

Player's Secrets of

HALSKAPA



BIRTERRIGHT™
DOMAIN SOURCEBOOK





Halskapa

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Welcome to Halskapa, the oldest and most powerful realm in the Rjurik Highlands. Your work is cut out for you. The last king sat idle while most of his power slipped from his fingers; there are others who see themselves in your place. To keep your throne, you will have to muster enough support from the clans and unite them under one ruler—yourself, your highness.

what you need to play

This product is intended for use in the BIRTHRIGHT™ campaign setting. We highly recommend that either you or your DM have the BIRTHRIGHT boxed set if you intend to use this product to its fullest potential, the *Rjurik Highlands* campaign expansion is also recommended. The *Player's Handbook* and the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* are also necessary to play.

how to use this domain sourcebook

This product is intended for players who to wish to play Halskapan characters in a BIRTHRIGHT campaign. Halskapa, on the Taelshore in Rjurik lands, is the most powerful and civilized of the northern domains. Life here is not easy. Rjurik lands are harsh, and the simple struggle for survival keeps most people busy their entire life spans. Nevertheless, a political struggle is also brewing, and the new king must move fast to rein in the power he needs to run the domain effectively.

There are many opportunities for PCs in Halskapa, even if you decide not to play the king. Consider playing a PC who is head of one of the seven rival provinces, or the regent of a guild, or high druid of a temple. Or perhaps your PC could be a lieutenant to one of these rulers. Your choice of character is limited only by your imagination, and the challenges of each are unique.

Be sure to discuss this product with your DM before beginning play: There may be changes required to balance game play in your BIRTHRIGHT setting.

the skald's song

Aeric's blessings upon you, entrusted one, on your coronation today as the King Father, High Jarl of all Halskapa! Though I may not be the first to do so, please accept my congratulations on being selected by our ailing king Bervinig as his designated heir. Allow me to present myself: I am Sir Jalkvar, High Skald of

Halskapa,
for many
years

high skald jalkvar's report

Bervinig's most
trusted seneschal.
I salute you, and
offer my services

should you need them. Achieving your coronation is a great feat, but as you well know there are trying times ahead. I have prepared this report to give you an inside look at the kingdom of Halskapa, the noblest and greatest of the Northlands. I only hope that it is of some small use to you as you begin your reign.

Halskapa stands proudly today, but it is no secret that your investiture is causing some measure of dissent from the assembled jarls. You are familiar with them, but I have included a section on each in case there is information you have not seen in sometime.

I apologize if I speak frankly in the remainder of this report, but I best not waste time and effort in matters of courtly protocol. Real danger is involved in your current situation, and I would give you good counsel for the sake of our land. It is my personal duty to guide you as best I can, as the raven of the sagas always guides lost ships to shore. It is the badge of Halskapa's Skald on my chest that burdens me so.

Bervinig chose wisely in you, and I don't mind admitting that I supported your candidacy in conference with him. It is unfortunate for Halskapa that he goes without heir, but his illness prevented the

taking of a wife. Still, I am certain that Erik smiles on you and that you are the one who can unite Halskapa and make her strong again.

the people

The people of Halskapa are hardworking and honest. There is little place for deceit in Rjurik lands, as the common need for survival usually outweighs personal greed and excessive self-interest. Simply put, we need each other to survive.

I wish I could say that all the people of Halskapa are firmly behind you, but, as you know, that is not the case. It is not that they will not support your reign, but certain clans have been outspoken supporters of other jarls. Bringing the clans around and garnering their support will be a work of great effort on your part.

Remember, too, that they are aware of your situation, and most today are afraid of what is to come. Our people work their fingers to the bone to survive and still make headway in this rugged land of ours. They work much too hard to lose the fruits of their labor in a cataclysmic civil war.

You may find the best judge of the hearts of the people in the druidic circles of the Oaken Grove of Erik and the Emerald Spiral. The leaders of these circles always have the good of Halskapa at heart (or so the theory goes), and not only know how the people feel, but hold some influence as well.

Win the druids over, sire, and you will win the hearts of Halskapa.

the nobles

The nobles of Halskapa are career politicians, extremely prone to long fits of quibbling and posturing on any given issue. There are some who are supportive of your rule; there are some who will cause difficulty. Be mindful of these, for they wield considerable power behind the scenes.

Be especially watchful of the one called Kjessen, jarl of the southern province of Helkstraad. He is a powerful, dangerous man, and is rumored to be calling for a united Halskapa by force of arms.

The rest of the jarls have their strengths and weaknesses, and these are detailed later in the

report. Though I have compiled the best information available to me, you may wish to meet with each individually to be sure you get any information about them first hand. I have done what I could, but I am well known in the land, and thus had a hard time gathering impartial information.

our neighbors

Halskapa has kept real peace with its neighbors for many decades, and it is my personal hope that this remains to be the case. The nearby kingdoms of Jankaping and Svinik are relatively weak, and the Siren is counted among our allies. But as a rule, trust no one—be cordial, but do not turn your back. History shows that during periods of great national changes, neighbors often take a keen interest. As we have done to others, they shall certainly do to us.

the land

Though the political situation is in great turmoil, Halskapa is as productive as it has ever been. Recent innovations in fishing and farming are making our homesteaders more productive, and a steady surplus is traded every year.

The highland provinces contribute great quantities of quality metals—iron, copper, and tin. The beautiful hill provinces generate fine wool and leather, and the fishermen who sail Tael Firth are pulling in record catches. The plains provinces, lightly wooded with beautiful taiga, are a northern farmer's paradise, and the herds of horses increase every year.

But there is room for improvement. The decline of the aolfers—the great guild leaders who once focused their existence on free trade—have left trade restricted but without direction from the provincial jarls. A reintroduction of the aolfer system may boost Halskapa's economy enough to start the sort of renaissance seen in Anuire and Khinasi these days.

our strength

The situation is dire, but do not lose hope! There is much to be done, and much that we can do.

Today is the most vulnerable day of your rule—tomorrow we forge alliances to create a great suit of armor out of what is now merely rusted ore. So for now, familiarize yourself with the contents enclosed, and rest well. Long days lie before us, but they are not without respite.

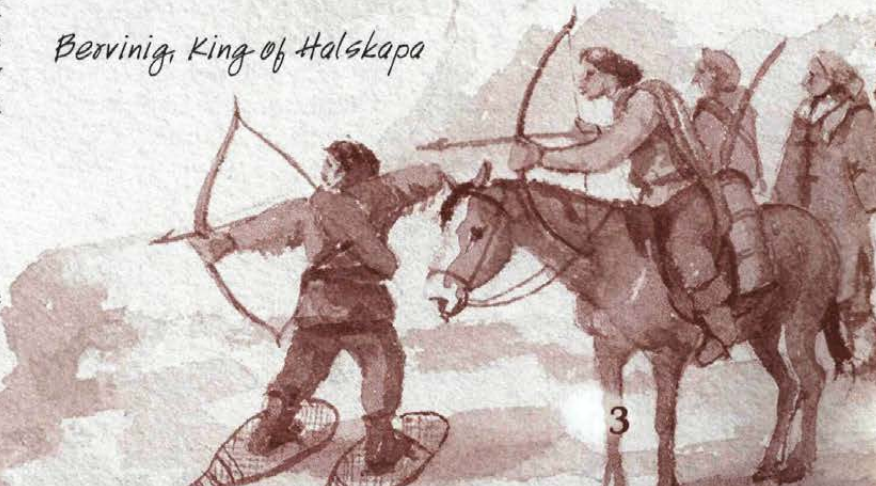
By Erik's Grace,
Sir Jalkvar of Halskapa, High Skald

a message from the king

Blessed by Erik you are, so they say, and therefore our realm to you we decree. By the time you read this, Rjanik, Grand Druid of the Oaken Grove of Erik, Jarl Dvasviik will have already performed the ceremony of investiture. A nice man that Rjanik, and with such a wise face that I am reminded of days long ago when my own father would tell me of his great-grandfather and the fisherman he met one day when walking along the shore. (I think he was a boy at the time.) The fisherman had been sleeping, so the story goes, and when the tide came in and the wind began to wail, he awoke to see a pale face pressed close to his own. He was startled, my father said, and nearly jumped into the Tael Firth. But he didn't . . . wait, perhaps he did . . . I can't quite recall . . . my father it was, I think. I have been hearing him of late.

I am an old man, and have finally come to grips with the disease that ails me. It is a hard thing to do, for though it may seem at times that I am unaware of my surroundings, I am quite aware that these are troubled times, and the past few years of my rule are not leaving you in an enviable position. Take care of our Halskapa, lead her better than I have, and may Erik's grace go with you.

Bervinig, King of Halskapa



Where the histories of domains in Anuire show a gradual decline of the wild nature of the lands, Rjurik histories show the land much as it is now, untamed as in the first weeks of the Flight from the Shadow.

Some 2,000 years ago, when elves, dwarves, and the humanoid races inhabited all of Cerilia, the Rjuven (as they were known then) lived on the southern continent of Aduria. They were always a nature-loving, seafaring people. And so it was, that when the five tribes headed north to Cerilia, the Rjuven came by sea.

The land that is now Halskapa was one of the first landing sites, and many of the resources needed for survival in the

history

harsh climate were found in her highlands and lightly forested plains. The land was not heavily inhabited by any people—the elves made their homes in deep forests and the dwarves in the high mountains. There were barbaric humanoids, however, and goblins, orogs, and gnolls mercilessly attacked the first clans to arrive.

The elves accepted the Rjuven as lovers of nature and helped them build homesteads in the violent climate of the northern reaches. They also helped the humans battle the humanoids, but though they had fought orogs and goblins for centuries, they had never tried to drive them from the plains before.

Sagas chanted by the skalds of the great war against the humanoids tell of its beginning in -450 HC (Haelyn's Count is dated from the Battle of Deismaar.) At first, the humanoids seemed too powerful to overcome. The unorganized raids by the Rjuven were met by the equally unorganized raids of the orogs, goblins, and gnolls. Superior weapons and a vital knowledge of the land helped the humanoids stay ahead of the humans at every turn.

Then, as the ancient skald observed in *Hjarring's Saga*, a hero of the Rjuven people had an idea. He had heard legend of giant humanoids living in the mountainous regions farther inland. Taking only a small band of able warriors (so as

not to deplete their defenses), he trekked through long and hard country to the land now known as the Giantdowns, where he met with the firbolgs, a race of giants appreciative of nature and possessing good hearts.

Excerpt from Hjarring's Saga

*And so Hjarring's small band of weary noble warriors, afflicted by the cold and bitter conditions of their long journey, entered the village of the men-who-were-not-men giants, leading their seven remaining horses and bearing the skins of the people. **

At first the men-who-were-not-men thought the little Rjuven toys, and picked them up and played games, throwing and catching them, killing three of the horses and injuring several of the warriors. Hjarring tried to speak to them. However, they did not understand language and only roared with great voices and laughed at the little Rjuven warriors.

Then Hjarring called upon Reynir to save them and a great lightning bolt struck a huge pine in the middle of the village, splintering it into hundreds of shards. The giants shuddered, and brought their own druid to Hjarring. They bade Hjarring to sit on a piece of the pine. Hjarring sat, and the two understood each other as the holly understands the oak.

The two spoke of the needs of their peoples, and of the honor of warriors. Great feasting followed for six days and nights, 'til all were spent. Hjarring spent 21 nights in the village of the firbolgs (as they were called), before setting out with his small band of noble Rjuven and 53 giant warriors to save the people from the ugly ones.

*Old Rjuven idiom for "the hopes of the people."

At first the clans were reluctant to accept the help of the firbolgs, fearing the giant humanoids. But soon the two peoples evidently had more in common than not. With the giants on their side, the fierce Rjuven warriors, with the help of the elves, pushed the gnolls, goblins, and orogs into the highlands or sent them fleeing to their underground warrens.

Thus it was that by -310 HC the first settlements were free from monstrous raiders, and the only enemy necessary to fight on a daily basis was the foreboding climate.

the druids organize

For many years after the humanoid threat ended, the Rjuven lived as nomads in the north, following their herds north in the summer months, and returning to the southern coast in the winter. Each clan was as self-sufficient as possible, and most came to distrust all others who were not their own kin. Clans made war openly with each other, stripping so many staples from the basic reserves that even victorious clans often perished the following winter.

The druids already had great influence on the people before the Flight from the Shadow, and collectively decided that clan warfare would destroy the people altogether. Urgently organizing, they founded their first temple at Odemark in -249 HC and from there spread their message to the peoples of the north.

They convinced the clans that open warfare was not a solution to clan disagreements, and instead created the Code of Championship. If the mediation of the druids could not solve a dispute between clans, each clan would select a champion who would fight for his clan's cause. Whichever defender won determined the outcome of the dispute.

The system was not as satisfying for the clans, but was better than total annihilation. The code was accepted and immediately put into practice. It was the first test of the power of an organized temple, and the druids' authority grew from there.



skapa hjarring founded

The early Rjuven were a nomadic people, traveling north each summer to follow the herds on the great hunt. The southern coast of the Taelshore and the western coast of Halskapa were popular winter campsites. The largest site, the one that eventually became a permanent settlement, was at the mouth of the Hjarring river. It soon became a great port as well, allowing the northerners to keep contact with the south in the early years of the Flight from the Shadow.

As Skapa Hjarring grew more permanent, so did its importance. The town, trading with the nations of the south, became a great trade center by -200 HC. As the clans learned to trust each other, interclan trade flourished and added to the town's coffers.

The camp had grown quickly into a town, and eventually to a city. As it grew, the need for an organized code of laws grew as well, and local clans elected the first jarl to govern the city and the lands surrounding it in -192 HC. This marked the first established legal system in Rjurik lands, a great milestone toward civilization.

halskapa is born

For thousands of years the nomadic clans of the Rjuven were self-sufficient, but that had been on Aduria, the warm southern continent of ancient days. Cerilia was less hospitable, and with the new system of conflict resolution, it quickly became obvious that the clans could not survive alone. And so they specialized, each clan assuming a role in what evolved into a complex economic system.

Hardly noticed at the time, the independence of the clans slipped away, and by the time the druids organized at Odemark the clans had organized their interdependence by goods and services. They structured their provincial communities after the economy. Following Skapa Hjarring's lead, they divided the land of the Iron Cape into provinces in -183 HC and each group of clans selected a jarl to govern the law. The jarl at Skapa Hjarring, as the province most central to trade and the economy, became King Aethl, and Halskapa was born.

war of shadow

Halskapa did not suffer as badly as other nations during the rise of shadow in Cerilia. The *gheallie Sidhe*, the hunt of the elves, was not as powerful in the north as it was in the south where humans destroyed the land instead of preserving it. The elves of the north were more accepting of the Rjurik, but times were still bad. Halskapan venturing into the taiga to follow the herds were slaughtered wholesale, and elves laid ambushes for fishermen where the Hjarring runs through the forests.

Halskapa sent many of its finest to the battle at Deismaar, and some returned as heroes, clad in the blood of the gods, to foster a new race of noblemen and women with divine right flowing through their veins.

wars of empire

In the years following Deismaar, the great bloodletting known as the Wars of Empire came upon Rjurik. Roele, the emperor, foolishly thought the northern lands an easy target for the expansion of his empire. Sagas of the period tell of the noble sons of Halskapa sallying to the lands along the Taelshore and repeatedly beating back would-be Anuirean conquerors.

By 20 HC they had repulsed most of the Anuirean strength and Halskapan whaling vessels were successfully disrupting trade routes from Brechtür to Anuire. Still,

although the sons of Erik had driven out the invaders, many Rjurik nobles had different ideas and made peace with Roele for promises of gifts and gold. For the next millenium, Halskapa and other domains remained independent, but closely linked to the empire.

modern history

Modern history in Halskapa begins with the decline of the Anuirean Empire and the re-emergence of strong neighboring Rjurik realms. Halskapa welcomed her Taelshore neighbors back by providing both economic and political support for the new leaders as the Anuireans retreated to the south.

By 1100 HC Rjurik was again its own land and Skapa Hjarring had taken on its role as cultural hub of the north. The clans traveled from all over Rjurik to sell their goods and trade in Skapa Hjarring. King Hjafofen forged early alliances with new nations as they emerged, and most of them still stand today.

Bervinig, Halskapa's most recent king, is a direct descendant of Hjafofen. Bervinig himself assumed the throne in 1471 HC when his father, King Fjerdinand, was slain by the awnshegh called the Dusk Man.

the awnsheghlien

The great villains of the north, the White Witch and the Dusk Man, came and founded their evil realms in the years after the Anuirean Empire broke. They gave the scattered humanoids banners under which they could renew the wars they fought against humanity.

The Dusk Man carved his realm out of Halskapa's influence—the highlands south of the Helkstraad province. He had been a thief, marauder, and bandit in the past. In fact, he had been one of the Gorgon's own lieutenants, earning

himself abominable powers when the smoke cleared at Deismaar. He came in 253 HC and began consolidating the tribes of evil gnolls and orogs in the highlands, eventually forming them into a great army to conquer three of Halskapa's provinces.

Whole tribes of gnolls hailed him as master. From his dark stronghold of evil he raided and pillaged in Halskapa and Svinik. Great wars were waged between 300 HC and his death in 1497 HC at the hands of a cursed young singer—who would steal his bloodline to become the Siren.

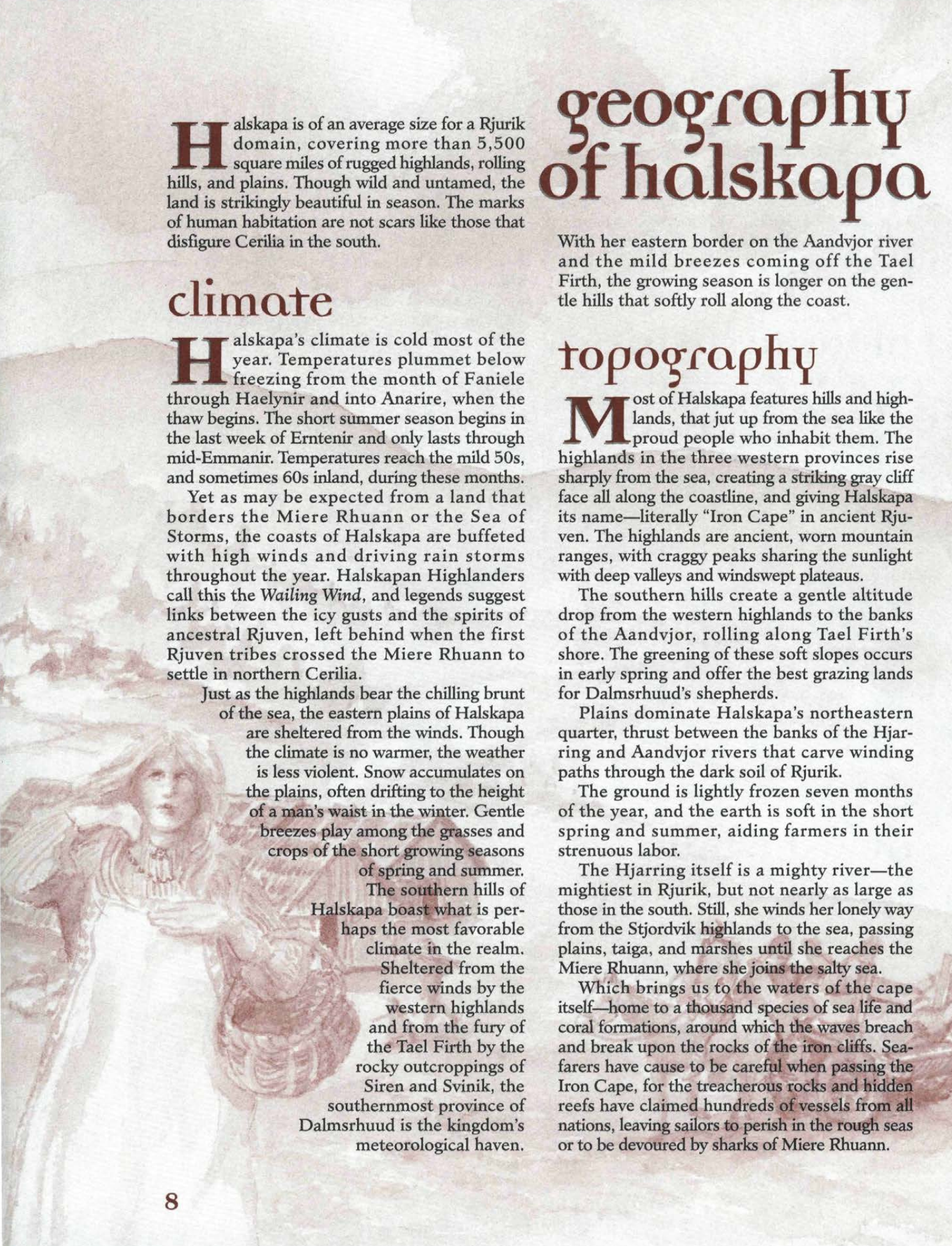
Those most affected by the Dusk Man's evil deeds hailed the Siren as savior, and named her queen of the Dusk Man's realm.

However, many Halskapans had other plans. Aengl, Jarl of Helkstraad, urged the king to retake the three provinces, reclaiming them for Halskapa. Within the year, Bervinig authorized a delegation of noblemen and champions under Aengl to head south under the guise of petitioning for a lasting peace.

Aengl tried to assassinate the awnshegh, but failed. By the time the rest of Halskapa's army marched from Helkstraad, Aengl was dead with the rest of his delegation and the Siren was transformed into a bitter enemy.

For years afterwards, bitter skirmishes took place along the borders of Halskapa and the Siren's Realm. These ended in 1520 HC, when Bervinig, whose affliction was just starting to become apparent to his closest advisers, traveled to a secret summit with the Siren. When they met at the border, they conferred for three days and nights. No one knows what was discussed or what the motivations were behind the treaty, but on the fourth day they announced a formal alliance between the two nations.





Halskapa is of an average size for a Rjurik domain, covering more than 5,500 square miles of rugged highlands, rolling hills, and plains. Though wild and untamed, the land is strikingly beautiful in season. The marks of human habitation are not scars like those that disfigure Cerilia in the south.

climate

Halskapa's climate is cold most of the year. Temperatures plummet below freezing from the month of Faniele through Haelynir and into Anarire, when the thaw begins. The short summer season begins in the last week of Erntenir and only lasts through mid-Emmanir. Temperatures reach the mild 50s, and sometimes 60s inland, during these months.

Yet as may be expected from a land that borders the Miere Rhuann or the Sea of Storms, the coasts of Halskapa are buffeted with high winds and driving rain storms throughout the year. Halskapan Highlanders call this the *Wailing Wind*, and legends suggest links between the icy gusts and the spirits of ancestral Rjuven, left behind when the first Rjuven tribes crossed the Miere Rhuann to settle in northern Cerilia.

Just as the highlands bear the chilling brunt of the sea, the eastern plains of Halskapa are sheltered from the winds. Though the climate is no warmer, the weather is less violent. Snow accumulates on the plains, often drifting to the height of a man's waist in the winter. Gentle breezes play among the grasses and crops of the short growing seasons of spring and summer.

The southern hills of Halskapa boast what is perhaps the most favorable climate in the realm.

Sheltered from the fierce winds by the western highlands and from the fury of the Tael Firth by the rocky outcroppings of Siren and Svinik, the southernmost province of Dalmsrhuud is the kingdom's meteorological haven.

geography of Halskapa

With her eastern border on the Aandvjor river and the mild breezes coming off the Tael Firth, the growing season is longer on the gentle hills that softly roll along the coast.

topography

Most of Halskapa features hills and highlands, that jut up from the sea like the proud people who inhabit them. The highlands in the three western provinces rise sharply from the sea, creating a striking gray cliff face all along the coastline, and giving Halskapa its name—literally “Iron Cape” in ancient Rjuven. The highlands are ancient, worn mountain ranges, with craggy peaks sharing the sunlight with deep valleys and windswept plateaus.

The southern hills create a gentle altitude drop from the western highlands to the banks of the Aandvjor, rolling along Tael Firth's shore. The greening of these soft slopes occurs in early spring and offer the best grazing lands for Dalmsrhuud's shepherds.

Plains dominate Halskapa's northeastern quarter, thrust between the banks of the Hjarring and Aandvjor rivers that carve winding paths through the dark soil of Rjurik.

The ground is lightly frozen seven months of the year, and the earth is soft in the short spring and summer, aiding farmers in their strenuous labor.

The Hjarring itself is a mighty river—the mightiest in Rjurik, but not nearly as large as those in the south. Still, she winds her lonely way from the Stjordvik highlands to the sea, passing plains, taiga, and marshes until she reaches the Miere Rhuann, where she joins the salty sea.

Which brings us to the waters of the cape itself—home to a thousand species of sea life and coral formations, around which the waves breach and break upon the rocks of the iron cliffs. Seafarers have cause to be careful when passing the Iron Cape, for the treacherous rocks and hidden reefs have claimed hundreds of vessels from all nations, leaving sailors to perish in the rough seas or to be devoured by sharks of Miere Rhuann.

flora and fauna

Halskapa's flora and fauna are not unique to Rjurik, yet it offers charms not found in Anuire or Khinasi. The highlands sport grasses and wild flowers in the growing months and taiga copses still dot the landscape to Aerik's great pleasure. Game is abundant, and when deer and elk are not available, hunters often track down the bear that make their dens in the highland caves.

A few resourceful Rjurik have begun terracing the land in the province of Selkhauske and the resulting farmland is adequate for hardy crops of barley, oats, rye, and root crops such as potatoes. Most other farmers herd sheep and goats, relying on the thick skins of these animals to survive the cold, wet winters along the Taelshore. Wool from the Halskapan highlands is said to be the best available in Cerilia, and locals claim the wailing icy winds thicken their sheep's shaggy wool.

But the hills offer the best grazing lands and farmers here often raise crops and herd animals—some have gone so far as to import cattle from Anuire, but have not had great success in adapting them to this cruel climate.

The lightly forested plains are home to the heavy draft horses, favorites in these lands because of their thick hides and ability to survive Rjurik's harsh winters. Though not as fast as Anuire horses, Rjurik's heavy draft animals can pull loads two to three times the size of the standard Anuirean mount.

Some Halskapan have settled into the plains as farmers and raise good crops in the short growing season. Very little, however, is left unconsumed after winter, so there is little or nothing to trade for much-needed goods.

sacred water

Perhaps the most reliable and plentiful of all Halskapa's resources are water-based. Much of the country's wealth is derived from the rivers and seas surrounding it. The Hjarring river holds plentiful salmon and trout. River fishers on both the Hjarring and Aandvjar manage to catch enough to feed themselves and to trade at Skapa Hjarring or Leivika.

Yet the seas themselves offer Halskapa's most plentiful source of both food and gold. The Tael Firth and Miere Rhuann are homes to millions of sea creatures and Halskapan whaling trade is renowned throughout Rjurik and Cerilia. Whalers and fishermen follow Nesirie, the goddess of the sea, but are mindful of Erik, and never take more than is necessary or than can be borne by the environment. Ocean fishers pull in huge bounties of cod and herring.

Mention should be made of the continent of Thaele, Cerilia's lonely neighbor to the north. Thaele is rich in minerals, timber, and animal life. Hoekstraad, Halskapa's colony on Thaele, booms with activity in the summer, as hunters from across Halskapa hunt sea otter and seal. Miners dig rich deposits of iron ore, copper, and the occasional glittering vein of gold.

iron cape

The Iron Cape is well named, for Halskapa's iron resources are vast indeed. Iron is found in all highland provinces, in many places rich veins lie under just inches of dirt. And where there is iron, smiths are found heavily stoking their great fires. Halskapan forges turn out the best weapons in Rjurik, and perhaps the best arms of human manufacture in all Cerilia. Demand is high, particularly with Brecht traders, and



the forges belch flame year round to keep the supplies available.

It was Halskapan forges that created Rjurik's unique double-thick chain armor during the Wars of Empire, and the great claymore was first forged under Halskapan hammers. Smiths are apprenticed at an early age and learn their trade by stoking fires for five years before even touching a hammer. Those brought up in the tradition claim it teaches complete understanding of the forge, which many believe is the most important element in the art of smithing.

Yet there is more to the name than the iron itself. It is the cape, just off the Selkhausken coast, that is the winter home of the frolicking *skettik*, a seallike mammal valued for its thick, waterproof fur. Most of the year the animal's coat is a dull gray, but in the summer, bathing in the waters off Thaele, *skettik* turn a brilliant silver.

Halskapan smith mythology likens the change to shedding the impurities in dusky iron to reveal the shining steel. Wandering skalds, however, link the change to the continent of Thaele, claiming it to be a land where the souls of dead Rjurik travel to feast with Aerik in singular silvery splendor.

the hunting grounds

Most Halskapans, like most Rjurik, have permanent winter homes and migrate to the hunting grounds for the short spring and summer. Where any particular hunter is headed depends upon his trade—elk hunters travel to Jankaping or Hognunmark, river fishermen head north to the thawed Aald river, and seal hunters venture as far north as Thaele. Family members not participating in the hunt often stay behind repairing the winter lodges and storing periodic shipments from the hunters in the field.

When the first frost comes, the hunters return home, hold a great feast, and preparations for the winter begin.

skapá hjarring

Skapá Hjarring is the capital province of Halskapa. It is the largest city north of Dhoesone. Located at the mouth of the Hjarring river, it is one of the busiest ports in western Cerilia and Rjurik's main center of trade. Each fall, as the yield of the summer's hunting, fishing, and growing season becomes available, a great market appears in Skapa Hjarring. Clan representatives from all across Halskapa and other Rjurik realms flock to this bazaar of the north to trade their goods.

Fishing and whaling clans base their operations here and the shipbuilding industry is strong. Whaling, trade, and fishing are all done from the Rjurik *skonning*, a boat similar in shape to a longboat, but with a deeper keel for increased stability in rough seas.

Highland herders and iron miners populate the rest of the province.

the plains provinces

The plains provinces, Taelrhud, Stjolvar, and Aandvjor, are lightly forested with the pine trees that are the lifeblood of the Rjurik people. The precious trees offer shelter, building materials, and fuel necessary to survive in the harsh climate.

These trees are sacred to those who follow Erik, and logging is restricted to what the forest can stand to lose without injury. It is common practice for loggers to plant two trees for every one that is cut.

The major winter settlements in the three provinces are Kinet Knolling (Taelrhud), Hjarring Hjoltar (Stjolvar), and Furvelk (Aandvjor). These settlements qualify as towns in the winter, but are mostly deserted in the spring and summer months.

the highlands

Selkhauske, Helkstraad, and Skapa Hjarring (outside of the urbanized areas) are the highland homes to the great

iron mines, and Halskapa's main resource bed. The forges at Har Ferbing, the largest town in Selkhauske, burn night and day. Halskapa's entire output of iron comes from these highland provinces.

The highlands, though not as steep and treacherous as the mountains found in other parts of Cerilia, are nonetheless dangerous to who do not possess mountaineering skills.

The major settlements in these provinces are Skapa Hjarring, Har Ferbing, and Fing Zjutor and Sriethein in Helkstraad. Har Ferbing and Sriethein are populated year round, since the iron mines are relatively close and the clans working the mines do not migrate in the warmer months. Fing Zjutor is a whaling village on the Helkstraad coast, and many whale hunters raise anchor in the summer months to hunt narwhals in the Miere Rhuann and Tael Firth. Other warriors head north to the Thaele summer.

the hills

The hill provinces of Dvasviik and Dalmsrhuud smooth the transition from the rugged highlands to the gentle plains. For the most part, the hills have little forestation. These provinces are known as the shepherd lands. The name is appropriate. It is in these two provinces that most herds spend both summer and winter.

Dvasviik is home to the great city of Ode-mark, which is found atop a timbered hill and surrounded by nature. The city is reputed to be the most beautiful in the northern lands, and followers of Erik from as far away as Vosgaard make pilgrimages to the druidic circles that gird the city.

There is one other village in Dvasviik. Toolenon is a quaint, peaceful village on the edge of the highlands of Helkstraad.

There is one town and two villages in Dalmsrhuud. Great numbers of Rjurik head to the Taelshore for the warmer climate. Courden, the town, is located across the Aandvjor from Leivika. The village of Firthenor is a coastal fishing village. Clatereden Village is home to the province's shepherd clans.

The family is the basic unit of government in Halskapa. Because the Halskapan climate is so harsh, family members rely heavily on each other for survival. As a direct result, extended families draw together to form clans and each member assumes its role supporting the survival effort of the entire group.

Clan living is communal. Where the standard Anuirean family consists of a father and mother with well-defined roles in relation to their children, Rjurik clans require members to perform those communal functions that best suit them. Men and women fill roles with less definition, using their best talents for the benefit of the entire clan. A strong hunter hunts, a forceful parent raises children, and so on.

politics of survival

Each clan specializes in one or two kinds of products to trade with other clans.

For example, one clan trades whale oil for the wool raised by another. This trading structure is unique to Halskapa in the north, and is probably the reason for her increase in power and the growth of her culture over the years.

Of the many clans in each province, one clan leader is selected as the provincial jarl. His primary responsibilities include maintaining the law set forth by the king, and settling disputes between clans.

Provincial jarls answer to the King of Halskapa, who maintains his court at Skapa Hjarring. The last king, Bervinig, ascended to the throne as an influential and powerful man who united the clans.

He led Halskapa to the pinnacle of strength it has reached in the nearly 50 years of his rule.

However, Bervinig, now old, weak, increasingly irrational and incoherent, has presided over the slow erosion of his authority.

Control has shifted from the central government at Skapa Hjarring to the provincial jarls.

provincial rule

The provincial jarls currently hold most of the power in Halskapa. While oversight shifted gradually, some were eager to exercise dominion but others only accepted control out of necessity.

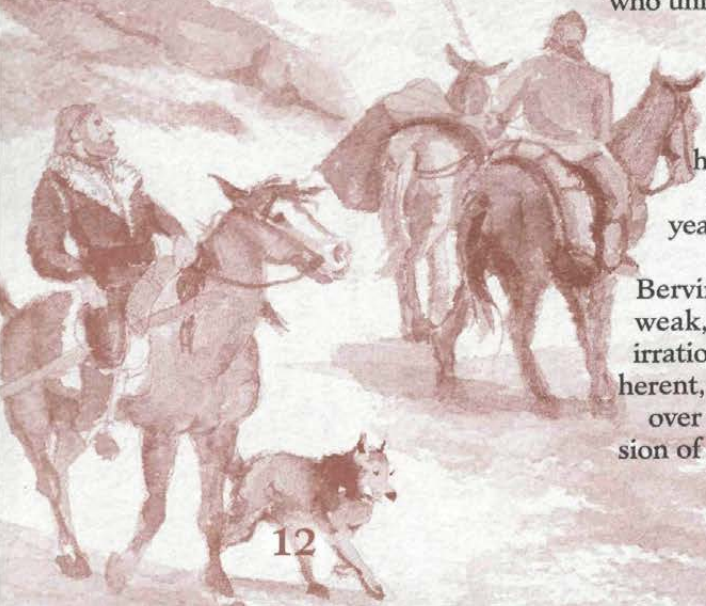
Provincial courts are held in *longhalls*, the traditional seat of clan government—really just long, one-room buildings with many benches. Courts are not fancy, and would never meet Anuirean standards. Most diversions, if any are even provided, are performed by wandering minstrels, or *skalds*, who serve as entertainers and historians in Rjurik culture.

Skalds are traveling heralds, carrying news from clan to clan and reciting the sagas of Halskapa's glory. The skalds are those who truly know what lies in the hearts of the people at any given time.

the political situation

Where the king once commanded complete loyalty from the seven jarls and their provinces, he now commands such loyalty from only Skapa Hjarring and its surrounding territory. The seven jarls had gradually, subtly usurped the power of the royal court. They now rule their own provinces as nearly independent nations, paying little heed to the king's edicts or counselors.

This process has been long and painful for Bervinig, who, when coherent, is not oblivious to the political situation. His most fervent advisers first handled his declining health with denials. Now, however, even Sir Jalkvar, the king's most loyal and capable lieutenant, has privately confessed the gravity of the current situation to outsiders. Public admission has not yet come, but when it does an extreme upheaval is expected, and succession will be the monumental issue at hand.



erik's temple

Though there has been a power shift in the central government, the druids maintain the most consistent level of influence across the land. From their great temple at Odemark, druids of Erik spread across Halskapa to maintain the health of her natural resources and people. It is a delicate balance with a simple creed: "Take no more from nature than you need and she can give; take no more from the people than you need and they can support." This philosophy of gentle preservation keeps the Rjurik family strong even as times change and nomads settle into permanent homesteads.

the military

Unlike most other Rjurik realms, Halskapa maintains a powerful standing army. The army is loyal to the king and at this time is perhaps the last thing that keeps the provincial jarls from challenging the king's rule, though Bervinig would never use force to gain his ends.

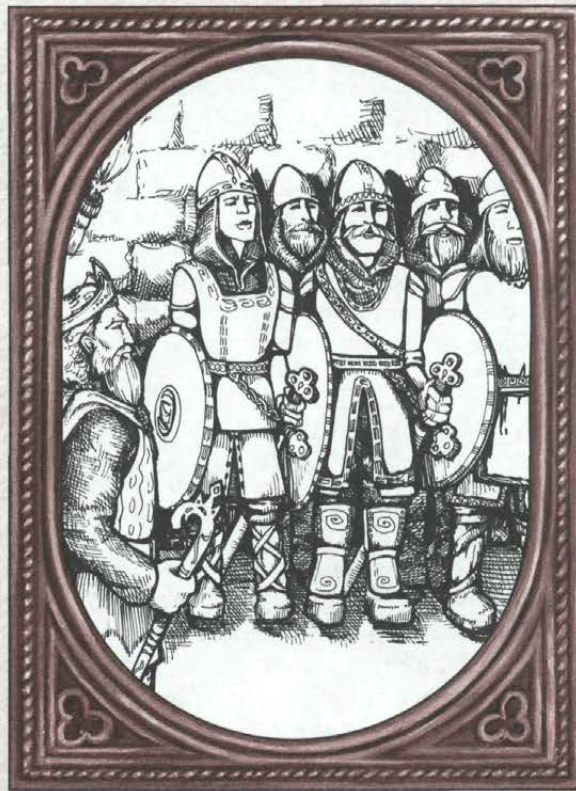
Yet seeds of dissent have been growing in the army as well. Factions have been forming, and open rivalries have begun between noble officers. Some companies have declared provincial allegiances, but are kept in line by the elite Iron Guard and the mercenary troops supplementing the ranks.

The provincial jarls currently handle matters of law as needed.

the seven jarls

Here is a breakdown of the seven jarls and their provincial political situations. Each has been involved in jockeying for the throne in some manner—although some, like the druids, honestly have the best interests of Halskapa in mind.

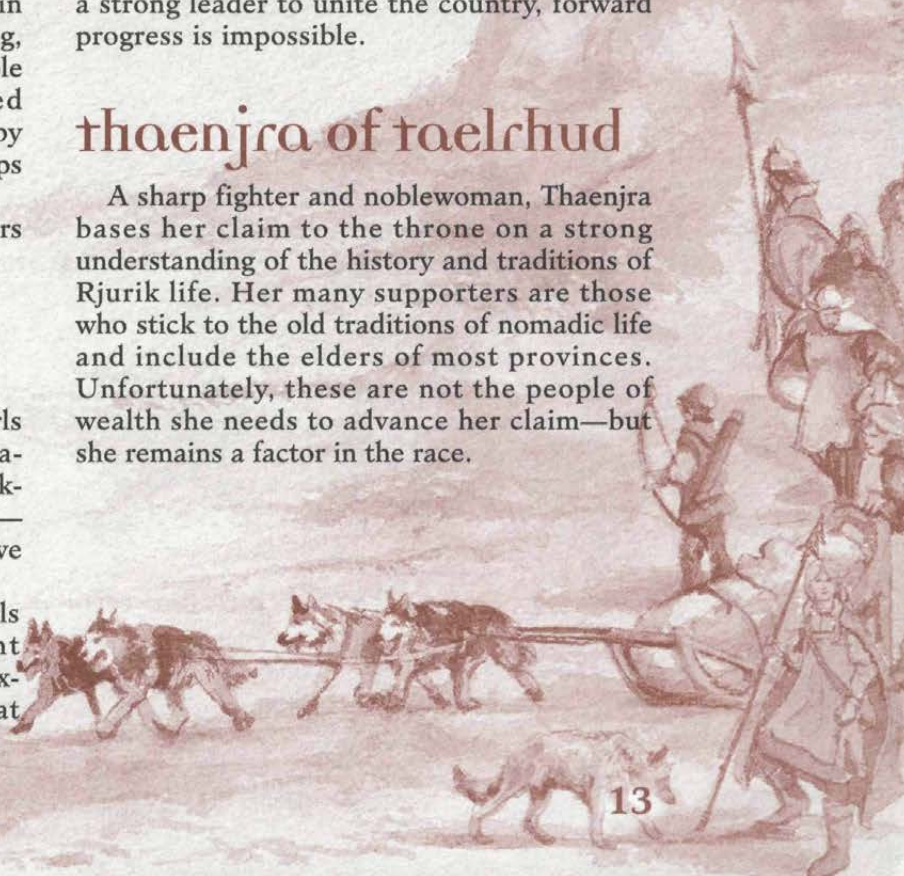
Players' Note: Each of the provincial jarls leads a network of clans with different ideals, specialties, and aspirations. For maximum game effect, it is recommended that



you pick one of these clans to lead, and either play the jarl as your PC or replace him with your own character. Halskapa faces strong challenges in the future, and without a strong leader to unite the country, forward progress is impossible.

thaenjra of taelchud

A sharp fighter and noblewoman, Thaenjra bases her claim to the throne on a strong understanding of the history and traditions of Rjurik life. Her many supporters are those who stick to the old traditions of nomadic life and include the elders of most provinces. Unfortunately, these are not the people of wealth she needs to advance her claim—but she remains a factor in the race.



laefr of stjolvár

Head of a fishing clan until his ascension to provincial jarl, Laefr has worked hard and risked much for a chance at the throne. His province is only sparsely populated and the fishermen, farmers, and herders of Stjolvár have little interest in his politics. Nevertheless, Laefr is a toothless hound in his ambition for the throne and boorishly denounces other claims as “codwash.”

dherg wir of selkhauske

The highlands of Selkhauske offer Dherg Wir, a ranging nobleman with quiet designs for uniting Halskapa. Though not as obnoxious as other jarls, he has gained much support with the people as an impartial adjudicator. His supporters among the nobles make the case that his immortality is just what Halskapa needs after an ailing king—but his enemies hold fast to racial preference and make the claim that an immortal on the throne would spell doom for humans in Halskapa.

Dherg Wir is the softest-spoken candidate, certainly the dark horse in this struggle. Others fear him for his quiet competence and charismatic charm.

kjessen of helkstraad

From the frontier land of Helkstraad comes Kjessen, a brave (some say ruthless) warrior of undeniable military brilliance. He maintains constant vigilance against the Siren in his province, and is sure that a strong military coup is the only sure way to gain control and unite

Halskapa. On his own, Kjessen is formidable, but he has been gaining steady influence in the rank and file of the king’s army, and is surely the most feared of those vying for the throne.

rjanik of dvasviik

Rjanik is the head of the Oaken Grove of Erik at Odemark. The Oaken Grove is committed to the welfare of Halskapa in both word and deed, and Rjanik’s chief interest in the throne is to head off a prolonged battle for succession. He would like to replace the current system with a benevolent theocracy. While many peasants support his claim, he has openly stated that he would support any truly strong candidate with the interests of Erik and Halskapa at heart.

council of aandvjor

Aandvjor is politically closest to Skapa Hjarring and has not drifted far from the king’s influence.

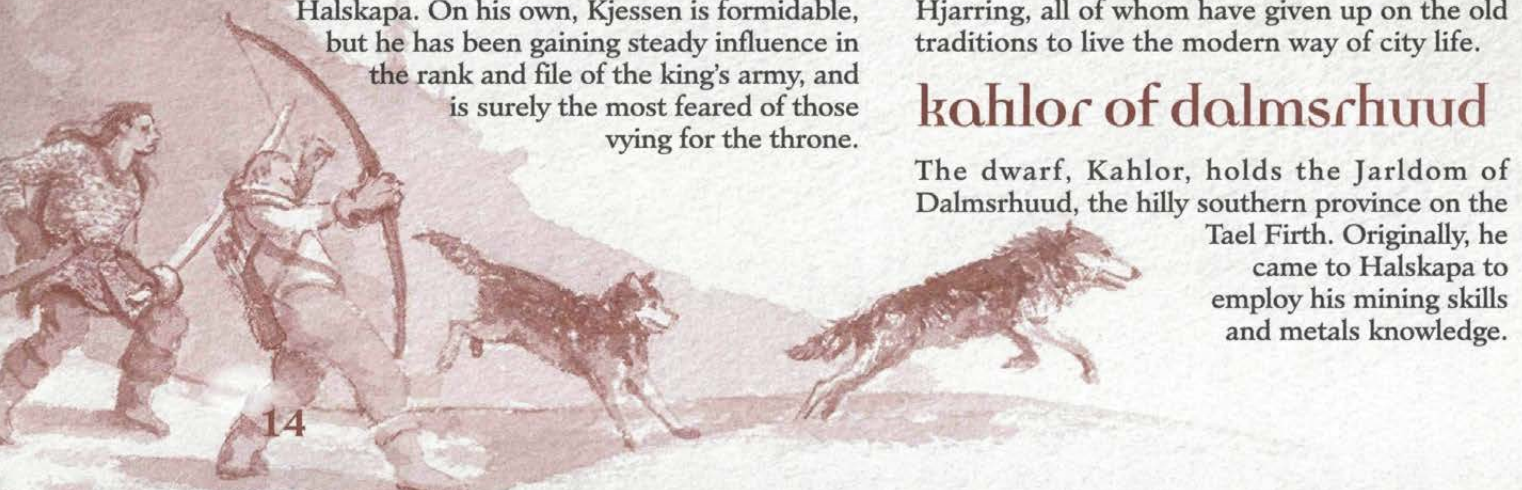
A council of elders currently leads Aandvjor instead of a provincial jarl. They reluctantly created the council when it became clear that the king could no longer handle disputes and matters of justice. The council has five members, from the five most prominent clans: two farming, one hunting, one fishing, and one herding.

The council itself does not have designs on the throne, but some younger nobles see less reason to remain out of the succession struggle. They are getting more vocal in the long-halls as time goes on, and it is the council’s jarl-protector, the wizard Sketa, who has the most viable right to the throne.

Sketa is an ambitious woman, but not fierce in her pursuit. She recognizes her eligibility as one of many, and knows that she needs great support to win the throne. Most of her support comes from the younger nobles in Skapa Hjarring, all of whom have given up on the old traditions to live the modern way of city life.

kahlor of dalmsrhuud

The dwarf, Kahlor, holds the Jarldom of Dalmsrhuud, the hilly southern province on the Tael Firth. Originally, he came to Halskapa to employ his mining skills and metals knowledge.



But Kahlor retired into political life in the mild weather of Dalmsrhuud. He faithfully served the jarl for many years, and, when the jarl was ailing, he designated Kahlor his successor and the clans ratified the selection.

The people and nobles of his province primarily fuel Kahlor's aspirations, all of whom agree that he is the best administrator Halskapa has ever seen. They maintain that his sure hand at the head of the country would prove the uniting force Halskapa needs to be strong. Though a reluctant candidate, he is nevertheless a commanding presence.

friends

A word about Halskapa's alliances is in order. Halskapa, as the most powerful and organized of the Rjurik realms, is a valuable ally for neighboring domains. Halskapa enjoys tolerable relations with most Rjurik lands, except Rjuvik itself.

Good relations are maintained with nearby Svinik and Jankaping, and close

trade relationships are sustained with the northern Anuirean realms.

The only formal alliance of Halskapa is with Stjordvik, but political situations in both countries make this pact shaky at best.

enemies

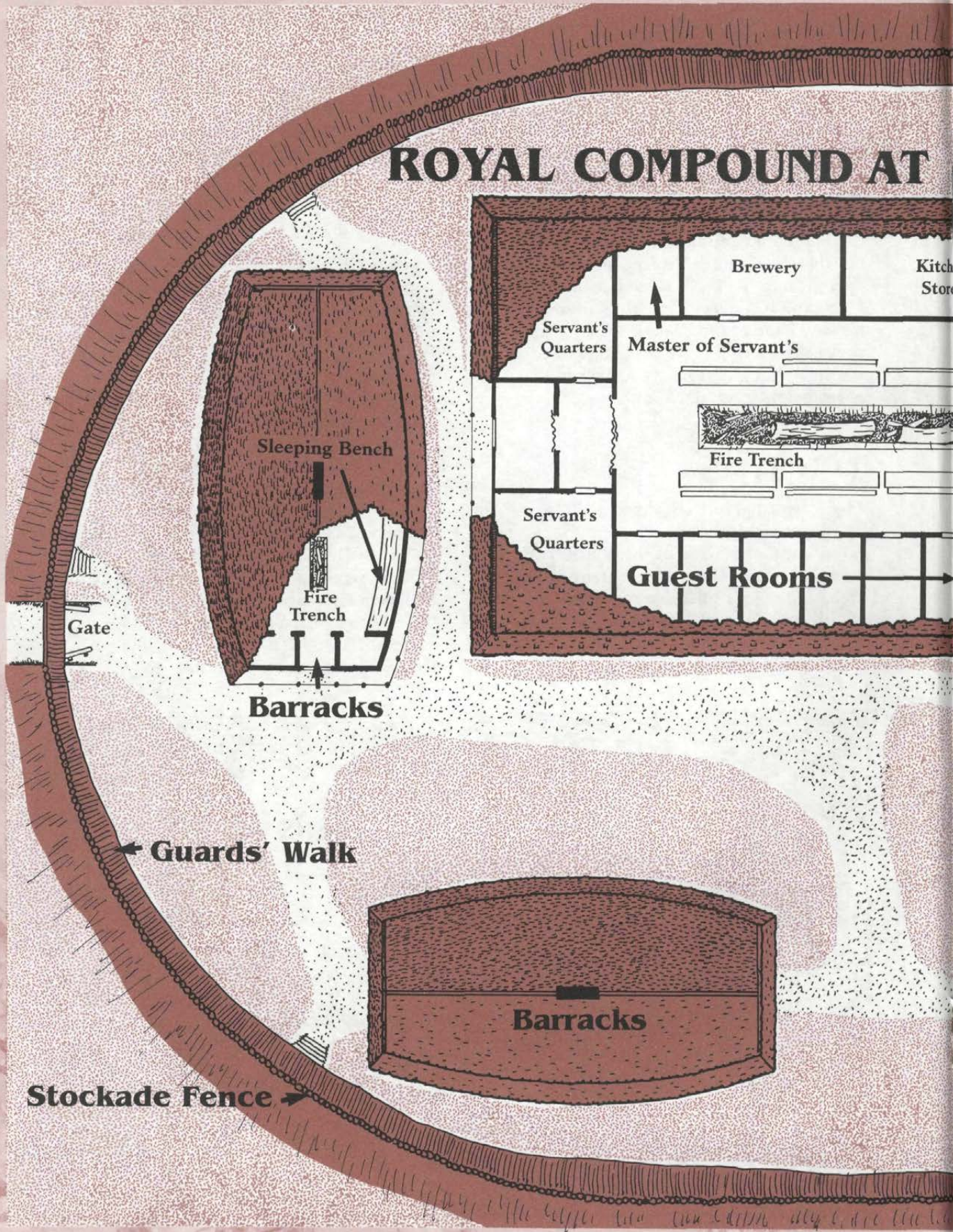
Rjuvik, the bandit kingdom between Halskapa and Anuire, is not a formal enemy of the king, but every few years a Rjuvik band hijacks a Halskapan trade caravan and causes an incident. The problem is not consistent or even all that serious, but it is a disagreeable situation that has prevented good relations between the realms.

The White Witch is perhaps Halskapa's most brilliant enemy. The awnshegh keeps busy by spreading her influence across Rjurik, and Halskapa has not escaped her attentions. If there was ever an aggressive, permanent enemy of Halskapa, she is the one.

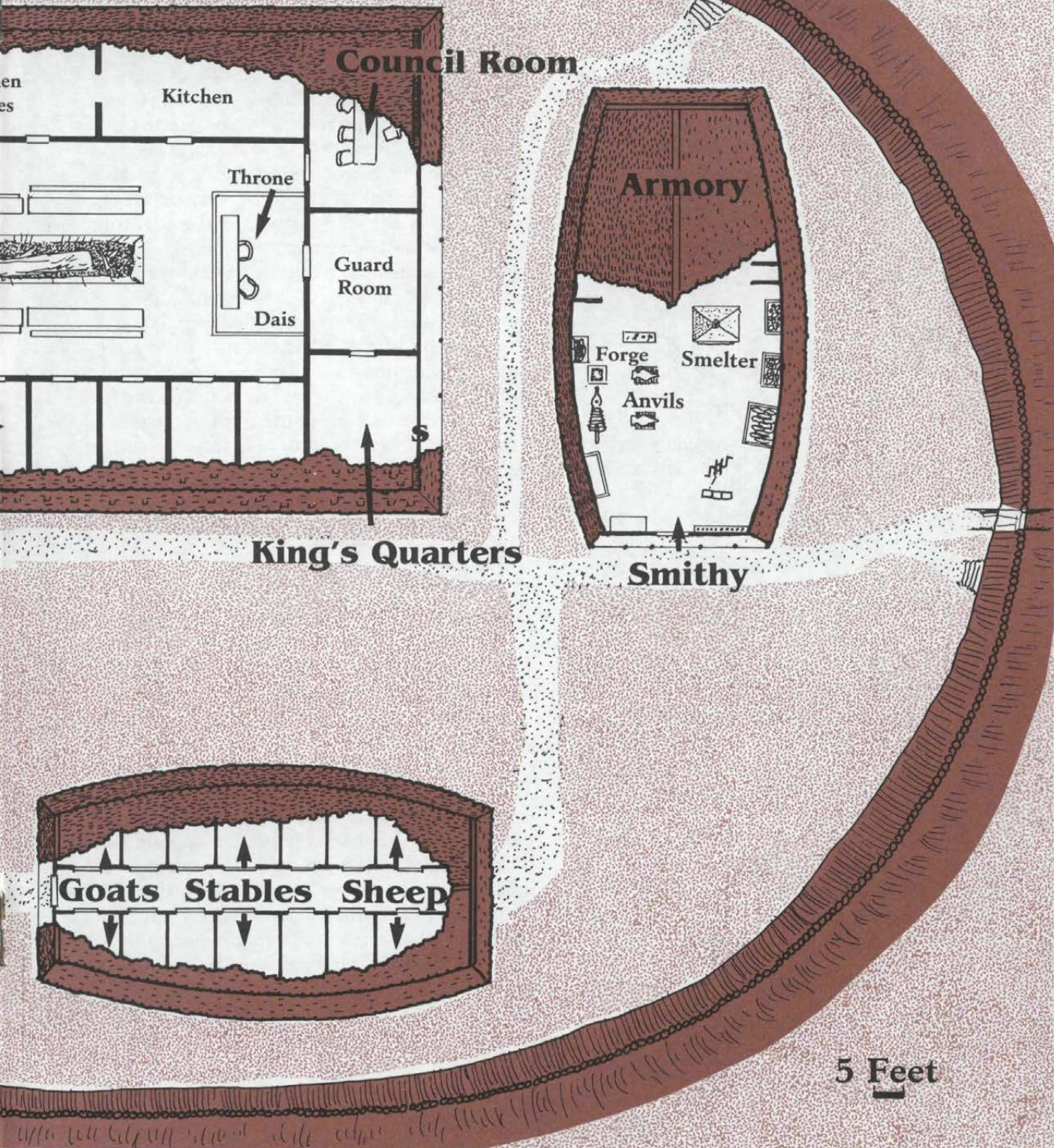
The Siren is officially an ally, but most nobles in Halskapa quietly urge the invasion of the Siren's lands. Bervinig never did listen, and remembers full well the fiasco of the past, but the quiet exhortations continue.

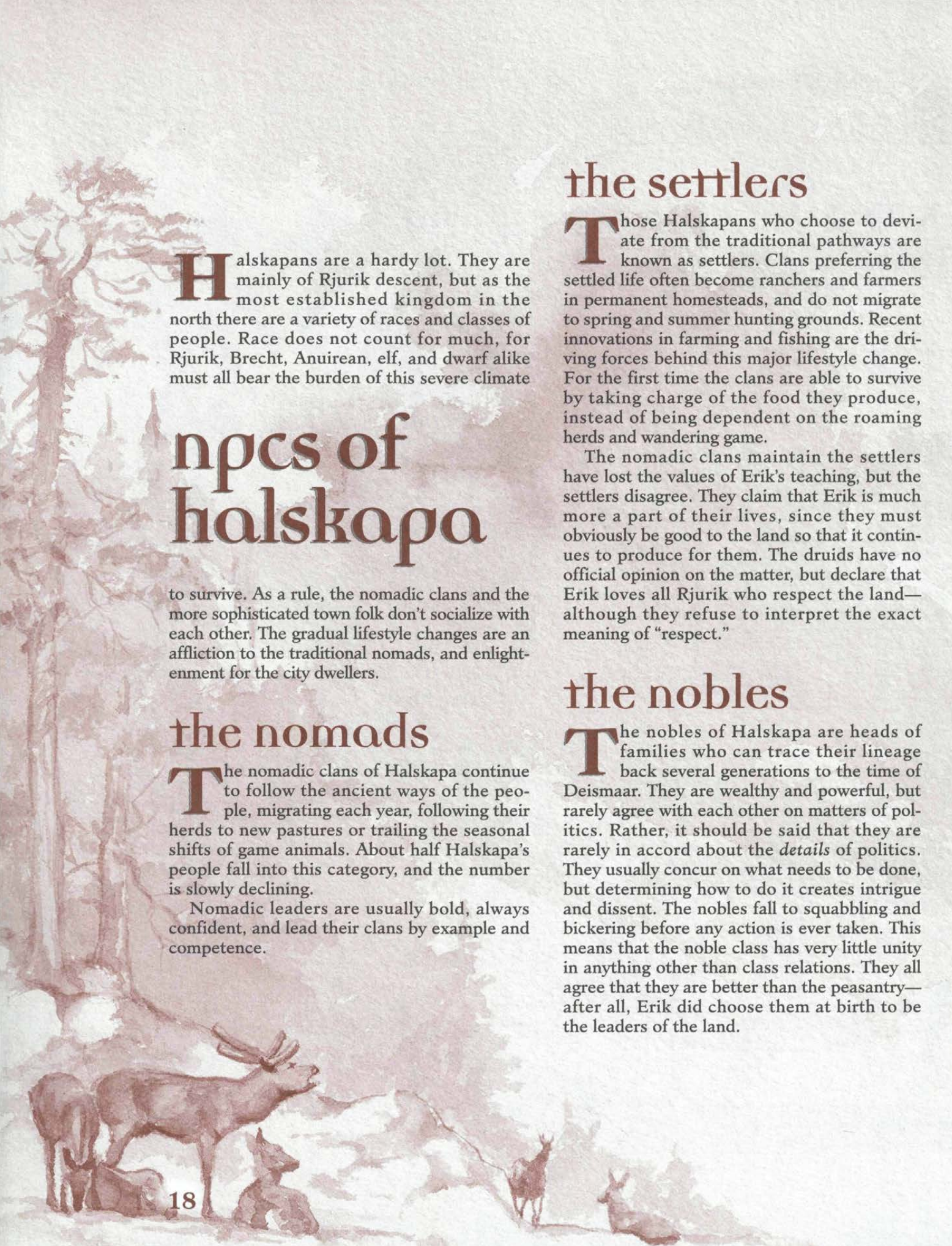


ROYAL COMPOUND AT



SKAPA HJARRING





Halskapans are a hardy lot. They are mainly of Rjurik descent, but as the most established kingdom in the north there are a variety of races and classes of people. Race does not count for much, for Rjurik, Brecht, Anuirean, elf, and dwarf alike must all bear the burden of this severe climate

npcs of halskapa

to survive. As a rule, the nomadic clans and the more sophisticated town folk don't socialize with each other. The gradual lifestyle changes are an affliction to the traditional nomads, and enlightenment for the city dwellers.

the nomads

The nomadic clans of Halskapa continue to follow the ancient ways of the people, migrating each year, following their herds to new pastures or trailing the seasonal shifts of game animals. About half Halskapa's people fall into this category, and the number is slowly declining.

Nomadic leaders are usually bold, always confident, and lead their clans by example and competence.

the settlers

Those Halskapans who choose to deviate from the traditional pathways are known as settlers. Clans preferring the settled life often become ranchers and farmers in permanent homesteads, and do not migrate to spring and summer hunting grounds. Recent innovations in farming and fishing are the driving forces behind this major lifestyle change. For the first time the clans are able to survive by taking charge of the food they produce, instead of being dependent on the roaming herds and wandering game.

The nomadic clans maintain the settlers have lost the values of Erik's teaching, but the settlers disagree. They claim that Erik is much more a part of their lives, since they must obviously be good to the land so that it continues to produce for them. The druids have no official opinion on the matter, but declare that Erik loves all Rjurik who respect the land—although they refuse to interpret the exact meaning of "respect."

the nobles

The nobles of Halskapa are heads of families who can trace their lineage back several generations to the time of Deismaar. They are wealthy and powerful, but rarely agree with each other on matters of politics. Rather, it should be said that they are rarely in accord about the *details* of politics. They usually concur on what needs to be done, but determining how to do it creates intrigue and dissent. The nobles fall to squabbling and bickering before any action is ever taken. This means that the noble class has very little unity in anything other than class relations. They all agree that they are better than the peasantry—after all, Erik did choose them at birth to be the leaders of the land.

Bervinig, King of Halskapa
9th-level Rjurik Fighter

S: 16
D: 13
C: 6
I: 15/7*
W: 16/3*
Ch: 14

AC: -4
hp: 30
MV: 12
THACO: 12
#AT: 3/2
Dmg: 1d10+5



Bloodline: Reynir, major, 28
Blood Abilities: Bloodmark (minor), detect illusion (minor), resistance (major)
Equipment: Full plate +4; *Hlarskvung*, a two-handed sword +3 (that becomes a +5 holy avenger in the hands of the blooded of Reynir)

Bervinig is an old man and was once a wise and resourceful ruler. He was a fair man, but dangerous in battle—especially when wearing and wielding the magic armor and arms permitted the king of Halskapa.

Bervinig's reign began over 50 years ago, when he had been a promising and popular prince. Bervinig was King Fjerdinand's only son, his pride and joy. Such was the king's love for his son that he gave his life for the prince in a battle with the Dusk Man's raiding armies. Skalds still sing of the account—Bervinig had been locked in combat with none other than the Dusk Man himself, when a particularly well-placed blow from the awnshegh dealt the prince a great blow to the helm, rendering him momentarily stunned. The Dusk Man, in grandiose fashion, prepared to pierce the prince's heart—thus transferring the power of Halskapa's future to himself. But Fjerdinand, possessed by Erik himself (so the skalds claim), magically transformed into a wolf and leapt 20 feet across the bloodied battlefield to place himself between the Dust Man and his own scion, taking the blow into his own body. The evil sword pierced the king's wolf heart

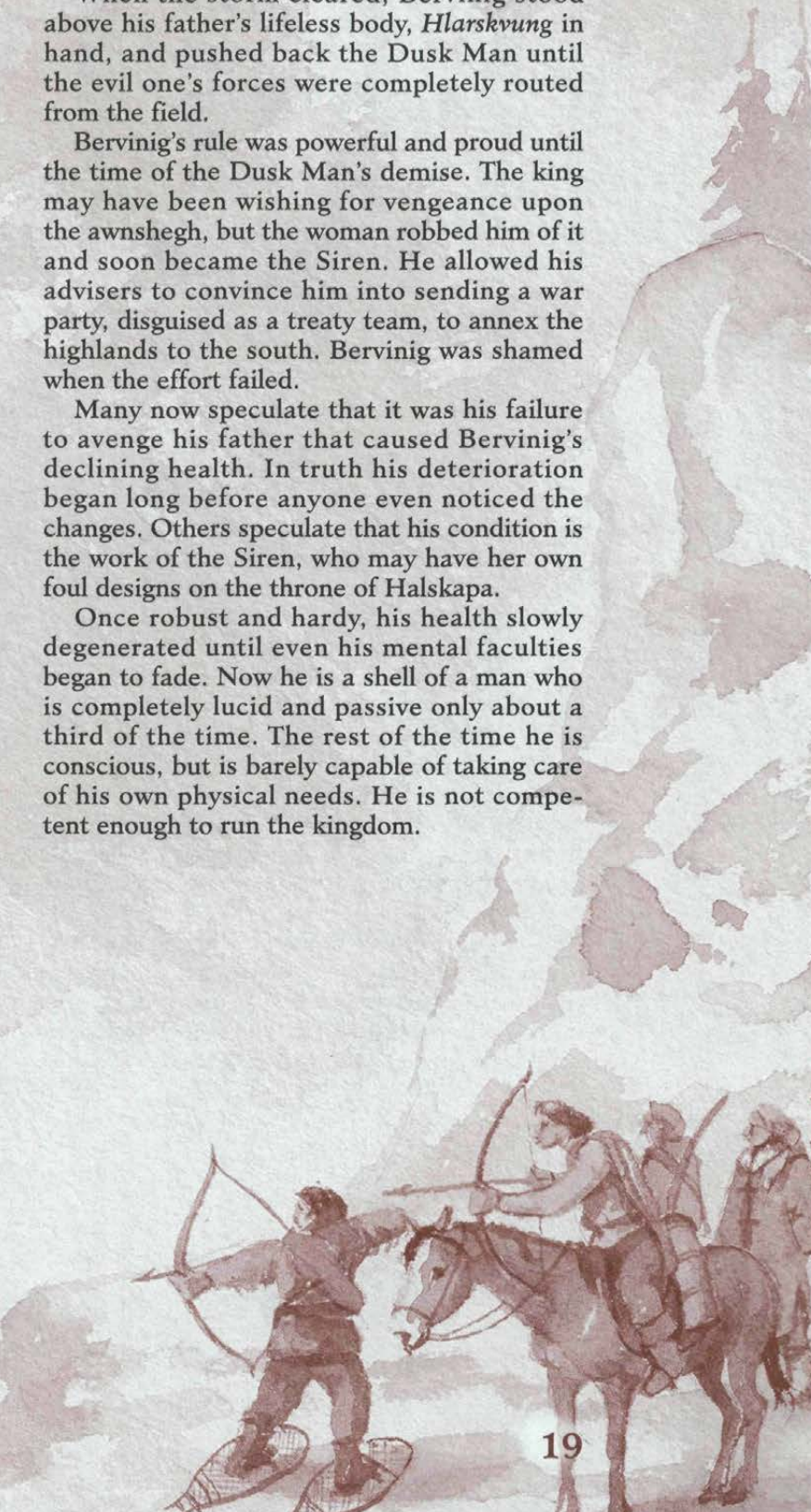
and lodged itself in Bervinig's side with a fierce stroke. Suddenly, a great storm of energy sprang from the wolf-king and ground into the prince, transferring (and perhaps doubling) the divine providence of Halskapa to Erik's chosen ruler.

When the storm cleared, Bervinig stood above his father's lifeless body, *Hlarskvung* in hand, and pushed back the Dusk Man until the evil one's forces were completely routed from the field.

Bervinig's rule was powerful and proud until the time of the Dusk Man's demise. The king may have been wishing for vengeance upon the awnshegh, but the woman robbed him of it and soon became the Siren. He allowed his advisers to convince him into sending a war party, disguised as a treaty team, to annex the highlands to the south. Bervinig was shamed when the effort failed.

Many now speculate that it was his failure to avenge his father that caused Bervinig's declining health. In truth his deterioration began long before anyone even noticed the changes. Others speculate that his condition is the work of the Siren, who may have her own foul designs on the throne of Halskapa.

Once robust and hardy, his health slowly degenerated until even his mental faculties began to fade. Now he is a shell of a man who is completely lucid and passive only about a third of the time. The rest of the time he is conscious, but is barely capable of taking care of his own physical needs. He is not competent enough to run the kingdom.



Sir Jalkvar
5th-level Rjurik Bard

S: 13
D: 14
C: 15
I: 14
W: 9
Ch: 16

AC: 3
hp: 16
MV: 12
THAC0: 18
#AT: 1
Dmg: 1d4



Bloodline: None
Equipment: Improved mail, claymore

Sir Jalkvar is the court skald at Skapa Hjar-ring, and a respected adviser to the king. Jalkvar has stood steadfastly behind Bervinig in recent years and is his most trusted counselor. Jalkvar has truly been the power behind the throne for many years, and he has done what he could to keep the appearance of Bervinig's viability alive.

Jalkvar is not ambitious for himself and rather neutral on matters of state. He has only acted on Bervinig's behalf out of a deep personal loyalty to the ailing king.

Jalkvar has a great network of informants and friends throughout Halskapa and may prove a valuable ally to the new regent—though his staunch loyalty to Bervinig will not allow him to become the new regent's lieutenant. Still, Jalkvar may offer his honest opinions openly, and will surely offer guidance to the new regent concerning shoring up the necessary political support for uniting Halskapa. He owes at least this much to Bervinig, and to Halskapa itself. He will try to prevent a long war of succession.

contenders

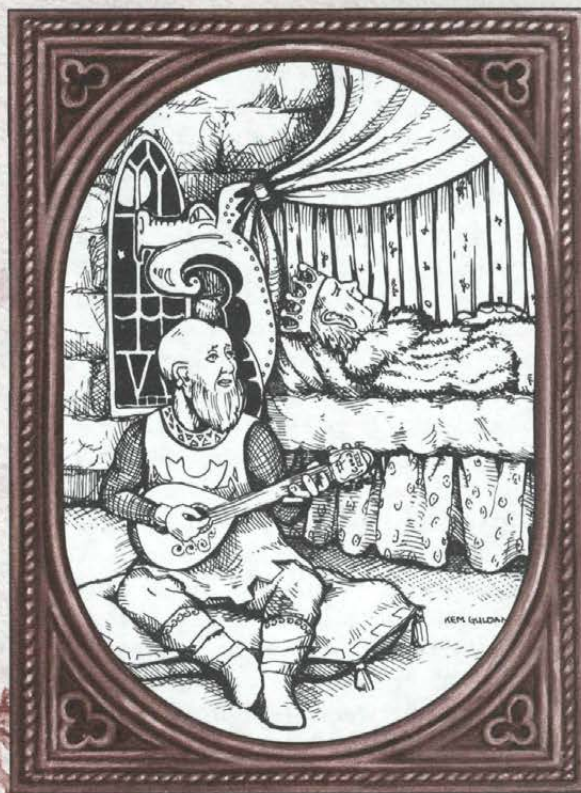
The following NPCs are contenders for the throne of Halskapa. You may choose to play or replace one of these people or select another background entirely.

Thaenjra, Jarl of Taelrhud
3rd-level Rjurik fighter

S: 15
D: 14
C: 16
I: 11
W: 9
Ch: 15

AC: 4
hp: 21
MV: 12
THAC0: 18
#AT: 1
Dmg: 1d8

Bloodline: Brenna, major, 16
Blood Ability: Animal affinity (minor)
Equipment: Improved mail, shield, long sword, medium war horse, lance



Dherg Wir of Selkhauske
11th-level Rjurikr

S: 17
D: 13
C: 16
I: 12
W: 10
Ch: 16

AC: 2
hp: 52
MV: 12
THAC0: 10
#AT: 3/2
Dmg: 2d4+3



Bloodline: Anduiras, major, 15
Blood Abilities: Enhanced sense (major)
Equipment: Long bow, sword +3, frost brand

Dherg Wir's father is a noble weaponsmith who moved his family to Selkhauske decades ago. Dherg Wir grew up close to the land and gradually became a local hero by leading the militia against orog incursions from under the highlands. His advanced abilities in tracking and scouting enemy war bands proved useful, and he has a well-developed tactical mind.

Dherg Wir is an able leader and maintains the peace effectively and fairly. He has great support from the peasantry as well as the favor of the tribes and druids who appreciate the way he regards the land.

Dherg is a schemer whose real interests lie only in his personal gain. He maintains a perfect facade of appearing fully loyal to Selkhauske.

Thaenjra is a well-spoken, capable leader in her province. Her people are a loose collection of horse clans who follow the caribou herds in their yearly migration north of the Hjarring. Her demeanor is calm and even-tempered, and she bases her claim on the traditional lifestyles and values of the Rjurik people, as first learned from Erik himself.

Born as the only daughter to the jarl, leadership of Taelrhuud has been in her family for many generations. She proved herself a great hunter in her youth, and there was no argument at all when the jarldom passed to her after her father's death.

Laefr of Stjolvar
2nd-level Rjurik thief

S: 15
D: 16
C: 12
I: 13
W: 15
Ch: 6

AC: 9
hp: 8
MV: 12
THAC0: 20
#AT: 1
Dmg: 1d4+1



Bloodline: Azrai, major, 33
Blood Abilities: Persuasion (major), enhanced sense (minor), heightened ability (minor)

A nobleman from birth, Laefr grew up in the high social circles maintained by generations of noble Rjurik. He is a member of the aristocracy and values the commoners only for what they can produce and pay in taxes.

Laefr is boorish, rude, and vocal about both his nobility and his desire for the throne. His company is tedious, but he is backed by most of the nobles—thus he wields great influence. He is also devious, and is probably a greater villain than his reputation would indicate. He runs Stjolvar adequately but without great imagination and is slowly earning the resentment of the traditionalists in his own land.



Kjessen of Helkstraad
5th-level Rjurik fighter

S: 19
D: 12
C: 7
I: 10
W: 9
Ch: 13

AC: 0
hp: 41
MV: 12
THAC0: 16
#AT: 1
Dmg: 2d4+7



Bloodline: Reynir, tainted, 14
Blood Abilities: Heightened ability (minor)
Equipment: Claymore, full plate, shield, heavy war horse, horseman's flail, lance

Kjessen is the most feared of all the jarls, and with good reason. He rules Helkstraad with something short of an iron fist, but keeps his people safe from orog incursions and undeclared border disputes of the Siren's overanxious army. He is extremely strong and revealed considerable military genius as a young noble warrior in the king's army. Being qualified by birth for the officers' corps, he immediately won the respect of the veterans in his first company by instituting harsh discipline and severe punishments for desertion in his company. He habitually leads charges from the front of a unit instead of issuing orders from the rear.

Passed over for promotion to general of the army by Bervinig's advisers (who fear him greatly), Kjessen asked for, and received, the Jarldom of Helkstraad province

under the guise of maintaining vigilance against the Siren and orog underdark tribes.

Helkstraad is a rich resource base for Halskapa and Kjessen has taken to taxing the guilds heavily to build his war chest. He maintains that open revolt is the only way to unite Halskapa, and does so openly. This has caused a great deal of fear among the ranks of the nobility.

Rjanik of Dvasviik
4th-level Rjurik Druid

S: 11
D: 11
C: 15
I: 13
W: 14
Ch: 13

AC: 7
hp: 15
MV: 12
THAC0: 18
#AT: 1
Dmg: 1d6+2



Bloodline: Reynir, minor, 15
Blood Abilities: None
Equipment: Morning star, leather armor, shield

Rjanik is an able leader for the Oaken Grove of Erik. Headquartered at the circle in Odemark, Dvasviik is ruled in accordance with Erik's teachings. Though the circle has great influence throughout Halskapa and Rjurik, Rjanik's only interest in the throne is to prevent a long, vicious political struggle between the other contenders.

Rjanik is a good-natured druid, who is honest and open in his dealings. Like all druids of Erik, he is a strong protector of the land and will not tolerate its desecration or deforestation. He was born a common highlander from Selkhauske, and joined the circle at a very young age. He was the very lesson of devotion to Erik and proved that strong faith and capable execution can overcome the injustice of aristocracy and ignoble birth.

Sketa of Aandvjor
4th-level Rjurik Wizard

S: 12
D: 10
C: 6
I: 15
W: 12
Ch: 10
AC: 6
hp: 8
MV: 12
THAC0: 19
#AT: 1
Dmg: 1d4+1



Bloodline: Masela, major, 24
Blood Abilities: none

Everything is harsh in the northern climates—life, work, and magic. Sketa, the wizard of Aandvjor, is the most powerful wielder of magic in Halskapa. She does not govern Aandvjor, but she is a talented political novice. Her background is in sorcery and matters arcane, but she has come to recognize that becoming queen of the land could realize her ambition for greatness.

Born the second daughter of a councilman, Sketa grew up as a rebel in a traditional household. Not wanting to live as a traditional clanswoman of the plains, she sought out and found Adrialala the Dark herself, becoming an apprentice to the dark wizard. Little is known about her years of service to the dark one, but when she reappeared in Aandvjor she possessed mystical powers.

She covets the throne and has acquired the support of the nouveau nobility, who approve of her modern ideas of personal landholding and civilizing the nomads. Nevertheless, she is far from ruthless and takes a rather academic view of the imminent struggle for the throne—this does not diminish her chances. She is extremely well-informed and has strong ties or

toeholds in all the provinces
and many
powerful allies
in other
realms.

Kahlor of Dalmsrhuud
3rd-level Dwarf Fighter

S: 13
D: 10
C: 20
I: 11
W: 13
Ch: 14

AC: 5
hp: 9
MV: 12
THAC0: 18
#AT: 1
Dmg: 1d6+1



Bloodline: Andviras, minor, 26
Blood Abilities: Resistance (minor)
Equipment: Scale armor, shield, *Blinder*, a *warhammer* +1

Kahlor the dwarf is an extremely sturdy examiner who has proved himself a patient administrator as well. Though aged, he maintains an impressive regimen of exercise he claims keeps him in shape as good as he was in 100 years ago. This offsets his great ability to hold drink, and he loves to tell tales in great topper contests in the local longhalls. He is well-liked by the people of his province, and was elevated to the status of throne contender by those whose knowledge of the current bureaucracy led them to seek someone to master the regime.

Kahlor accepts their praise, but does not look forward to a political struggle.

Speculators at the taverns (when he is not present—which is not too often) harp on the fact that he retired into political life and that he wants no part of running a kingdom. The opposite view, however, is that he cannot stand the great bureaucracy and is secretly preparing to make a strong challenge for the throne.

Kahlor's own thoughts, however, are unknown.



Halskapa is a fractured land geographically, politically, and economically. The decline of royal authority under King Bervinig has produced a state of extreme competition between those maneuvering to fill the regent's shoes. As a result, there are many different realms inside the kingdom. While the king still controls some law, individual jarls have wrestled most of the rule of law from him. The result is a mishmash of underlings and demi-regents.

holdings

law holdings

When Halskapa was first formed, the provincial jarls controlled most of the law. Yet as the kingdom united, the structure of law was consolidated under the king. So it has been for centuries—until Bervinig's decline, that is.

The provincial jarls hold the law today, and each sets the level at which they enforce the laws and punish the guilty—with some measure of Erik's favor, it is hoped. Unfortunately, this is not always true.

skapa hjarring

Rule of the law in Skapa Hjarring is still firmly in the hands of the king—perhaps only because no one ever dared to challenge his rule in his own capital.

The law in Skapa Hjarring and the surrounding province equals a level 3 holding, even though the area is a level 4 province. This reflects the fact that although the king is the only one who controls the law holdings here, there is room for improvement in both administration and enforcement.

the army

Though most Rjurik realms cannot field a standing army, Halskapa has maintained a regular army for centuries due to the unique interdependent economic system of the clans and the considerable wealth held by the crown. It was created out of necessity; after the wars of empire, no permanent army was kept. However, when the Dusk Man appeared with his army of humanoids, Halskapa trembled, for there was no way to challenge his claims to the southern provinces. A standing army was commissioned and has continued ever since.

The breakdown of units is as follows:

- ◆ 4 companies of archers
- ◆ 4 companies of infantry
- ◆ 2 companies of cavalry
- ◆ 2 companies of elite infantry (The Iron Guard)
- ◆ 2 companies of mercenary cavalry
- ◆ 2 companies of mercenary infantry

The regular army of Halskapa is still loyal to the king, though there are rumors of other influence being spread among the ranks or in the officers' corps. The mercenary companies, however, are the brainchild and strongarm of Kjessen. He has not made any threatening moves toward the king or any other realms, but does keep his troops trained and ready.

The Iron Guards are the elite of Halskapa's forces and form the king's own guard. Never in the history of Halskapa has an insult to the crown been overheard by a member of this corps and not avenged in a duel. Fiercely loyal, the king should never have cause to doubt their allegiance.

temple holdings

Rjurik is the land of Erik, and Halskapan temple holdings are not exceptions. There are two rival temples of Erik in Halskapa, the Oaken Grove of Erik and the Emerald Spiral. Together, these two temples account for the vast majority of temple holdings in Halskapa's provinces.

Still, they are not the only temples present. Small holdings of the Peaceful Seas of Nesirie

claim the whalers and fishermen as their own, and Northern Reformed Church of Sarimie both hold some sway within Halskapa's borders.

Though rivals for worship, the churches mainly work together rather than against each other. The real religious competition in Rjurik comes from nature, not from man, and Halskapan seem open-minded enough to accept the beliefs of others.

the oaken grove of erik

The Oaken Grove of Erik is the most powerful druidic circle in Halskapa. Organized at the temple in Odemark, the circle has a long and rich history associated with it.

The first Rjuven druids were followers of Reynir, the ancient god of the woods and streams. He was also a hunter, and graced his chosen people with abundance after teaching them the way of the woods. The druids were his hand-picked devotees, and from a young age those with a particular affinity for the woods were known as "Reynir's Chosen." These men and women devoted themselves to the god, and he granted them the priestly powers necessary for them to enforce his will and keep the Rjuven safe.

When the Rjuven came to Cerilia, Reynir smiled upon them and used the druids to teach them how to survive in this new and bitter land. It was his idea too that the druids should organize and so they built a temple at Odemark.

The power of the druids grew steadily in the following centuries and when the War of the Shadow came to the Oaken Grove of Reynir, the druids led the Rjuven against Azrai. They

sent the high druid himself, Erik, to the battle at Deismaar. When the cataclysm came about, Reynir perished with the rest of the gods. But in his place, Erik stood lofty in the heavens. The temple was immediately renamed in honor of Reynir's chosen successor.

The Oaken Grove is as strong today as it has ever been, mustering a domain total of 28, including more than half Halskapa's temple holdings. The temple is still centered in Odemark, but in the centuries of prosperity during the Anuirean Empire, a great city grew around it and threatened the natural surroundings of the circle. The druids solved this problem by devising a plan by which the city would remain naturalized. Many elven city planners were brought in as consultants. As a direct result of this strategy, Odemark is one of the few—if not the only—human cities living in complete harmony with nature.

Günther Brandt heads the Oaken Grove and controls its holdings. His lieutenant, the High Druid Rjanik, currently leads the local Halskapan circle. He is detailed in the NPCs section. Rjanik is well-liked by his peers and subordinates and is favored by Erik himself—having actually met the god several times.

The Oaken Grove has not revealed where it stands on the question of the differences between the nomadic and homesteading lifestyles, but many circle members wish Rjanik would take a position. There are factions on both sides of the issue, and if either has an upper hand at all it is the modernists. They point to the long history of teachings stored in the Oaken Grove's great library that detail the slow progression away from true clannish ways. Rjanik has kept his personal preference, if he has one, to himself.





emerald spiral

The Emerald Spiral is a rival organization to the Oaken Grove. Organized during the years of empire, the Emerald Spiral was at first a tool of infiltration created by the Anuireans, and meant to spread Anuirean influence to the Rjurik who were not already dominated.

But as the Anuireans would eventually learn, Erik does not take to politics well. Somehow the southerners' plans were thwarted. Whether this was through the design of the druids, or a mere fact of existence that underhanded intrigues just don't work in Rjurik, the druids eventually shrugged off Anuire's influence and became an independent druidic circle.

The Emerald Spiral does not have a central organization; its druids and members are much more interested in becoming one with nature than in playing at politics. As a result, the temple has a lesser influence in matters of state than the Oaken Grove, but most members openly tout this as a victory for Erik, and denounce the Oaken Grove as a collection of bureaucrats with no real interest in the land. Each temple is equal to all other temples in the organization, and every year each gets a vote in the conclave on matters of policy.

Obviously, this is the temple of choice for Halskapan traditionalists. They flock to the banner of the spiral.

guild holdings

The provincial jarls hold most of the guilds in Halskapa. This has not always been so, but it is an extension of the divisive trend that is tearing the nation of Halskapa apart.

Guilds have traditionally been held by clan jarls of a class similar to those of merchants in other parts of Cerilia. Called *aaolfers*, guilders are members of clans who have specialized in transporting goods and negotiating

services for other clans.

The transfer of power from the aolfers to the jarls occurred gradually, and sometimes it was actually the aolfers who assumed the responsibilities of jarl as well.

The Halskapan economy is a complicated one, dictated as it is by the need to survive and to advance this burgeoning culture. Nomadic clans who follow migratory herds return in the fall with the harvest of their summer hunt and sell it to a guild or some other trade center. Of course, many clans prefer to make the journey themselves, hoping for higher prices in the city, but the basic principle is the same.

Each clan has goods to sell as surplus from the summer. Hunting clans sell meat and furs, whaling clans exchange whale oil and whale-skins, forest dwellers trade timber and woodland herbs, herders swap wool and mutton, horse clans offer horses and leather goods, mining/smithing clans sell weapons and tools, and so on. The more the list is extended, the more obvious it becomes how important the role of the guilders is within the system.

Agents of the awnshegh the White Witch perform some guild activities in Halskapa, and she is listed as the regent in those cases. For the most part, these actions are on the fringe of permissible activity and have created something of a black market in the seamier districts of Skapa Hjarring. Goods smuggled in from Brechtür and Khinasi are sold duty-free and at inflated prices if the article is on the contraband list as designated by the local jarl and the Oaken Grove.

One other holding shows great promise for the future. They call the northern continent of Thaele the "Great Unknown," but, although the land is harsher than Rjurik, it holds mineral resources far greater than one can imagine. Several colonies exist on Thaele, and of those, Halskapa's Hoekstraad is the most ancient. During the spring and summer seasons, great riches are shipped to Skapa Hjarring from the northern continent, making Jarl Haelrya Sivardaan (MRj; F8; An, minor, 16) and the king wealthy men.

(DM Note: In the spring and summer seasons, the colony produces GB equal to a guild (6) in a province (7). For fall and winter seasons, it produces as a guild (0).)

SOURCES

Source holdings in Halskapa are completely undeveloped—at least as far as is known. But potential sources lie all around in a kingdom where nature is held in higher regard than many past kings.

There are those who have learned arcane skills. Sketa, in particular, has recently returned from an apprenticeship to Adrialia the Dark, and is rumored to have mastered the loom of the ley line and the art of realm magic. It is certainly only a matter of time until she begins to uncover sources and begin a network of ley lines.

As regent, you may wish to develop an alliance with a wizard who has a network of ley lines. Such a tool is without equal for realm defense. Use of the ley lines could also benefit Halskapanes who suffer in the winter months. Consider the power of an allied wizard with such a network through the land. It would enable him to change wind vectors during a storm or melt a great snowfall that may have closed the highland passes. Such an ally would be a powerful one indeed—or an even more powerful enemy.

Just before Bervinig's abdication, Jalkvar received a message of unknown origins. The message was a warning to the king that two sources have recently been developed in the provinces of Helkstraad and Stjølvar. The developer of these sources is unknown, and his motivations an even greater mystery. Sketa has not been approached on the matter, but Jalkvar predicts she will claim no knowledge of them in any case.

rumors and plots

Now that you have an overview of the land and its people, you must also know what is afoot. As a regent, you will find that each drunken confidence has a way of reaching the ears of the king, and not even the wisest of the druids know how much truth is contained in rumor. But you must give

rumors, secrets and plots

your attention to each, for it is by these tales that you may discern which way the Wailing Winds blow and for whom the skalds sing.

the struggle for a united halskapa

Surely the most obvious and expected rumors you will hear deal with your own claim to the throne—the current political situation has been brewing for a long, long time. Some, like Kjessen of Helkstraad and Laefr of Stjolvar will be open and blunt about their own claims. But others, like Sketa of Aandvjom and Dherg Wir of

Selkhauske, are silent and subtle. Keep an eye on all approaches—you may have a greater chance to spot intrigues from afar.

It has been said many times that the only way Rjurik can survive is as a united

people. Halskapa is in grave danger. Bervinig's remaining influence kept the challengers at bay until now, and they have become firmly entrenched in their support and claims. You will have to work hard and fast to win the support of and those you cannot you must remove from power.

But it is not over there. Once you have firmly entrenched yourself on the throne, you must go about reversing the situation that has seen royal power flee to the jarls. Without this part of the formula, your seat will never be secure.

Domestic affairs are certainly the rule of the day, but do not forget about those who lie beyond your borders. Other realms, Rjurik and the rest, may take sides in the struggle. Poor external relations or your outright ignorance of their attitudes may lead to a challenge from nearby regents—and if there is one thing of which you can be certain, this will not help your claim.

There are definite challenges to overcome before Halskapa can be united. This is the hardest battle you will face, and may take years before it is over, but the future of Halskapa depends on you.

the great unknown

The colony of Thaele is rich and proves it a hundred times over each year. When things in the capital begin to settle, it may be time to mount an expedition to find a second site suitable for a colony.

But be wary. The colonization of Thaele is a touchy subject with other Rjurik nations, particularly with those who do not have the resources to support more than small camps on the great northern shores. Clever diplomacy may be required to keep alliances intact when sailing to the north.

And be careful. Thaele is rich, yes, but it is even more dangerous than Cerilia. The climate is colder and harsher, and food is not as abundant. And then there are the vile *unnskrajir*—great serpentine monsters that inhabit the coastal waters and lands. These beasts threaten the lives of the Hoekstraad colonists on a daily basis and many hunters are killed each season. Not much is known about these giant sea snakes, but there are rumors of organized attacks made by groups (some even describe



them as clans) of the creatures. A continued presence on the continent may require more information about these and other beasts found there.

lost secrets

Halskapan weaponsmiths are the best in Rjurik. Their worst weapons are truer and sharper than the best made by smiths of other nations. Much of this comes from the innovation and new techniques researched and discovered over the course of the centuries.

What, then, is to be made of the rumor that Har Ferbing's best smith, one Djohin Naissen, has rediscovered the secret of making tighmaevril?

A loyal Halskapan heard the rumor locally and he immediately set out for Skapa Hjarring. It is now known to have been far more widely spread. An initial follow-up investigation brought both good and bad news. It seems the rumor may have some truth to it—two arrowheads of an unknown metal were recovered. These are under lock and key in the treasury awaiting your inspection. The bad news is that Djohin has vanished! Local speculation ranges from a kidnaping by the Siren, to his defection in the service of Fulgar the Bold in Rjuvik, to an assassination by the Gorgon himself.

Where is Djohin? Has he found the secret to making the fabled bloodsilver? Investigation in Har Ferbing is required—and quickly, before the knowledge falls into the wrong hands.

raids along the seashore

The Rjurik are a peaceful people, preferring individual duels to full-scale war. Erik requires this of his people. But who, then, is making disastrous raids along Halskapa's western coastline?

The fishing village of Fing Zjolor has suffered severe losses three times in the last year and raiders have been sighted off the western shores of Selkhauske by Brecht merchants as

well. Whoever they are, they come by sea, land, raid, pillage, and relaunch their boats within a few hours.

Kjessen has sent troops to protect areas hit by the raiders, but has only been angered so far. The raiders seem to hit only those villages undefended by troops, and worse, they seem to know which ones have men-at-arms. Frustrated, Kjessen demanded of Bervinig a solution to the problem, but no further action has been taken.

There is some evidence that the raiders are coming from the south and Jalkvar thought they may be coming from the Siren's realm, Rjuvik, or perhaps Dantier Island. But this has become more complicated, as recent reports seem to confirm that they are coming from the north, from the colony of Thaele.

a dying river

Several fisher clans who make the yearly journey up the Hjarring river in pursuit of the fish schools that they rely upon for food have put a petition before the court. According to the petition, the Hjarring is suffering great natural damage between Rjuvik and Blood Skull Barony. Miles of riverbank forests lie dead in great, gray tracts. The trees stand naked and barkless, their limbs bleached white by some immense catastrophe.

Entire schools of fish die when they enter these areas, floating on top of the water in decaying islands of wasted life. The fishermen who tested the water report that it burns the skin on contact and is wholly unfit for drinking. Though the dying fish and all else in the river move downstream, the deadly properties of the water seem confined to the areas of dead trees.

The fisher clans rely heavily on the upstream migration of the salmon and other fish, so the problem is very urgent. They ask for swift action and an official investigation into the matter would be prudent.





the fiery firbolgs

For centuries, Halskapans have lived in peace with a tribe of firbolgs that settled into the Dvasviik hills some time after the wars against the humanoids, centuries ago. These hard living giant-kin have a great deal in common with the Rjurik, even their god of nature is similar to Erik. They hunt off the land, and range through parts of Dvasviik, Helkstraad, and the Siren's realm—in all respects following the laws set by Erik and the temples, and doing so of their own accord.

Imagine the surprise in court, then, when the Siren sent word that she had grown weary of the firbolgs' foraging into her domain, and stated flatly that she would consider any future raids by the firbolgs to be raids by Halskapa on her territory and resources.

The firbolgs, who have ever been honest and open with the court at Skapa Hjarring, were outraged by the statement and immediately began to prepare a blood war against the Siren and her troops. It took many soothing words and personal visits by both Rjanik and Jalkvar to keep the firbolgs from their folly.

The issue is not yet resolved, but the firbolgs have agreed to cease raids on the Siren's domain for the time being. Kjessen, however, has other plans, and is rumored to be aggravating the situation, pitting both sides against each other. It is currently unknown how stable the situation truly is or for how long it can remain so.

orogs of the earth

Orog and gnoll tribes are rumored to rule great underground kingdoms beneath the highlands of the western coast. These rumors have never proven, but occasional raids by orogs and gnolls in Helkstraad and other provinces make it obvious that there are at least some organized tribes of humanoids in the highlands.

It may be no more than the songs of skalds meant to frighten children, but it bears keeping a watchful eye for, especially as things heat up between the jarls.

secrets

Everyone has a secret or two and Bervinig, for all his incapacity, has managed to keep some facts relatively quiet and hidden from scrying eyes.

the treasury

The treasury of Halskapa, though not necessarily a secret itself, is well hidden and secured. Only Bervinig and Jalkvar know of its location and as the new king you are also privy to this information.

But the contents of the vault are exciting. Inside, great national treasures and wealth stand ready to benefit a united Halskapa—and the regent who unifies her.

Among the treasures are the king's personal arms and armor. Bervinig was once invincible when wearing the king's own *full plate armor* +4, crafted for an ancient king of Halskapa by the dwarves of Baruk-Azhik and passed along ever since.

Hlarskvung, a great *claymore* +3, is the king's sword. In the hands of a blooded of Reynir, however, *Hlarskvung* acts as a *claymore* +5, *holy avenger*.

There are other magical weapons in the vault, but the catalog, if any existed, has been lost.

The treasury currently stands at 20 GB and 23 RP have accumulated as well.

barrow wights

It is common knowledge that the kings of Halskapa are always interred in the *Throne of Spirits*, a great ancestral barrow at Odemark reserved for the great servants of Halskapa. The barrow is found on a hilltop outside the city, in the midst of a great druidic circle, and is only opened for the funeral of a king.

This last item, however, is a secret known only to Jalkvar, Rjanik, and select druids at the Oaken Grove of Erik.

A young druid, charged with holding vigil at the foot of the barrow hill one night, thought he saw a figure at the top of the hill standing in the great circle of stones. The young druid climbed the hill to discover that the barrow had been opened—and the figure he had seen was no longer standing on the hill. Fearful for what he would find inside, he did not enter, but returned to the temple and reported what he saw.

The next day a party of druids made an expedition to the barrow hill, Rjanik among them, and confirmed that the barrow had indeed been disturbed. Upon venturing inside, they were startled to discover that the body of one of the ancient kings was missing! It did not take them long to cast priestly magic and determine what happened to the king. The results are more than a little shocking, some force, natural or unnatural, caused the ancient king to reanimate as a living dead.

Since then, the ancient king has been spotted throughout the province of Dvasviik, and has even been reported in Aandvjor and Helkstraad. Those who meet the undead king are usually traveling in pairs or singly, late at night, and always when the sky is clear. Rjanik claims no knowledge of which king this is, but there is evidence to suggest that he does know. One aged fisherman, Tuloor by name, was allegedly accosted by the apparition while dozing along the seashore. He is now quite insane (but may have been before the incident). He continually babbles about a trip taken many years ago to Skapa Hjarring in which he met king Fjerdinand. Unfortunately, there is no more such evidence, and the king's identity and reason for animation is still unknown.



strategy and advice

As the new king of Halskapa, you have a great struggle ahead of you. Perhaps a word or two of advice may be helpful as you begin your rule over us.

internal diplomacy

Domestic policy is the most important problem you will have to deal with for at least the first few years. You will need to start by garnering as much political support as you can muster. Hold long and involved policy sessions with the jarls and make them feel part of the decision making process. Meet with those whom you consider most likely to support you and get them firmly in your corner, then bring in others.

Next, perhaps you can reach some of the fringe jarls by inviting several of them to a diplomacy session and include two of those you have already convinced. These will affirm that your policies strive for the common good of all Halskapa and can only benefit the jarls and their people, hopefully convincing them.

external diplomacy

Establish good relations with neighboring realms quickly and urge them to support your claim to the throne. If they do not or are already predisposed against you, try to convince them to remain impartial in the dispute (bribes may help), and let the people of Halskapa choose their next ruler by themselves.

Be wary of these kingdoms and keep an eye out for any moves against Halskapa. It is usually

the realm caught up in its own internal affairs that misses the fact that its neighbors have amassed great numbers of troops on its borders, and by that time it is much too late.

war

Try to avoid war at all costs. Some of the jarls are strong and aggressive, but a civil war will bathe Halskapa in blood and create an open invitation for the neighboring realms to stake claims of their own.

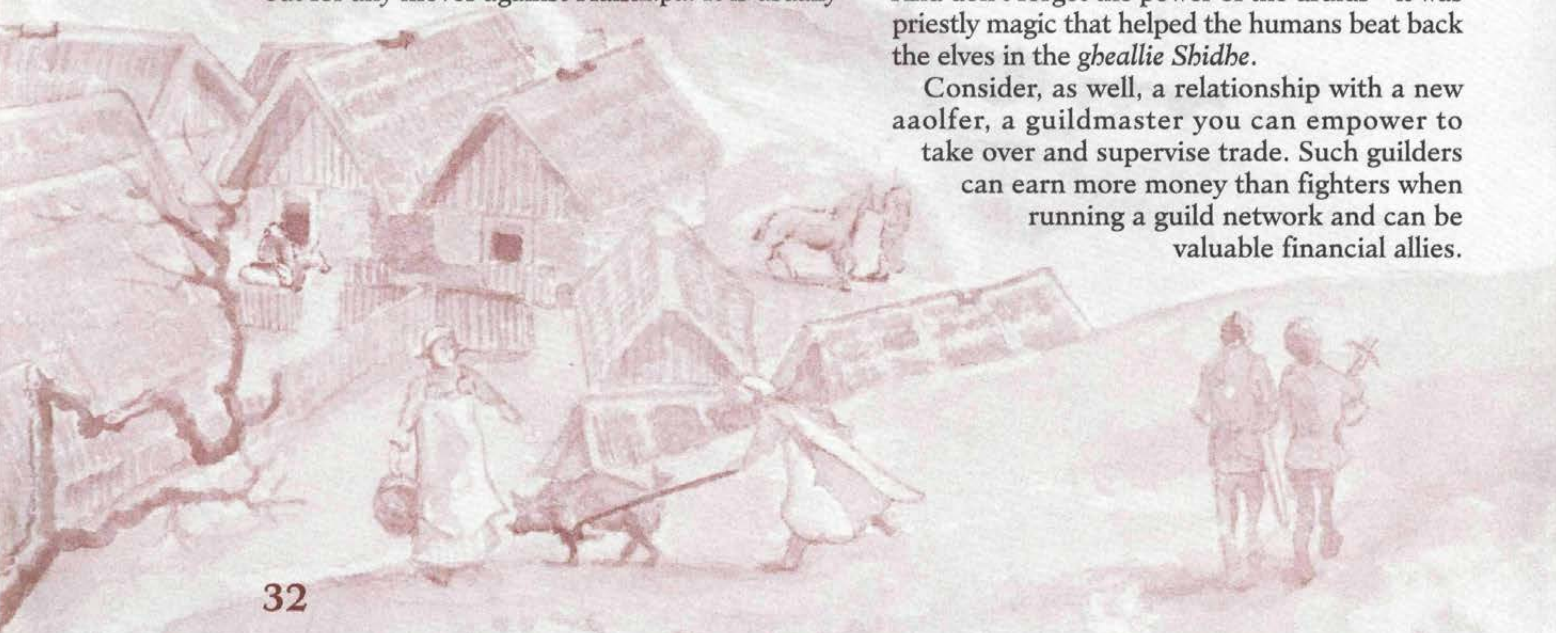
Work through diplomacy, but you will have to walk a fine line with the true aggressors not to make concessions. Concessions will show your obvious weakness and encourage the strongarms to exercise further muscle.

allies

Consider an alliance with a wizard, or perhaps take one as a lieutenant. Allow him to begin developing sources in the land. You may find having a wizard around very useful, especially if civil war does break out.

And seriously consider allying yourself with one of the temples. The temples know hearts of the people and such an alliance would indicate that you are a popular candidate for the throne. And don't forget the power of the druids—it was priestly magic that helped the humans beat back the elves in the *gheallie Shidhe*.

Consider, as well, a relationship with a new *aaolfer*, a guildmaster you can empower to take over and supervise trade. Such guilders can earn more money than fighters when running a guild network and can be valuable financial allies.





Halskapa Holdings Summary

Province	Law	Temples	Guilds	Sources
Aandvjør (1/4)	Sk (1)	OE (1)	Sk (1)	—
Dalmsrhuud (2/5)	Kh (1)	OE (2)	Kh (2)	—
Dvasviik (4/1)	Rj (2)	OE (2)	Rj (2)	—
	—	PSN(1)	—	—
Helkstraad (2/5)	Kj (2)	OE (2)	Kj (2)	—
Selkhauske (2/5)	DW(1)	OE (2)	DW (2)	—
Skapa Hjarring (4/3)	Be (3)	OE (2)	Be (3)	—
	—	—	WW (2)	—
	—	RCS(1)	—	—
Stjolvar (1/4)	La (1)	OE (1)	La (1)	—
Taelrhud (2/3)	Th (2)	OE (2)	Th (1)	—

Abbreviations: Sk=Sketa; Kh=Kahlor; Rj=Rjanik; Kj=Kjessen; DW=Dherg Wir; Be=Bervinig; La=Laefr; Th=Thaenjra; WW=White Witch; OE= Oaken Grove of Erik (Günther Brandt); PSN=Peaceful Seas of Nesirie (Daffyd Tamaere); RCS=Northern Reformed Church of Sarimie (Nara Nielems).

The Domain of Halskapa



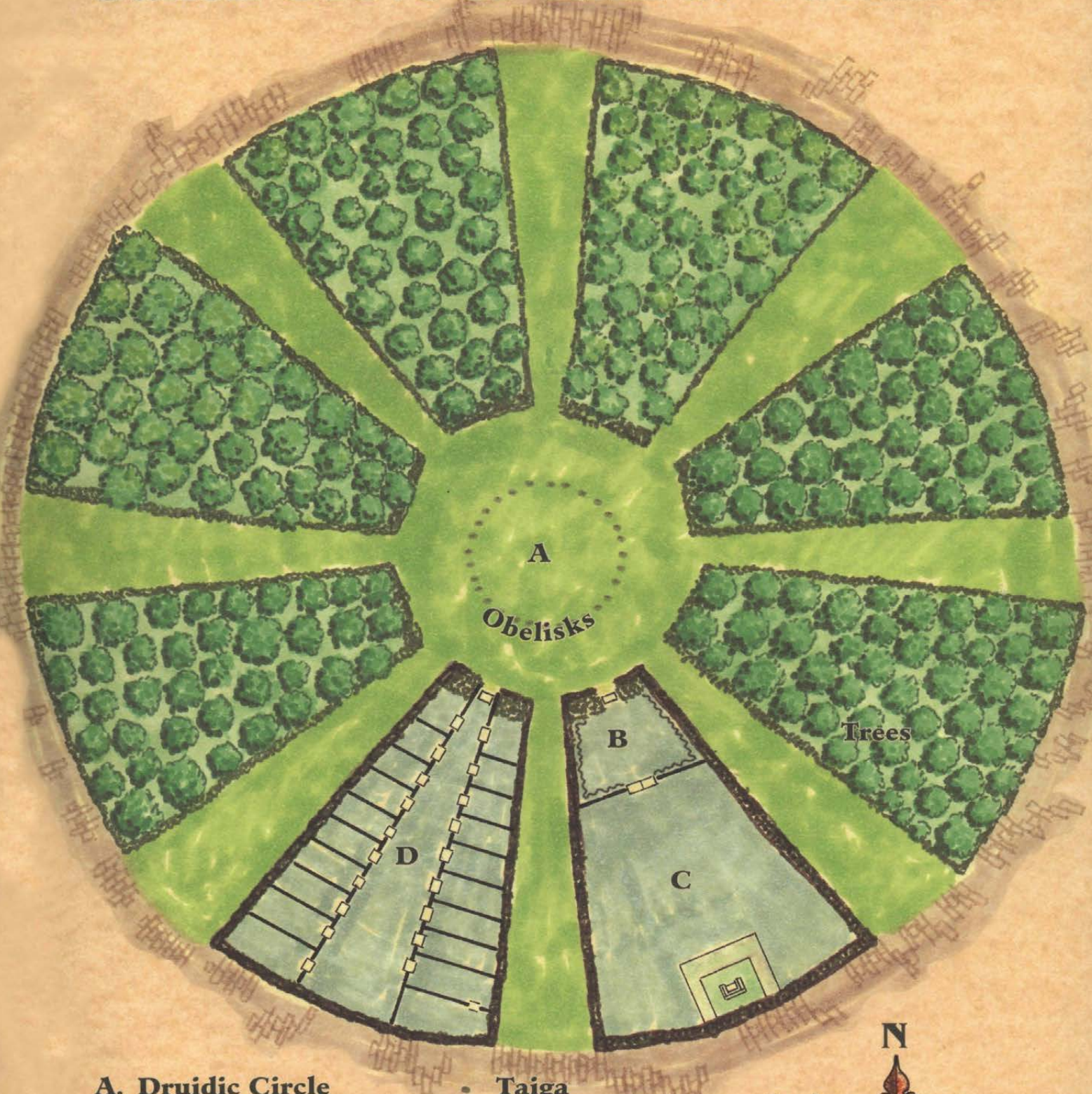


The City of Skapa Hjarring

Scale
120'



Oaken Grove of Erik at Odemark



- A. Druidic Circle
- B. Antechamber
- C. Audience Chamber
- D. Druids' Cells

- Taiga
- ▧ Stones
- ~ Curtain
- Door

Scale
5'





JANKAPING

Aaldvika

Stornomark

Skapa Hjarring

MIERE
RHUANN
(SEA
of
STORMS)

HALSKAPA

Odemark

SVINIK

the
SIREN

Leivika

RJUVIK

Tael Firth

Dantier Island

Player's Secrets of

HALSKAPA



by Dan Wenger

From the fishing village of Fing Zjlor to the druidic city of Odemark and the great capital of Skapa Hjarring, this is Halskapa, the greatest kingdom of the Rjurik Highlands in the BIRTHRIGHT™ campaign setting.

King Bervinig, aged and ailing, a man who once united the discordant provinces of Halskapa, is abdicating his throne in favor of your character. Once, he could take almost any action and keep the support of the jarls who govern those provinces. Now, his mind debilitated and his strength ebbing, anything he does creates open conflict with them—and they are particularly outraged that he has designated someone from outside the group as his successor. Will the ambitious, competitive jarls allow the crown's choice to stand? Will they allow the new regent to live?

Halskapa, the original settlement of the Rjurik in the Highlands, with a long and proud history as a bulwark of human civilization in the north, is about to plunge into civil war—unless you can tame the jarls, stop the internal feuds, and prevent invasion by those who view the regent as weak and Halskapa as prey.

This BIRTHRIGHT domain sourcebook is designed for players who wish to take the role of High Jarl of Halskapa. It can also be used by players taking the roles of provincial jarls, vassals of the regent, merchants, or adventurers in this Norselike domain.

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