The Order had done its work well: Sharzun was no longer welcome in Jahzir's army. It seemed as though Sharzun's illustrious career was over.

Morgatha once more came to Sharzun's rescue. Using her contacts and enchantments, the witch gave Sharzun a place of anonymity in the garrison at Steel



Hill. Over the years, Morgatha and Sharzun maneuvered and manipulated until Sharzun took command of the garrison in a brief but bloody coup reminiscent of events years before in Erethor. Although garrison commander of Steel Hill was a backwater post compared to his former positions, the arms the city produced made it an important cog in the war machine. Sharzun would have to be satisfied.

Several years on, Sharzun has accepted his new position, but his hatred for the Order of Shadow remains strong. The bitter pill of his posting has been sweetened somewhat by the swelling of his ranks to a full legion thanks to recognition by Jahzir of Steel Hill's military importance. However, Aushav, his arrogant Bloodguard, and the conniving legates—all reminders of his one-time humiliation and defeat—gnaw at Sharzun's equanimity. He promises to himself and to Morgatha that, in time, all his enemies will pay.

Vylaria, Preceptor of the Sisterhood

Female Erenlander Lgt8 (Sisterhood of Mercies): CR 8; Medium Humanoid (5 ft. 9 in. tall); HD 8d8+8; hp 44; Init +1; Spd ft.; AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15; Base Atk: +6; Grp +5; Atk +10 melee (1d3+1[non-lethal]+2d6, +1 vicious spell storing whip) or +6 melee (1d4, dagger); Full Atk +10/+5 melee (1d3+1[non-lethal]+2d6, +1 vicious spell storing whip) or +6/+1 melee (1d4, masterwork dagger); SA spells; SQ astirax companion, Erenlander traits, rebuke undead, spells; AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +9; Str 8, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 18.

Skills: Bluff +11, Concentration +8, Diplomacy +8, Intimidate +17, Knowledge (central Erenland) +2, Knowledge (religion) +8, Profession (torturer) +16, Sense Motive +9, Spellcraft +3.

Feats: Combat Expertise, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (whip), Improved Disarm, Persuasive, Weapon Finesse (whip).

Languages: Black Tongue, Erenlander (literate).

Spells Prepared: (6/5+1/4+1/3+1/2+1; base DC = 12 + spell level): 0—*cure minor wound*, *detect poison*, *guidance*, *inflict minor wound*, *light*, *read magic*; 1st—*bane*, *cause fear*, *command*, *deathwatch*, *inflict light wounds**, *shield of faith*; 2nd—*death knell*, *enthrall*, *hold person*, *shatter**, *zone of truth*; 3rd—*blindness/deafness*, *contagion**, *inflict serious wounds*, *magic vestment*; 4th—*discern lies*, *inflict critical wounds**, *poison*.

*Domain spell. **Domains:** Evil (cast evil spells at +1 caster level), Destruction (smite 1/day, +4 to hit and +8 damage).

Possessions: Fine black robes (embroidered with purple runes), high leather boots, corded belt, +1 chain shirt, cloak of resistance +1, +1 vicious spell storing dagger (usually has *inflict serious wounds* stored), masterwork dagger, scroll of *divine favor*, scroll of *augury*,

2 scrolls of *cure moderate wounds*, scroll of *bestow curse*, fine ceremonial clothing, iron symbol of Izrador, belt pouch containing 20 gilden coins.

Legate Vylaria is a preceptor of the Sisterhood of Tender Mercies, driven by ambition born of insecurity; she exudes cruel confidence and power that is but a brittle shell covering a fragile spirit.

Vylaria was born at Theros Obsidia in the 70th year of the Last Age. The acknowledged daughter of a true-blooded legate, middle of three siblings, her life has ever been a fight for recognition and acceptance: recognition from her cold mother, recognition from her proud brothers, recognition within the black ranks of the Order of Shadow. Lacking any true emotional connection or recognition, Vylaria turned to increasingly heinous acts of cruelty toward the innocent and torture of the guilty in order to feel anything at all. After nearly three decades within the cruel and pernicious halls of Theros Obsidia, the tender, frightened, and desperately lonely child has been all but eradicated, replaced by an inhuman priestess bent on carving a niche for herself within the scheming hierarchy of the Order of Shadow. Only Vylaria's eyes occasionally give sight of the hurt and self-loathing that huddles within.

Vylaria's flare for inflicting pain made her an obvious potential inductee to the Sisterhood of Tender Mercies. Vylaria found a release from herself and her fear amidst the blood and screams of the torture chambers, and she used those horrific rooms as training grounds to strip away all of the "weaker" emotions from her psyche, until her soul became as gaunt as her painfully thin frame.

Two years ago, Vylaria was made preceptor of a commandery, which quickly became renowned for its ruthless efficiency in routing out corrupt or faltering legates. Several arcs ago, Vylaria's commandery was sent to Cruach Emyr to investigate rumors of weakness and incompetence within the city's priesthood. It did not take her long to spot the problems that beset the temple and to identify the high legate, Dorgath Blackhand, as the weakest link in the failing chain.

Unfortunately for Vylaria, exposing the weak-willed Dorgath and bringing the erosion of the Order's power to the attention of Theros Obsidia did not sit well with the plans of others in Steel Hill. Morgatha quickly realized the danger posed by Vylaria and bound the young legate with powerful spells; now the Preceptor unwittingly serves Morgatha's will. Vylaria's investigation has ground to a halt, and what was once obvious to her flits maddeningly at the edge of perception, evading elucidation. Her previously clear conclusions now seem vague and uncertain, and Vylaria is drowning in self-doubt and frustration. This has increasingly manifested in outbursts of violence and paranoia directed against those most often around her: the once trusted legates of her commandery. The victims of these outbursts are concerned about the uncharacteristic and erratic behavior of their preceptor. Two weeks ago they sent a trusted

messenger south to Theros Obsidia to report on the situation, but the hapless envoy has yet to return.

Rank and file forces

Steel Hill is crucial to Jahzir's war effort. The city's foundries are never idle and slaves die by the score, scratching out the bloody ore from the bones of the Lía Rudh Emyr. Heavily guarded caravans leave via the March Gate weekly, taking their loads of steel weapons and armor into the southlands and toward the Pellurian Sea. Jahzir can ill afford to lose this vital cog in his war machine, and to this end leaves Steel Hill relatively well garrisoned for its size and geographical location. The main force that maintains occupation of Steel Hill and oversees the security of the mining and smithing operations is the orcish Legion of the Splintered Skull, led by Sharzun the Bloodaxe.

Steel Hill can muster several other formidable forces, including Aushav's oath-sworn Bloodguard and the feared sword brethren of the local chapter of the Brotherhood of the Black Sword. The legates of the Order of Shadow also wield considerable power, but engage in battle only in extremis. In addition to his loyal Bloodguard, Prince Aushav can also call upon clans Strachan and Kalle to provide a limited number of armed clansmen.

Legion of the Splintered Skull

The Legion of the Splintered Skull is the standing military force of Steel Hill. The legion is stronger than a normal garrison for an occupied settlement of this size, but only as much as the Shadow can spare from the war effort to guard this important center of weapons and armor manufacture.

The legion is divided into six warbands, each commanded by a War Captain (Logdúr, Ghothmub, Ragduk, Mroth, Narm, and Gamash). Each war band is further divided into five fists (corps) of twenty warriors led by a fist Commander. Each fist consists of two cadres of ten warriors led by a warrior sergeant. The lord commander of the legion is Sharzun the Bloodaxe, a massive oruk of formidable reputation, veteran of Erethor, and slayer of the Dornish outlaw Broch the Red.

The bulk of the legion is quartered in the undercellars and caves of the crumbling Bastion of Gibbet's Hill. Sharzun also resides in the fortress, where he is closely guarded by a bodyguard of elite oruks.

Sharzun's bodyguards are led by a gigantic half-ogre/half-troll warrior called Azorl the Tusk. A number of orc fists man the Ore and Southbridge gates and quarter in several barracks scattered about Lowtown. There are usually two or more fists split into cadres on patrol in the lands surrounding Steel Hill, scouring the hills and valleys for signs of insurgent activity and runaway slaves. A fist is stationed at each of the guard towers, and another 10 garrison Tarish. Guards are drawn from these later legionnaires to protect the wagons of ore traveling from the mines to Steel Hill; typically, these fists are split so that each wagon train is guarded by a cadre of orc warriors. The orc fists are often supported by goblin warriors, wolf riders, and trackers. The later are feral hunters called sniffers, and are usually found ranging with the orc fists assigned patrol duty farther afield in the Lia Rudh Emyrn.

Legion of the Splintered Skull

600 heavy orc infantry, 200 light goblin infantry, 75 goblin trackers "sniffers," 50 goblin wolfriders, 60 warrior sergeants, 30 fist commanders, 6 War Captains. **Total:** 1021

Bloodguard of Cruach Emyrn

The Bloodguard are the human guardsmen of Steel Hill formed from those mercenaries who supported the Traitor Prince Aushav Falon in the Betrayal. The Bloodguard control all of the upper city of Cruach Emyrn with the exception of the Temple ward, which is held by the Order of Shadow. Aushav's brutal enforcers also control March Gate, and therefore the flow of weapons and armor south along the Iron Road. This situation does not sit well with Sharzun and his orcs host. For their part, the human Bloodguard view the orc legionnaires as essentially an occupying force. The antipathy between the two military forces is a palpable hatred, and the Bloodguard would like nothing better than to drive the "filthy tuskers" beyond "their" walls.

The senior officers of the Bloodguard are warriors of formidable prowess called the blood riders. A soldier called Tanazir the Bloodmask, a young Sarcosan warrior of the beeshi caste, formed this band of black knights. Named thus because he poured human blood over his face prior to battle, the Bloodmask was a murderous rapist who committed atrocious acts upon his enemies and whose gruesome blood rituals gave him supernatural strength and resilience. Despite his dark excesses, Tanazir had been a decorated soldier of extraordinary skill in the army of Kalif Ranur of Cambrial. However, even his reputation as a soldier could not save him from a death sentence after he brutally murdered his wife and children in a fit of magically cultivated rage and lust. He managed to escape via unknown means and later reap-

peared in Aushav's entourage just prior to the Betrayal. Tanazir trained Aushav's lieutenants in warfare and horsemanship, and the troop he founded has since become feared throughout the North.

More than a hundred years have passed since the Betrayal, and Tanazir is long dead; his Bloodguard lives on, however, and it still serves the demonic prince. With spirit-inspired guidance, Aushav has empowered the blood rituals of his former captain, bestowing dark and necromantic gifts upon his knights. When a warrior is accepted into the higher echelons of the Bloodguard, He is taken deep beneath Castle Falon, where he must practice a grim and blasphemous ritual in a blood-drenched cathedral to swear fealty to his fellows, the prince, and to Izrador.

The current commander of the Bloodguard is Bazan Githuran, a quiet, hard man of Erenlander stock. Bazan is unquestionably loyal to Aushav, but has grown progressively more concerned as his liege's behavior becomes ever more erratic. Bazan is only too aware of the precarious political hold Aushav maintains in Steel Hill, and knows that his increasing insanity threatens to destabilize the balance of authority within the city. Only the demonic prince's terrible power stops Sharzun from taking control; even the battle-hardened oruk with his formidable martial skill fears the once-human prince of Steel Hill, and with good reason.

Bloodguard of Cruach Emyrn

200 guardsmen, 10 watch sergeants, 30 blood riders, 3 blood rider lieutenants. **Total:** 243.

The Brotherhood of the Black Sword

A Sarcosan swordsman of consummate skill founded the Brotherhood of the Black Sword at the beginning of the Last Age. The name of this grand master has been lost to the purging flames to which the Voices of Shadow have condemned much of Eredane's history; however, it is said that Jahzir knighted this warrior for his great accomplishments at the end of the Last Battle. The knight swore upon the Night King's black sword to protect Izrador's temples and sacred zordrafin coriths. The knight's following grew quickly from the ranks of zealous soldier legates, who combined devastating mastery of the sword with black sorceries and became the first sword brethren of the feared Brotherhood of the Black Sword. Now, most temples that have a black mirror older than two decades also have an attendant chapter of sword brethren and their acolytes. The latter, called sword-sworn, are soldier legates who have joined the brotherhood's ranks but have yet to master its fluid style of fighting.

The Steel Hill chapter of the Brotherhood of the Black Sword is one of the oldest outside Theros

Obsidia, for the city was one of the first in the North to fall to the Shadow. Cruach Emy'n's zordrafin corith is almost 100 years old, on the cusp of becoming a Grand Mirror. The Knight-Commander of the chapter is Voratch Darksworn, an intense man of middle years who plays a close political game while maintaining the outward appearance of a man dedicated only to his sacred duty. Voratch is the ranking sword brother of the Cruach Emy'n chapter and has a dozen sword brethren and more than 40 sword-sworn under his command. The sword brethren, and ultimately Voratch, also command the normal temple guardsmen, simple fighters drawn from the ranks of the faithful.

Cruach Emy'n Chapter of the Brotherhood of the Black Sword

100 temple guardsmen, 45 sword-sworn, 15 sword brethren. **Total:** 160.

Sample foes

Bloodguard

Male Dorn (House Falon) Ftr2: CR 2; Medium Humanoid; HD 2d10+4; hp 15; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +2; Grp +5; Atks +6 melee (1d10+3, bastard sword) or +5 melee (1d6+3, shortspear) or +2 ranged (1d6+3, shortspear); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA —, SQ Dornish traits; AL NE; SV Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 17, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Skills: Climb -2, Intimidate +2, Jump -2, Knowledge (Northlands) +1, Listen +3, Profession (soldier) +2, Spot +1, Swim -7.

Feats: Cleave, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (bastard sword), Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bastard sword).

Languages: Erenlander, Norther, Orcish Pidgin.

Possessions: Guard uniform (white linen shirt, black fur hat, black woolen pants, broad leather belt, knee-length leather boots, and a long red cloak), well-made scale mail, light steel shield, wide leather belt, armored greaves, bastard sword and back scabbard, shortspear, large fighting knife, large belt pouch containing 2 man-days of rations and 5-10 steel coins.

Appearance and Personality: The Bloodguard walk with a cock-sure swagger that speaks of their belief that they are better than the common man. For the orcs they reserve hatred and, in their hearts, fear. Thanks to Bazan Githuran's leadership, the Bloodguard are well-trained and highly disciplined, though they have not seen much real combat.



Bloodguard Watch Sergeant

Male Erenlander (House Falon) Ftr5: CR 5; Medium Humanoid; HD 5d10+5; hp 32; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 18, touch 11, flat-footed 17; Base Atk +5; Grp +9; Atk +10 melee (1d10+6, bastard sword); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA —; SQ Erenlander traits; AL LE; SV Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +2; Str 18, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Skills: Climb +2, Handle Animal +8, Intimidate +8, Jump +2, Profession (soldier) +8, Ride +9, Spot +5, Swim -8.

Feats: Cleave, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bastard sword), Weapon Proficiency (bastard sword), Weapon Specialization (bastard sword).

Languages: Erenlander, Norther, Orcish Pidgin.

Possessions: As Bloodguard, but with sturdy breastplate, heavy steel shield, and no spear.

Appearance and Personality: Bloodguard sergeants are recognized by the black trim on their red cloaks and the fact that they tend to be of Erenlander stock (Prince Aushav always favors Erenlanders and Sarcosans over Dorns in House Falon). The watch sergeants are veteran warriors, survivors who have learned how to avoid the city's hazards, and act accordingly: they are firm but fair with the city's freemen, intolerant of the inconsequential slaves, and keep their distance from the orcs.

Blood Rider

Male Erenlander (House Falon) Ftr7/Blr1: CR 8; Medium Humanoid; HD 8d10+24; hp 67; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 21, touch 11, flat-footed 20; Base Atk +8; Grp +12; Atk +14 (1d10+7, +1 *bastard sword*) or +12 melee (1d8+4, lance); Full Atk +14/+9 melee (1d10+7, +1 *bastard sword*) or +12/+7 melee (1d8+4, lance); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA deadly charge 1/day; SQ Erenlander traits, unstoppable; AL LE; SV Fort +11, Ref +4, Will +6; Str 18, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Skills: Handle Animal +10, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (northern Erenland) +4, Knowledge (warfare) +7, Profession (soldier) +8, Ride +11.

Feats: Cleave, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (bastard sword), Great Cleave, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Ride-by Attack, Spirited Charge, Weapon Focus (bastard sword), Weapon Specialization (bastard sword).

Languages: Black Tongue, Erenlander, Norther, Orc Pidgin.

Possessions: As Bloodguard, but with masterwork banded mail, +1 *large steel shield*, steel full-helm, +1 *bastard sword*, lance, *cloak of resistance +1*, 2 potions of *cure moderate wounds*, heavy warhorse, tack, chain barding.

Appearance and Personality: Blood riders are the

elite of Prince Aushav's guards. Their red cloaks are trimmed in silver and their equipment is the finest Steel Hill has to offer. These are hard men who have sold their souls in service to Prince Aushav. They are brutal, unforgiving, and can be inhumanly cruel.

Blood Rider Lieutenant

Male Erenlander (House Falon) Ftr7/Blr3: CR 10; Medium Humanoid; HD 10d10+30; hp 85; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 24, touch 11, flat-footed 23; Base Atk +10; Grp +14; Atk +16 melee (1d10+7/17-20, *bastard sword +1*) or +14 melee (1d8+4, lance); Full Atk +16/+11 melee (1d10+7/17-20, *bastard sword +1*) or +14/+9 melee (1d8+4, lance); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA deadly charge 1/day; SQ Erenlander traits, blood magic 1/day, unstoppable; AL LE; SV Fort +13, Ref +5, Will +8; Str 18, Dex 11, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14.

Skills: Handle Animal +11, Intimidate +15, Knowledge (northern Erenland) +4, Knowledge (warfare) +9, Profession (soldier) +8, Ride +12.

Feats: Cleave, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (bastard sword), Great Cleave, Improved Critical, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Ride-by Attack, Spirited Charge, Trample, Weapon Focus (bastard sword), Weapon Specialization (bastard sword).

Languages: Black Tongue, Erenlander, Norther, Orc Pidgin.

Possessions: As blood rider, but with +1 *half-plate*, *cloak of resistance +2*, and *ring of protection +1*.

Appearance and Personality: The blood rider Lieutenants wear red cloaks bordered in gold and bear red plumes on their helms. They are the most trusted and experienced of the Bloodguard, Aushav's inner coterie, and speak with the prince's voice on matters affecting the city. Most scramble from their horses' paths, even orcs.

Goblin Soldier

Male goblin War1: As described in the *MM*.

Languages: Black Tongue, Orcish Pidgin.

Possessions: Hodgepodge clothes of cloth, fur and poorly tanned leather (natural colors), leather wrappings for shoes, thin leather belt, rude studded leather, short sword, dagger, shortbow, 10 arrows, flint skinning dagger, belt pouch with one man-day of rations.

Appearance and Personality: Goblin soldiers are small and spindly, with large, almost luminous eyes, wide mouths filled with small, sharp teeth, and long, claw-like hands. They look like deformed children, bearing sharp steel and malice toward all.

Goblin Sniffer

Male Goblin Wld2: CR 2; Small Humanoid; HD 2d8; hp 8; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 17, touch 14, flat-foot-

ed 14; Base Atk: +2; Grp -2; Atk +3 melee (1d6, short sword) or +6 ranged (1d6, shortbow); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA —; SQ darkvision 60 ft., wildlander traits: bloodhound, tracking; AL CE; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +1; Str 10, Dex 16, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Skills: Climb +3, Heal +6, Hide +12, Knowledge (Northlands) +3, Knowledge (nature) +4, Listen +8, Move Silently +8, Spot +8, Survival +6, Use Rope +6.

Feats: Alertness, Track, Weapon Focus (shortbow).

Languages: Black Tongue, Orcish Pidgin.

Possessions: Same as goblin soldier, but more basic and they usually go bare-foot, plus hunting knife, 10 poisoned arrows (small centipede poison: Injury, Fort DC 10, initial and secondary damage 1d2 Dex), large belt pouch with three man-days of rations.

Appearance and Personality: Sniffers are feral goblins with bent backs and large protruding noses. Their gait is hunched, carrying them close to the ground, and they often use all four limbs to propel themselves. When hunting escaped slaves, orcs sometimes put leashes around sniffers' necks and use them as the Dorns use hunting dogs.

Goblin Wolf Rider

Male Goblin Brb1/Ftr2: CR 3; Small Humanoid; HD 1d12+2d10+3; hp 22; Init +7; Spd 40 ft.; AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 13; Base Atk: +3; Grp +0; Atk +5 melee (1d6+1, shortspear) or +5 melee (1d6+1, scimitar) or +7 ranged (1d4+1, inutek); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA —; SQ darkvision 60 ft., fast movement, rage 1/day, uncanny dodge; AL CE; SV Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +0; Str 12, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Intimidate +5, Jump +2, Knowledge (Northlands) +3, Listen +7, Ride +9, Spot +7.

Feats: Alertness, Improved Initiative, Mounted Combat, Ride-by Attack.

Languages: Black Tongue, Orcish Pidgin.

Possessions: As goblin soldier, but equipment is better quality, plus small wooden shield, shortspear, scimitar, small fighting knife, two inuteks, and belt pouch with two man-days of rations.

Appearance and Personality: Goblin wolf riders are noticeably taller and thinner than average goblins, and their legs are bowed from a lifetime of riding their vicious steeds. Wolf riders are the goblin elite, and they know it.

Wolf mount: As per MM.

Orc Recruit of the Splintered Skull Legion

Male Orc War1: CR 1; Medium Humanoid; HD 1d8+3; hp 7; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +1; Grp +5; Atk +5 melee (1d12+4, vardatch) or +2 ranged (1d6+4, javelin); Space/Reach 5

ft./5 ft.; SA —; SQ orc traits; AL CE; SV Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 18, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Climb +2, Intimidate +1, Jump +2, Survival +2.

Feats: Power Attack.

Languages: Black Tongue, High Elven Pidgin, Old Dwarven Pidgin, Orcish.

Possessions: Simple clothes of rough cloth and poorly tanned leather (natural colors), heavy hobnail boots, crude chain shirt, small wooden shield badly painted with legion insignia in white, wide leather belt, armored greaves, vardatch, dagger, 2 javelins, large belt pouch with two man-days of rations.

Appearance and Personality: These orc warriors are wild-eyed and have tangled manes, dark gray hides, and yellowing tusks. Their deep voices are thick and rasping, their howls frightening. They bear the three bloody claw marks of their tribe upon their cheeks, and the white split skull of their legion upon their shields. Most have few kill scars, as they are still only recruits recently come from the tribal lands in the Northern Marches, but they are nonetheless unpredictable and savage fighters.

Orc Legionnaire of the Splintered Skull Legion

Male Orc Ftr2: CR2; Medium Humanoid; HD 2d10+6; hp 17; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 17, touch 11, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +2; Grp +6; Atk +7 melee (1d12+4, vardatch) or +3 ranged (1d6+4, javelin); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA —; SQ orc traits; AL CE; SV Fort +6, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 18, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Climb +0, Intimidate +2, Jump +0, Survival +2.

Feats: Cleave, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (vardatch).

Languages: Black Tongue, High Elven Pidgin, Old Dwarven Pidgin, Orcish.

Possessions: Same as orc recruits, but with better quality chain shirt, heavy steel shield, and 4 javelins.

Appearance and Personality: More disciplined than the raw recruits but every bit as savage, the orc legionnaires have better quality gear and fight with greater cunning born of experience. Many have taken to shaving their wild manes and painting their pates and faces white with black, jagged lines, to mimic the splintered skull insignia of their legion. They also bear their tribal markings, three bloody slashes across the cheek, with fierce pride.

Orc Sergeant of the Splintered Skull Legion

Male Orc Ftr3: CR 3; Medium Humanoid; HD 3d10+9; hp 22; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 18, touch 11, flat-footed 17; Base Atk +3; Grp +7; Atk +8 melee (1d10+4,

crafted vardatch) or +4 ranged (1d6+4, javelin); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA —; SQ orc traits; AL NE; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +1; Str 18, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Climb -2, Intimidate +4, Jump -2, Knowledge (Northern Marches) +1, Survival +2.

Feats: Cleave, Improved Sunder, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (vardatch).

Languages: Black Tongue, High Elven Pidgin, Old Dwarven Pidgin, Orcish.

Possessions: Same as orc recruit, but with sturdy breastplate, heavy steel shield, crafted vardatch, large fighting knife, and 4 javelins.

Appearance and Personality: Only the most disciplined and skilled of the legionaries become warrior sergeants. These veterans are brutally savage, but fight with canny tactics. They revel in slaughter and bear the many kill scars of countless battles.

Oruk Fist Commander of the Splintered Skull Legion

Male Oruk Ftr3: CR 5; Large Giant; HD 3d8+3d10+12; hp 44; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 16, touch 9, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +5; Grp +14; Atk +10 melee (2d6+7, battleaxe) or +4 ranged (1d8+5, javelin); Space/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.; SA —; SQ darkvision 60 ft., light sensitivity, orc/ogre blood; AL LE; SV Fort +9, Ref +2, Will +3; Str 21, Dex 11, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 9.

Skills: Climb +2, Intimidate +0, Jump +2, Listen +3, Spot +3, Survival +1.

Feats: Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Sunder, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (battleaxe).

Languages: Black Tongue, Orcish.

Possessions: Simple clothes of heavy cloth and tanned leather (natural colors), heavy hobnail boots, well-made breastplate, heavy steel shield emblazoned with the legion's insignia, broad leather girdle, armored greaves, greataxe, fighting knife, 3 javelins, large belt pouch with two man-days of rations, 10 gp worth of alcohol, cured meats, and salt.

Appearance and Personality: These vicious, hulking warriors bear themselves with arrogant cruelty, for they are the elite of the true chosen of Izrador. They exude power and menace, glorying in how the citizens of Steel Hill shrink from their presence. Their arms are covered in ritual kill scars and their eyes glint with feral cunning.

Oruk War Commander of the Splintered Skull Legion

Example: Ghothmub

Male Oruk Ftr6: CR 8; Large Giant (9 ft. 6 in. tall); HD 3d8+6d10+27 hp 73; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 17; Base Atk +8; Grp +18; Atk +15 melee (2d6+8/17-20/x3, masterwork crafted var-

datch) or +9 ranged (1d8+4, masterwork composite longbow [+4 Str]); Full Atk +15/+10 melee (2d6+8/17-20/x3, masterwork crafted vardatch) or +9/+4 ranged (1d8+4, masterwork composite longbow [+4 Str]); Space/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.; SA —; SQ darkvision 60 ft., light sensitivity, orc/ogre blood; AL LE; SV Fort +10, Ref +4, Will +4; Str 22, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 9.

Skills: Climb +9, Intimidate +1, Jump +9, Listen +3, Spot +3.

Feats: Cleave, Endurance, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (crafted vardatch), Improved Overrun, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (crafted vardatch), Weapon Specialization (crafted vardatch).

Languages: Black Tongue, Norther, Orcish.

Possessions: Simple clothes of heavy cloth and tanned leather (natural colors), heavy hobnail boots, thick fur-trimmed woolen *cloak of resistance +1*, *amulet of natural armor +1* (tusk bound with silver wire, hung from a leather thong), masterwork breastplate, heavy steel shield emblazoned with the legion's insignia, broad leather girdle, armored greaves, masterwork crafted vardatch, fighting knife, masterwork composite longbow [+4 Str], 20 arrows, 5 +1 *flaming burst arrows*, 5 +1 *seeking arrows*, *potion of cure serious wounds*, large belt pouch with two man-days of rations, 50 gp worth of alcohol, cured meats, maps, metals, and salt.

Appearance and Personality: Ghothmub is a huge, scarred oruk whose fiery temper is infamous in the city. He characteristically wears a dark green woolen cloak trimmed with black fur, and is often seen striding through the streets of Gibbet's Hill with his goblin bow-carrier scuttling behind him.

Sword Sworn

Male Erenlander Ftr1/Lgt3: CR 4; Medium Humanoid; HD 1d10+3d8+4; hp 23; Init +7; Spd 30 ft.; AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +3; Grp +5; Atk +6 melee (1d8+2, longsword); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA spells; SQ astirax companion, Erenlander traits, rebuke undead, spells; AL NE; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +5; Str 14, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 8.

Skills: Balance +2, Concentration +10, Climb +0, Handle Animal +0, Intimidate +1, Jump +1, Knowledge (central Erenland) +1, Knowledge (religion) +5, Listen +2, Profession (soldier) +6, Spell Craft +2, Spot +2, Swim -2, Tumble +5.

Feats: Combat Casting, Dodge, Mobility, Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (longsword).

Languages: Black Tongue, Erenlander, Norther.

Spells Prepared (4/3+1/2+1; base DC = 12 + spell level): 0—*cure minor wounds*, *detect poison*, *guidance*, *light*; 1st—*cause fear*, *cure light wounds*, *divine favor*, *protection from good**; 2nd—*bull's strength*, *inflict moderate wounds*, *spiritual weapon**.

* Domain spell. Domains: Evil (Evil spells cast at

+1 caster level) and War (Weapon Focus: longsword).

Possessions: Cloth shirt, rough-spun woolen cassock (red) with cowl, rope belt, sandals, chain shirt, longsword, dagger, holy symbol of Izrador (iron).

Appearance and Personality: The novitiates of the Brotherhood of the Black Sword wear hooded robes the color of dried blood. They move about their business with an eerie and silent intensity that is unbroken even in battle; these fervent devotees have taken a vow of silence, not to be forsaken until they are ordained as sword brethren.

Sword Brother

Male Erenlander Ftr4/Lgt3/Sbr2: CR 9; Medium Humanoid; HD 4d10+5d8+9; hp 53; Init +7; Spd 30 ft.; AC 18, touch 13, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +8; Grp +10; Atk +16 melee (1d8+5/17–20, +1 longsword); Full Atk +16/+11 melee (1d8+5/17–20, +1 longsword); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA spells; SQ black blade, Erenlander traits, fluid style, Greater Weapon Focus (black blade), rebuke undead, spells; AL NE; SV Fort +8, Ref +8, Will +9; Str 14, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 8.

Skills: Balance +8, Concentration +7, Climb +1, Intimidate +5, Jump +6, Knowledge (central Erenland) +1, Knowledge (religion) +6, Listen +2, Profession (soldier) +7, Ride +5, Spellcraft +2, Spot +2, Tumble +11.

Feats: Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Dodge, Improved Critical (longsword), Improved Initiative, Mobility, Spring Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword).

Languages: Black Tongue, Erenlander, Norther.

Spells Prepared (4/3+1/2+1; base DC = 12 + spell level): 0—*cure minor wounds, guidance, light, resistance*; 1st—*cause fear, doom, inflict light wounds**, *protection from good*; 2nd—*hold person, inflict moderate wounds, shatter**

* Domain spell. *Domains:* Destruction (smite 1/day, +4 bonus to attack and +3 bonus to damage) and War (Weapon Focus [longsword]).

Possessions: Cloth shirt, high-quality black woolen cassock with cowl, rope belt, sandals, +1 chain shirt, black blade (+1 long sword), dagger, belt pouch with 20-40 steel coins and one man-day of rations, holy symbol of Izrador (iron).

Appearance and Personality: The black knights of Izrador's church and guardians of the sacred zordrafin coriths, sword brethren wear black cassocks with billowing sleeves and hoods that hide their features. They exude silent menace, and even the swaggering orcs give way to them.

Sword Brother, Knight Commander

Example: Voratch Darksworn

Male Erenlander Ftr4/Lgt3/Sbr6: CR 13;



Medium Humanoid (5 ft. 8 in. tall); HD 4d10+9d8+13; hp 75; Init +9; Spd 30 ft.; AC 22, touch 17, flat-footed 20; Base Atk +12; Atk +26 (1d8+13/17–20, +2 *long sword*); Full Atk +26/+21/+16 melee (1d8+13/17–20, +2 *long sword*); SA spells; SQ black blade, deadly dance, defensive weave, Erenlander traits, fluid style, Greater Weapon Focus (black blade), rebuke undead, spells, uncanny dodge, Weapon Specialization (black blade); AL LE; SV Fort +10, Ref +12, Will +11; Str 14, Dex 20, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 10.

Skills: Balance +14, Concentration +7, Climb +1, Intimidate +12, Jump +17, Knowledge (central Erenland) +2, Knowledge (religion) +9, Listen +10, Profession (soldier) +10, Spot +7, Tumble +16.

Feats: Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Dodge, Improved Critical (longsword), Improved Initiative, Mobility, Spring Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Specialization (longsword).

Languages: Black Tongue, Erenlander, Norther.

Spells Prepared (4/3+1/2+1; base DC = 12 + spell level): 0—*cure minor wounds, guidance, light, resistance*; 1st—*cause fear, doom, inflict light wounds*, protection from good*; 2nd—*hold person, inflict moderate wounds, shatter**

*Domain spell. *Domains:* Destruction (smite 1/day, +4 bonus to attack and +3 bonus to damage) and War (Weapon Focus [longsword]).

Possessions: As sword brother but with black blade (+2 *long sword* with DC 15 obsidian tears), *ring of protection* +2.

Appearance and Personality: The thin-faced commander of Steel Hill's chapter of sword brethren watches the shifting political landscape in the city impassively. He keeps his sword brethren neutral in the struggle between Dorgath and Vylaria, focusing on defending Izrador's dark temple no matter who holds the mantle of ecclesiastical power. However, Voratch is far from apolitical; he just plays a larger game in which the local concerns of this backwater do not figure. Voratch appears as any other sword brother. His only concession to conceit to set him apart from his subordinates is a golden ring on his left hand, set with a startling red gemstone that is cut to resemble a glaring eye.

Temple Guard

Male Dorn (House Falon) Ftr1: CR 1; Medium Humanoid; HD 1d10+2; hp 8; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +1; Grp +4; Atk +6 melee (2d6+4, greatsword); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA —; SQ Dorn traits; AL CN; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 17, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 7.

Skills: Climb –1, Intimidate +0, Jump –1, Listen +2, Profession (soldier) +2, Spot +2.

Feats: Cleave, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (greatsword).

Languages: Erenlander, Norther, Orcish Pidgin.

Possessions: Woolen clothes, leather belt, sturdy

boots, scale mail, greatsword and back scabbard, fighting knife, large belt pouch with 2 man-days of rations and 5–30 steel coins.

Appearance and Personality: Temple guards are at once haughty and humble; they regard all outside the Order with suspicion and contempt, but are painfully aware that failure is likely to earn them a place upon the sacrificial altar.

Voice of Shadow

Male Erenlander Lgt3: CR 3; Medium Humanoid; HD 3d8+6; hp 19; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 16, touch 10, flatfooted 10; Base Atk +2; Grp +2; Atk +2 melee (1d8, heavy mace); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA spells; SQ astirax companion, rebuke undead, spells; AL NE; SV Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +8; Str 10, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 14.

Skills: Bluff +9, Concentration +6, Diplomacy +6, Intimidate +6, Knowledge (central Erenland) +1, Knowledge (religion) +6, Perform +3, Profession (record keeper) +5, Sense Motive +8, Spellcraft +2.

Feats: Combat Casting, Iron Will, Persuasive, Scribe Scroll.

Languages: Black Tongue, Erenlander (literate), Norther.

Spells Prepared: (4/3+1/2+1; base DC = 13 + spell level): 0—*guidance, purify food and drink, read magic, resistance*; 1st—*cause fear, command, protection from good*, shield of faith*; 2nd—*detect thoughts*, enthrall, zone of truth*.

* Domain spell. *Domains:* Evil (evil spells cast at +1 caster level) and Knowledge (all Knowledge skills as class skills).

Possessions: Coarse woolen robes (black), leather boots, corded belt, splint mail, heavy mace, scroll of *command*, scroll of *augury*, 2 scrolls of *cure moderate wounds*, scroll of *bestow curse*, fine ceremonial clothing, iron symbol of Izrador, belt pouch containing 20 gilden coins.

Appearance and Personality: These fervent priests wear dark, hooded robes. They seek out blasphemers in the city's streets and find them with surprising regularity amongst the cowed populace. In shrill tones of dark rapture, they condemn these unfortunates to the sacrificial altars of Scath na' Cruach.

Appendix

New Rules

A number of powerful creatures and groups are described in *Forge of Shadow*. The prestige classes and monsters that follow were designed for Steel Hill, but may be used in any MIDNIGHT campaign. The names and game statistics of this chapter are designated as **Open Game Content**. The background and descriptive text is designated as closed content.

Prestige Classes

Blood Rider

The blood riders of Cruach Emyrn are knights of dark renown. Masters of sword, axe, and spear, their skill as horsemen is unparalleled by any but the Sarcosan Knights.

The blood riders are a legacy of Tanazir the Bloodmask, a despicable murderer who spilled a sea of blood for Prince Aushav at the end of the Third Age. Aushav has since empowered the blood rituals of his former captain, bestowing dark and necromantic gifts upon his knights. When mounted and empowered by their foul blood magic, they become a deadly, moving mountain of muscle and steel that is all but unstoppable.

Hit Die: d10.

Requirements

To qualify to become a blood rider, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Alignment: Lawful evil or neutral evil.

Base Attack Bonus: +7.

Skills: Ride 8 ranks, Intimidate 6 ranks.

Feats: Mounted Combat, Ride-by Attack, Spirited

Charge, Weapon Focus (bastard sword, battleaxe, greataxe, lance, or any spear).

Special: Must be a human from Erenland.

Class Skills

The blood rider's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Handle Animal (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (warfare) (Int), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), and Swim (Str).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are features of the blood rider prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Blood riders gain exotic weapon proficiency with the Dornish horse spear if they do not already have it. Blood riders are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, all types of armor (light, medium and heavy), and shields.

Deadly Charge (Ex): Once per day at 1st level, when mounted and using the charge action, a blood rider may declare that he is attempting a deadly charge. If his attack hits, he deals triple damage with his melee weapon (or quadruple damage with a Dornish horse spear or lance). The blood rider may use this ability twice per day at 5th level and three times per day at 9th level. This ability supersedes the Spirited Charge feat.

Unstoppable (Su): Aushav's mounted elite use their knowledge of blood rituals to imbue their armor with a protective ability. As they wash the blood of those they have slain from their armor, that blood's life energy grants a warding effect to the blood rider. A blood rider wearing medium or heavy armor adds 1 point of Charisma bonus (if any) per blood rider class level to her armor's armor bonus. For instance, a 2nd-level blood rider with a Charisma score of 16 (+3 bonus) can add +2 to her full plate's armor bonus of +8, for a total armor bonus of +10.

Blood Rider

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+0	+0	Deadly charge 1/day, unstoppable
2nd	+2	+3	+0	+0	Blood magic 1/day
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+1	Bonus feat
4th	+4	+4	+1	+1	Blood magic 2/day
5th	+5	+4	+1	+1	Deadly charge 2/day
6th	+6	+5	+2	+2	Blood magic 3/day
7th	+7	+5	+2	+2	Bonus feat
8th	+8	+6	+2	+2	Blood magic 4/day
9th	+9	+6	+3	+3	Deadly charge 3/day
10th	+10	+7	+3	+3	Blood magic 5/day

Blood Magic (Sp): The blood riders wield dark magic begotten of Izrador. Once per day at 2nd level and an additional time per day at every other level thereafter, the blood rider may employ one of the following spell-like abilities. All abilities have a duration of one minute per blood rider level.

Sanguinary Blade: While this ability is active, the blood rider gains 1 temporary hit point for every 5 points of damage he does in melee. This ability only works when the damage is dealt to creatures with blood; damage dealt to creatures that are immune to sneak attacks or critical hits do not provide the blood rider with temporary hit points. When the blood rider suffers damage, these hit points are lost first, and in any case, disappear after one hour.

Crimson Shield: The blood rider gains damage reduction 3/magic.

Bloodfury: The blood rider gains a +4 profane bonus to Strength.

Beget Terror: While this ability is active, if the blood rider successfully demoralizes an opponent with the Intimidate skill, the target becomes frightened for a number of rounds equal to the blood rider's Charisma modifier (minimum one) rather than shaken for one round.

Sword Brother

The Brotherhood of the Black Sword is a knightly order of zealous soldier legates called sword brethren. The Brotherhood of the Black Sword is sworn to protect Izrador's temples and the precious zordrafin coriths.

Sword brethren wield unholy blades, cold-forged from black iron and imbued with malicious demonic powers. These blades are poisonous to mortal flesh, and when drawn, demand a mortal life that the sword brother is oath-bound to take. The sword brethren practice a deadly, fluid style of swordsmanship and do not wear

armor more bulky than chain shirts lest it hamper their movement. Over their armor, which is also forged from black iron, they wear voluminous, black, hooded cassocks. The swirling of their robes distracts their opponents and gives the sword brethren the appearance of angels of death.

Hit Die: d8.

Requirements

To qualify to become a sword brother, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Alignment: Lawful evil or neutral evil.

Base Attack Bonus: +6.

Skills: Balance 4 ranks, Tumble 4 ranks.

Feats: Combat Expertise, Dodge, Mobility, Weapon Focus (any one-handed sword).

Weapon Proficiency: Must be proficient in any one sword.

Spells: Must be able to cast 2nd-level divine spells and have access to the War domain.

Special: Must come from the ranks of the soldier legates, and have served as a sword acolyte (novitiate of the brotherhood); during this time they must have observed the strict vow of silence imposed on the novitiates until their mastery of the sword warrants them becoming sword brethren.

Class Skills

The sword brother's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Craft (Int), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Profession (Wis), Tumble (Dex).

Skill Points at Each level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are features of the sword brother prestige class.

Sword Brother

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+0	+2	+2	Black blade, fluid style
2nd	+2	+0	+3	+3	Greater Weapon Focus
3rd	+3	+1	+3	+3	Black blade, uncanny dodge
4th	+4	+1	+4	+4	Deadly dance
5th	+5	+1	+4	+4	Black blade, defensive weave
6th	+6	+2	+5	+5	Weapon Specialization
7th	+7	+2	+5	+5	Black blade
8th	+8	+2	+6	+6	Improved uncanny dodge
9th	+9	+3	+6	+6	Black blade
10th	+10	+3	+7	+7	One with the sword

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Sword brethren do not gain any armor or weapon proficiencies. However, the sword brethren's training is focused around their black blades and involves swift movements and fluid grace; when using a shield, carrying a medium or heavy load, or wearing medium or heavier armor, a sword brother loses all of his extraordinary class abilities. Most sword brethren wear light armor (typically chain shirts forged of black cold iron) and usually renounce all weapons other than their black blades.

Black Blade: In a dark ceremony before a sacred zordrafin corith, the sword brother's astirax companion is bound into a black sword of cold-forged iron that becomes his badge of office. During this ritual the demon's essence is infused into the blade, which may be either a short sword, longsword, or bastard sword. The choice of weapon, once made, may not be altered in the lifetime of the union: the blade and sword brother are bound until death or destruction parts them. If the sword brother loses his black blade, or it is broken, he loses all supernatural class abilities until he has atoned for his negligence and has been bequeathed a new black blade.

At 1st level, the black blade is a cold iron weapon with double the normal hit points and hardness. In the sword brother's hands, the sword gains a +1 enhancement bonus. As the sword brother grows in power, so too does the blade. The following powers work only when the sword is wielded by the sword brother.

3rd level: The sword's enhancement bonus increases to +2, and the sword brother may use *detect magic* at will as a spell-like ability while holding the sword. When using this ability, the sword brother may add his legate and sword brother levels as a competence bonus to his Spellcraft check to determine the schools of magic involved in any auras. Caster level is equal to the sword brother's class level.

5th level: The sword constantly seeps a poison called obsidian tears (Injury; Fort DC 15; initial damage 1d4 Strength, secondary damage 1d4 Dexterity). Sword

brothers are immune to the effects of any black blade's obsidian tears.

7th level: The sword gains the *frost* enhancement, and the DC to resist its obsidian tears increases to 17.

9th level: The sword's enhancement bonus increases to +3, and the DC to resist its obsidian tears increases to 19.

Fluid Style (Ex): The sword brethren's fighting style combines agility with force. When wielding his black blade, the sword brother adds 1 point of Dexterity bonus (if any) per sword brother class level to his attack and damage. For instance, a 2nd-level sword brother with a Dexterity score of 16 (+3 bonus) can add +2 to his attack and damage rolls when wielding his black sword.

Greater Weapon Focus (Ex): The sword brother is treated as having the Greater Weapon Focus feat when wielding his black blade, even if he does not have the normal prerequisites for that feat.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): As per the rogue class ability of the same name.

Deadly Dance (Ex): The sword brother is treated as having the Cleave and Whirlwind Attack feats when wielding his black blade, even if he does not have the normal prerequisites for those feats. Note that, unlike the normal use of the Whirlwind Attack feat, a sword brother using this ability need not forfeit any bonus or extra attacks granted by other feats or abilities (such as the Cleave feat or the *haste* spell).

Defensive Weave (Ex): When wielding his black blade and using Combat Expertise, the sword brother gains an additional +1 dodge bonus to his Armor Class for every -1 he takes to his attack roll. Additionally, he can take a penalty of up to his sword brother class level on his attack roll, rather than the normal maximum of -5.

Weapon Specialization (Ex): The sword brother is treated as having the Weapon Specialization feat when wielding his black blade, even if he does not have the normal prerequisites for that feat. If the sword brother already has the Weapon Specialization feat with the

weapon of the black blade's type, he is instead treated as if he had the Greater Weapon Specialization feat.

Improved Uncanny Dodge (Ex): As per the rogue class ability of the same name.

One with the Sword (Su): At 10th level, the sword and the sword brother become inevitably intertwined with one another. This has many effects. First of all, the sword brother's bond to his sword is such that it cannot be disarmed or removed from his grasp without his consent. The sword is also very nearly unbreakable: it is immune to all physical damage, and can only be destroyed if it fails its save against a *disjunction* or *disintegrate* spell, and even then the disintegrate spell must still do enough damage to reduce the sword to 0 hit points. Alternatively, a *destruction* spell targeted at either the sword or the sword brother will, if the target fails its save, destroy both utterly.

Whenever the sword brother is reduced below 0 hit points, his body stabilizes automatically and his spirit is instantly transported to his black blade as if he had cast *magic jar* at caster level 10 using his black sword as the receptacle. The sword brother must be holding the black sword to use this ability. The sword brother may then act as if under the effect of a *magic jar* for the duration of the ability, including being able to possess other creatures. The DC for this ability is Wisdom-based.

Finally, when the sword drinks the blood of another, the sword brother prospers. For every five points of damage inflicted using the blade, the sword brother gains one temporary hit point. When the sword brother suffers damage, these hit points are lost first, and in any case, disappear after 1 hour.

Vow of Blood

When inducted into the Brotherhood, the sword brother swears a sacred oath to the dark god: if he draws his unholy blade, he must kill a sentient living creature with it (Intelligence score of 3 or higher). Failure to honor this vow results in crippling penalties, even death, unless the sword brother appeases the blade's thirst for blood. For every day after the first that the sword brother has not fulfilled his vow, the sword's abilities decrease to the next lower black blade ability and the sword brother gains one negative level that can only be removed by taking a sentient life with the sword. If the negative levels accrued equal or exceed the sword brother's total HD, he is instantly slain and rises the next day as a hate-filled ghost. His sword regains all of its supernatural black blade abilities, gains the *ghost touch* enhancement, and additionally may be used to channel the ghost's corrupting touch or draining touch special attacks. The ghosts haunts the place of its death, attacking any living creature within 100 ft. per HD the sword brother had at his time of death. The only creatures that the ghost will not attack are fellow sword brethren.

New Monsters

Taker

Large Magical Beast

Hit Dice: 7d10+21 (59 hp)

Initiative: +3

Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares), fly 80 ft. (poor)

Armor Class: 19 (-1 size, +3 Dex, +7 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 14

Base Attack/Grapple: +7/+17

Attack: Bite +12 melee (1d8+6), or claw +12 melee (1d6+6), or wing +12 melee (1d6+6)

Full Attack: Bite +12 melee (1d8+6) and claw +10 melee (1d6+3) and 2 wings +10 melee (1d6+3)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.

Special Attacks: Improved grab

Special Qualities: Low-light vision, scouring lifesense

Saves: Fort +8, Ref +8, Will +2

Abilities: Str 22, Dex 17, Con 16, Int 4, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills: Hide +1*, Move Silently +6[†], Spot +12,

Feats: Flyby Attack, Multiattack, Wingover

Environment: Cold plains and hills

Organization: Solitary, pair or flight (3-6)

Challenge Rating: 5

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually neutral evil

Advancement: 8-10 HD (Huge); 11-21 HD (Gargantuan)

Level Adjustment: —

Created by foul sorcery, the takers (*Norther: sciathan*) are shadow servants of nightmare. Bred from the once-proud races of giant eagles and giant owls, these beasts have been mutated and bred to fly in the benighted, cathedral-like caverns and black, twisting passages of Kazak-Dûr. They have lately been brought south to hunt in the occupied lands of men. By night, these sinuous creatures fly on membranous wings, their mottled, feathered gray skin blending in with the steel-colored clouds of the sky above Cruach Emyrn in the moonlight; the only visible sign of a sciathan passing above is a chill that runs through one's bones, and the glimpse of a pair of eldritch blue lights, the flames that pass for the creature's eyes, passing through the sky.

Sciathan have long, muscular necks, and from their skull-like heads to the tips of their long, reptilian tails, they measure up to 15 feet long. Their wings span 20 feet or more and consist of flaps of membranous skin covered with gray, constantly molting feathers. Thick knotted veins form a fibrous network through these vast structures that provides strength and resilience. The hind legs of the sciathan are large, muscled limbs that end in bird-like talons with black, razor-sharp claws. These limbs can propel the sciathan at some speed on land, although the air is its preferred medium of travel.



Combat

The Shadow's minions breed sciathans as steeds for lightly armored goblins and human legates, although it is rumored that huge variants of these beasts exist, which serve as mounts for heavily armored orcs and even oruks. Sciathan are somewhat stupid creatures and, although trained to attack unsupervised by a rider, they are more likely to grab a single opponent and carry them off than see a combat through to its conclusion. With a rider in seat, however, the sciathan can be encouraged to continue its attack. Once earthbound, the sciathan can only use one claw attack at a time, needing the other and its tail to maintain balance.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the sciathan must hit with one of its claws. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold. It may attempt to take off in order to capture the creature or drop it from a great height, depending on the opponent's size and its rider's commands.

Scouring Lifesense (Su): A taker's most feared ability, and that for which it is named, is its lifesense ability. As long as it keeps its eyes of blue flame open while flying, it can detect the auras of living, intelligent creatures (Int greater than 2) beneath it as if it possessed the blindsense ability. The range of this ability varies depending on the power of the life force being detected, however. Creatures of 3 HD or less can be detected at a range of one-half mile, and the range doubles for every

3 HD of the creature. This means that the higher the HD of a creature, the easier it is for the taker to find it.

The taker's lifesense ability has two drawbacks. The first is that, in order to see the auras for which it searches, it must keep its eyes open. Since these are bright blue glowing balls of flame, the position of a taker on the hunt is fairly visible from the ground. Second, while it can sense and differentiate between any number of 3 HD or lower creatures, the taker can only sense the presence of the single nearest living, intelligent creature over 3 HD. This means that the taker's ability is significantly weakened if it is ridden by anything other than a rank-and-file orc or goblin soldier or a low-ranking legate.

Skills: †Sciathans have a +11 racial bonus on Hide checks when flying beneath overcast skies. This bonus is negated if the sciathan opens its eyes of blue flame to use its scouring lifesense ability. *They have a +14 racial bonus on Move Silently checks while flying.

Shadow Servant Template

In the Third Age, Izrador adopted a subtle and insidious approach to the war in place of the brutal attacks that he had previously attempted. Ultimately, this strategy won him the bulk of Eredane. Rather than engaging in overt military confrontation, he instead attacked the trust that held men and the other races together, corrupting those who led them. The shadow

servants were key pawns in the Dark God's game of dominion in the Third Age, and now reap the rewards of their betrayal in the Final Age. Shaped by Izrador's will, they are infused by his shadowy breath and forever changed.

The physical form of a shadow servant gains supernatural strength and resilience, but at the same time her mind is clouded. Izrador's maleficence fogs her thoughts and makes her movements wooden and clumsy. The Dark God's potent force bestows many other supernatural powers to the shadow servant, but at the expense of the her sanity.

Creating a Shadow Servant

"Shadow servant" is a template that can be added to any humanoid or monstrous humanoid with six or more Hit Dice (referred to hereafter as the base creature).

Size and Type: The creature's type changes to aberration. Do not recalculate attack bonuses, saves, or skill points. Size is unchanged.

Hit Dice: Increase all current and future Hit Dice to d8s. If Hit Dice were originally better than d8, they remain at the higher die, but future Hit Dice become d8.

Speed: Same as the base creature.

Armor Class: The flesh of a shadow servant becomes infused with the profane power of the Shadow, taking on a gray, lifeless appearance. Yet this sickly looking skin is tough and resilient, providing greater protection to the creature. The base creature's armor bonus improves by +4 if it is Large or smaller, or by +8 if it is Huge or bigger.

Damage: A shadow servant retains all the attacks of the base creature and also gains one claw attack per hand if it didn't already have them: its fingernails lengthen, becoming hard and black. If using only its claws, a shadow servant can strike with each of its claw attacks at its full attack bonus. If the base creature can use weapons, the shadow servant retains this ability.

Full Attack: A shadow servant without weapons uses either its claw attacks (see above) or its natural weapons (if it has any). If armed with a weapon, it usually uses the weapon as its primary attack along with a claw or other natural weapon as a natural secondary attack.

Damage: Natural and manufactured weapons deal damage normally. A claw attack deals damage depending on the shadow servant's size. (If the base creature already had claw attacks with its hands, use the corrupted claw damage only if it's better.)

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

Special Attacks: A shadow servant retains all the special attacks of the base creature.

Special Qualities: A shadow servant retains all the special qualities of the base character and also gains those described below.

Damage Reduction (Ex): A shadow servant has damage reduction dependent on its Hit Dice as indicated in the table below. If the base character already has damage reduction, use the better value.

Hit Dice	Damage Reduction
6–9	5/silver
10–13	5/silver and magic
14+	10/silver and magic

Fast Healing (Ex): So long as it has 1 hit point, a shadow servant heals damage equal to half of its Hit Dice (maximum 10) each round. If the base creature already has fast healing, use the better value.

Resistance to Cold (Ex): A corrupted has resistance to cold 5 + 1 per HD (maximum 20).

The shadow servant also gains one additional supernatural ability for every four Hit Dice it possesses (minimum of one), chosen from the following. The caster level for these abilities is equal to 10 + one-half the shadow servant's Hit Dice + Cha modifier.

Black Shroud (Su): The shadow servant may use *darkness* as per the spell, once per day per four Hit Dice.

Malevolent Presence (Su): The shadow servant may use *cause fear* as per the spell, once per day per four Hit Dice.

Pain of the Corrupted (Su): The shadow servant may use *inflict light wounds* as per the spell, once per day per four Hit Dice.

Potent (Su): The save DCs all of the shadow servant's special attacks and spells increase by 1 per four Hit Dice of the shadow servant.

Shadow's Luck (Su): The shadow servant gains a +1 luck bonus on all saving throws per four Hit Dice.

Shadow's Will (Su): The shadow servant may use *command* as per the spell, once per day per four Hit Dice.

Abilities: Change from the base creature as follows: Str +4, Dex -2, Con +4. Additionally, the shadow servant must choose Int, Wis, or Cha. The ability chosen suffers a -2 penalty for every 4 HD of the shadow servant.

Skills: Shadow servants have a +4 racial bonus on Intimidate checks. Otherwise same as the base creature.

Feats: The creature gains Multiattack and Toughness, assuming the base creature meets the prerequisites and doesn't already have these feats.

Environment: Any, usually same as base creature.

Organization: Usually solitary.

Challenge Rating: Up to 9 Hit Dice, same as base creature +2. 10–13 Hit Dice, same as the base creature +3. 14 or more Hit Dice, same as the base creature +4.

Treasure: Double standard.

Alignment: Always evil (any).

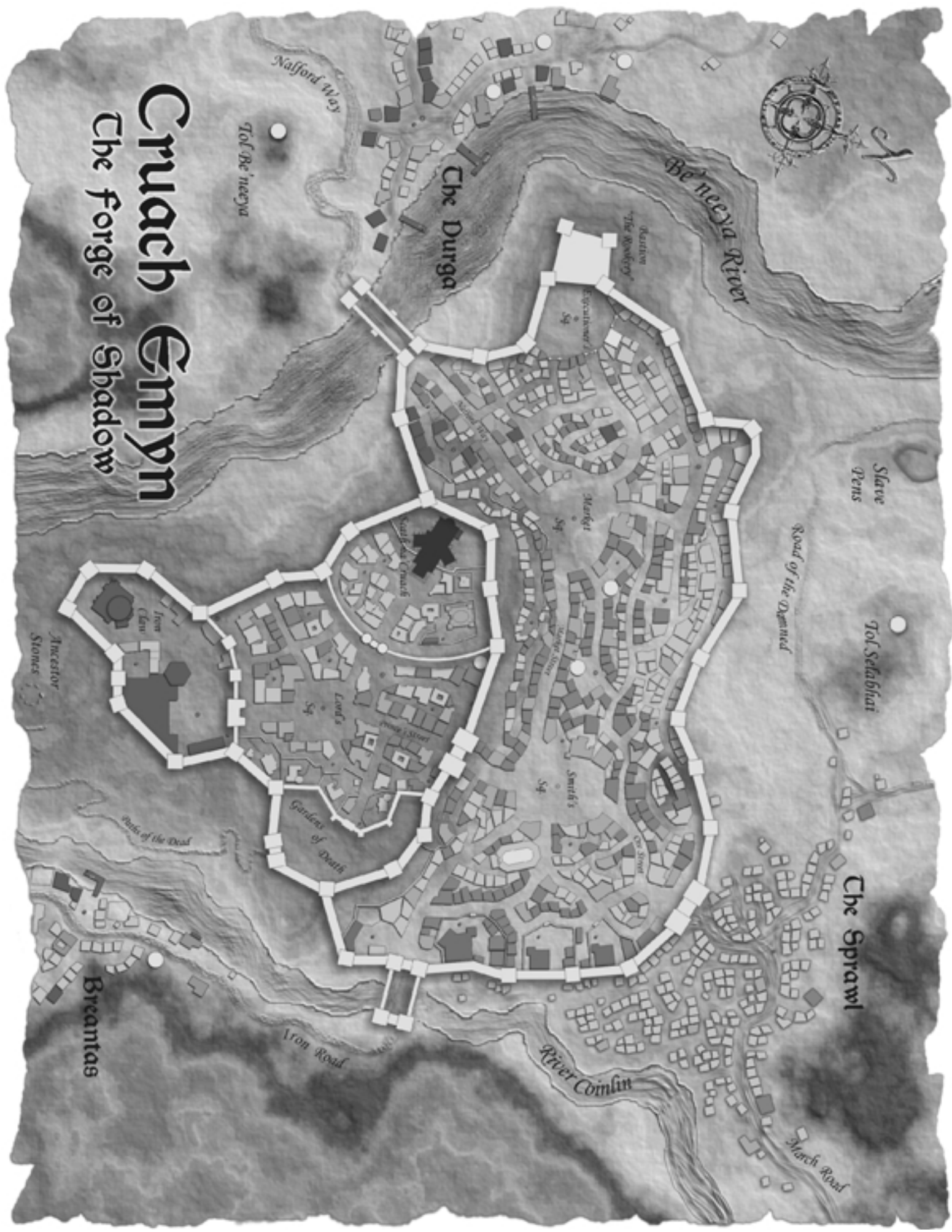
Advancement: By character class.

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