



Volo's Guide to the DALELANDS



VOLO'S GUIDE TO THE DALELANDS

Clippety-cloppety, bold Jonstan the Rover
Rides misty-eyed down to the Dales again
Into forests and fields, rare beauty all over,
Land of his true loves—Aldee, Imthra, and Luthane,
Elda and Myrta, Chalantha and Araine.



Will he find yet another? Or be welcomed back?
Long lasses aplenty catch his winking eye.
Is it kisses he'll taste soon? Or scorn everlasting?
Love and laughter and soon away Jonstan will fly—
Cone again over threshold and under dawn sky.



Far across Faerûn, a rover adventures free
'Til the Dales call his heart home again
To Jhaele, Sharune, Aleese and Rythree—
Warm arms and hearth and a roof 'gainst rain
'Til his wandering feet bear him away again.



Climbing far mountains, riding in high clover
To Waterdeep and the shores of the Shining Sea—
“Hark! Comes now bold Jonstan the Rover?
Will he, oh will he ever come back to me?”
The Dales call back the man wedded but free.



Clippety-cloppety, bold Jonstan the Rover
Comes riding down into the Dales again.
Their forests and fields, rare beauty all over,
His true love more than all the maidens in pain.
My man is riding mist-eyed to the Dales again.

—Jaladha Tshamryl,
Minstrel of Battledale,
“Jonstan the Rover”



Dedication

To the original Knights of Myth Drannor for first exploring the Dales at my side. Elminster salutes ye.

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Volo's Guide to Waterdeep

Volo's Guide to the North

Volo's Guide to the Sword Coast (includes information on the Western Heartlands)

Volo's Guide to Cormyr

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Foreword

Well met. Welcome to the fifth of my popular travel guides to regions of Faerûn. The Dalelands are a bucolic backwater known far across the Realms for their beauty and for the tales of adventuring glory set in their forests and fields. Many folk have long desired a wayfarer's practical overview of the Dales, and that's precisely what I've endeavored to provide herein. So once again I pray to all the gods who may be disposed to smile favorably upon such efforts that your eyes also find favor with this latest work — *Volo's Guide to the Dalelands*.

In these pages many of the most colorful minstrels' tales have been regrettably laid aside in favor of covering features likely to be of interest or useful to the traveler—or that should bear warnings or be best avoided.

Many isolated hamlets, walled estates, ruins, and private keeps—particularly in

southwestern Battledale and along the fringes of the Elven Court—are not dealt with herein, but remain for the reader to discover. With the elven withdrawal, changes are sweeping this region, and adventure has come again to the Dales. May this guidebook bring you safely to it—or guide you in evading it, if you prefer. For ease of use, I've listed the Dales alphabetically, even places I was not able to fully explore (for reasons which will become apparent). Here are the Dales as you have never seen them before¹—Volo's Dalelands.



Volo's Dalelands



Elminster of Shadowdale

Ahem. As usual, I've amended some of the worst distortions and untruths, but not all of them.² Some adventure is good for all of ye.

¹*Elminster*: Nor are likely to again, unless someone else as given to exaggeration, misrepresentation, and flights of fancy happens along.

²*Elminster*: No prizes for guessing which ones.

Volo's Ratings System

| | Pipes (Inns) | Tankards (Taverns) | Coins (Prices) | Daggers (Alleyways, Courtyards, etc.) | |
|--------|------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|-----------|
| Worst | | | | | Unsafe |
| ↓ | | | | | ↓ |
| Better | | | | | Dangerous |
| ↓ | | | | | ↓ |
| Best | | | | | Deadly |

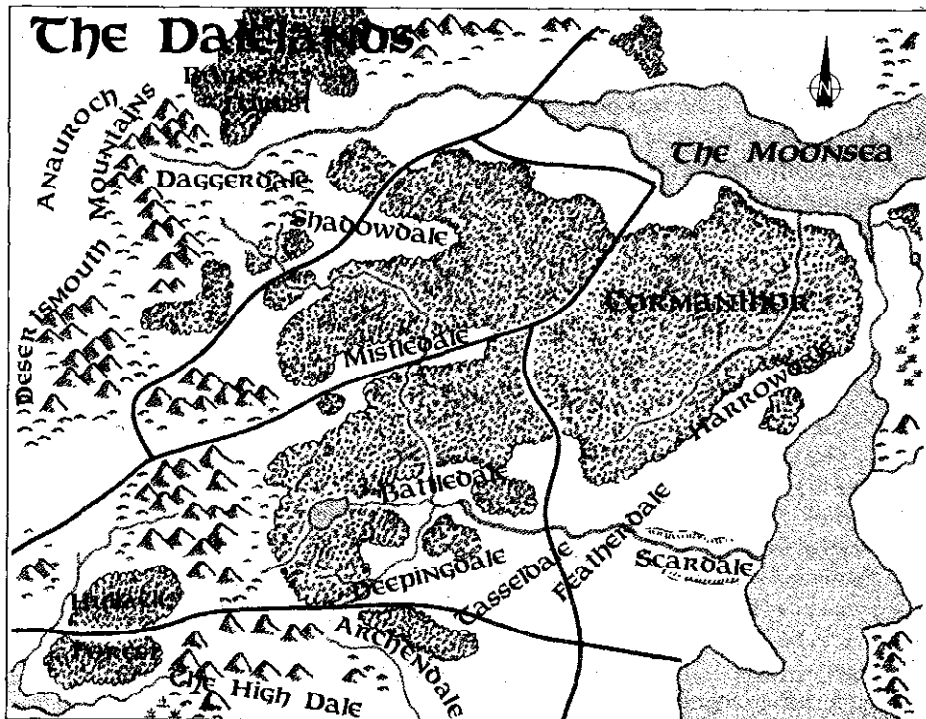


The Dalelands

The Dalelands (called just “the Dales” by most folk who live there) are known as the Breadbasket of the Dragon Reach because of the fine and abundant food crops these small, wood-girt vales produce. One of the most beautiful, pastoral regions of Faerûn, the Dales are well worth any traveler’s time—but be warned: Many a wayfarer who sees them falls hopelessly in love with their beauty and their good-natured freedom and subsequently will think of dwelling nowhere else in all the Realms.

Even folk who shrug at tales of deep elven forests, stags at bay, and verdant

farms tend to have heard of the Dales at least as “that quaint backwater where the mage Elminster dwells—in, er, Shadowdale, isn’t it?” To neighboring powers such as the Zhentarim, the realms of Sembia and Cormyr, and the cities of Hillsfar and Mulmaster, the Dales are a prize worth fighting for: rich farms that each power must deny to their rivals at all costs. Azoun of Cormyr has been heard to say, “My worst nightmare is the Zhentarim casting eyes at my realm and Sembia to the east *after* they’ve got the Dales comfortably under their belts.” A Sembian envoy was heard to agree that such a seizure of the Dales must never happen.





The hardy independence of the Dalesfolk—notably the inhabitants of Archendale and Shadowdale—has helped to thwart the imperialistic ambitions of many of the larger, more powerful realms and city-states in the Dragon Reach and to keep the Dales free. The people of Shadowdale alone have successfully repulsed almost a dozen invasions led or sponsored by the Zhentarim.

The traveler will find in the Dales the bucolic paradise that minstrels all across Faerûn sing of and harried city folk from Westgate to Waterdeep think that all countryside, everywhere, is: a land where livestock are fat, harvests are plentiful, and rolling fields or dense forests meet the eye on all sides. The Dales hold their dangers, to be sure. As the vigilant elves have left Cormanthor, the sylvan cloak of ancient forest surrounding the

comparatively small human dale holdings, predatory beasts and long-hidden dark powers have arisen to take their places. Wayfarers are warned that even local woodcutters venture into the leafy depths only in large, well-armed parties. Bugbears, trolls, owlbears, and worse predators often skulk around the fringes of many of the Dales. Those thrifty travelers, such as the merchants of Cormyr and Sembia, who customarily save a few coins by dining at inns and then sleeping out under the stars in nearby woods may find this habit a fatal mistake when in the Dales.

Foraged food and water free for the taking are, however, both plentiful in the Dales, and travelers may even happen upon food crops gone wild in the overgrown remnants of a now-vanished Dale or abandoned hold. Deer are



plentiful—even overabundant—throughout the Dales, and rabbit, porcupine, woodchuck, boar, and bear also flourish and find their ways often to Dale tables. Many berries, edible ferns, and mushrooms grow wild in the forest glades, and the verdant dales themselves produce rich harvests of wheat, oats, barley, and all manner of vegetables. Cattle, swine, and (increasingly) sheep are kept by Dale farmers, and the region produces fine cheeses, good beer; and indifferent but cheap wines in plenty.

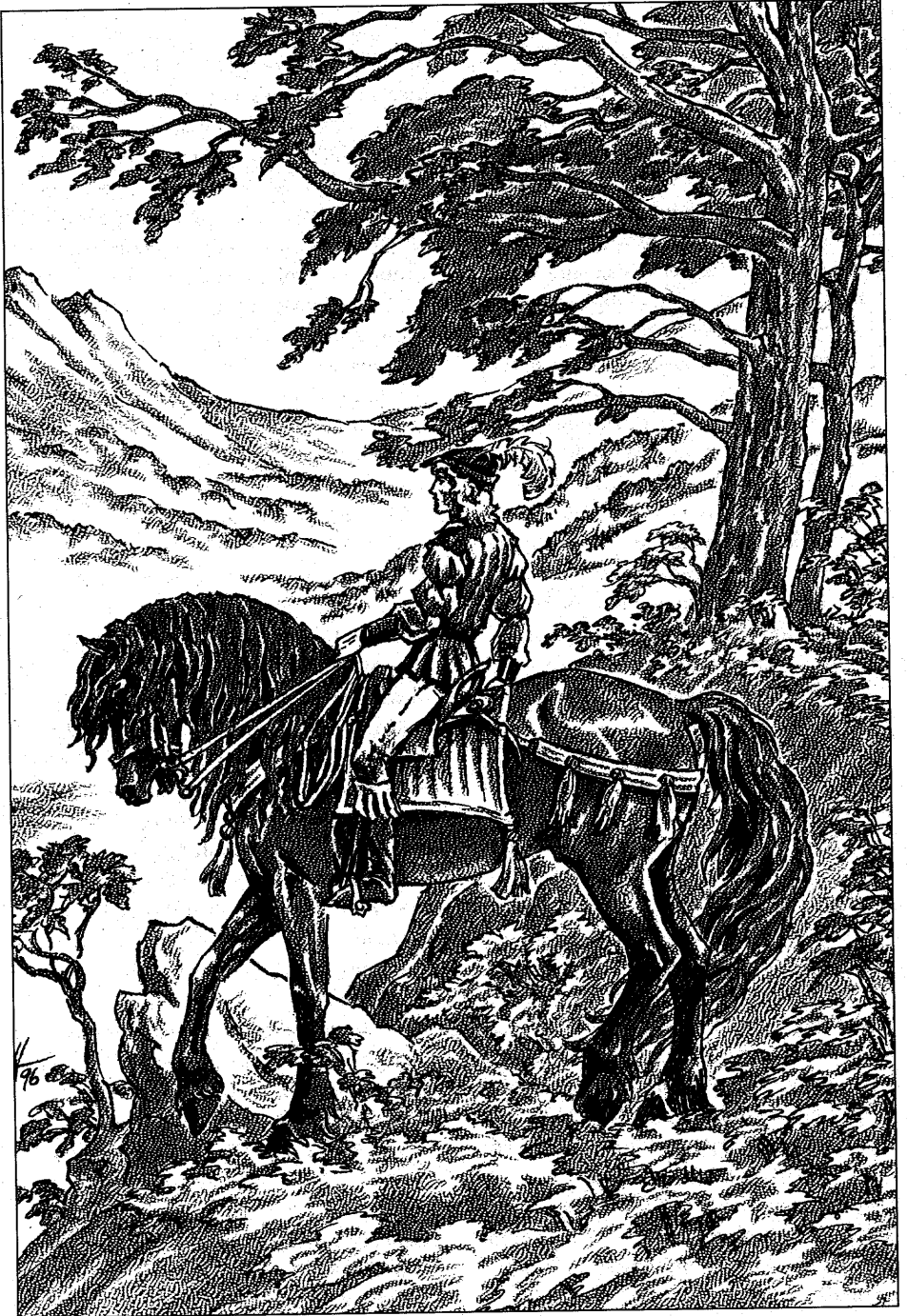
Even an impoverished traveler need never go hungry in the Dales. An old custom still honored in this region is the knock and bite.” If a traveler raps upon a kitchen door and calls out “three copper,” the cooks within open a service hatch. The traveler hands in a cup or drinking jack with the coins in it, and receives it back full of small beer and accompanied by a handwheel of cheese and a round, hard loaf of bread.

The elven presence kept human encroachment into the woods to a minimum for generations. The Elven Court woods were still home to a strong elven nation, the last remnant of the once-mighty realm of Cormanthyr, until just a score or so years ago. Woodcutting is now beginning in earnest, however. The shipbuilders of Sembia and elsewhere have their eyes on straight-standing trees larger and longer than those still standing anywhere else within easy reach of their markets that would make ideal masts for ever-larger trading vessels. The visitor is warned, however, that most Dales regard the woods around their settlements as their own property. Attempts to cut and take out timber are met with armed resistance.

One of the most fabled treasure troves in all the Realms still slumbers here in the heart of the Elven Court woods: the overgrown city of Myth Drannor. This ruined city is said to yet hold much magic, but also to be home to fearsome beasts and otherworldly monsters. Only the most mighty adventurers should dare to seek it; others find only swift death there.

The Dales hold other strange and dangerous sites, too. Many merchants ride across one whenever they travel Rauthauvyr’s Road between the Standing Stone and Essembra: a wooded valley where a darkness drifts in the forest. This watchful gloom is adorned with odd drifting lights and whisperings that no one likes to camp near. Bards call this the Vale of Lost Voices and sing of the ghosts of fallen elven warriors drifting through the trees. Such ghosts are said to be on guard against the intrusions of nonelves and aided by baelnorn and more deadly, mysterious things that do not die. Many fear-filled tales about the hauntings of the Vale are told in Sembian and Moonsea taverns, and every band of scoffing adventure-seekers who plunge into the Vale in search of elven jewels and magic hurries back out—white-faced and fewer in number—to add new fears to the swelling store.

When riding through sun-dappled farms and tree-girt Dale gardens, it’s easy to ridicule such tales, but in the dim heart of the deep forest, the legends seem too real. The Dales are beautiful—but the traveler would do well to remember that they can be as deadly—and deserve as much respect—as the most haughty city of warriors or abode of imperious wizards.





Archendale

Known to most as the unfriendliest and most aggressive of the Dales, Archendale¹ is both of those things, but it is also the wealthiest and best-defended Dale. This sure defense makes it a secure haven for merchants, who can operate here (at least below Arch Pool) in even more safety than in Sembia. Wayfarers are warned to behave themselves when within the writ and reach of the Rides (mounted army patrols) of Archendale. The Zhentarim, several ambitious Sembian merchants, and—a century ago—the folk of rival Sessrendale can attest to the ruthless, energetic efficiency of the army of Archendale. In separate wars, this tiny holding handily hurled back the armies of all three powers—and not only wrested a treaty out of Sembia that still brings a yearly shipment of gems² from Ordulin to Archendale, but slaughtered or drove all the inhabitants of Sessrendale from their own land. The wilderness of Sessrendale, known as the Dead Dale, exists today because its soil was sewn with salt by the forces of Archendale.

Lawbreakers in this Dale can expect the same swift, sure justice as acted in these cases to descend upon them; therefore, banditry, thefts, and even fraud are almost unknown here. Be advised that any Ride captain can dispense justice in the name of the three Swords who rule

Archendale. And never forget that travelers who so much as speculate aloud as to the identities of these mysterious rulers³—let alone say anything against their judgments—can expect to leave Archendale under immediate escort with some or all of any trade goods they carry forfeit!

The vigilance of both citizens and their soldiers leaves Arkhenfolk free to get on with the business of getting rich through trade—something they have always done very well. The struggling merchant seeking investors in the western Dragon Reach lands should go to Suzail and Ordulin first, but come to Archenbridge before trying the harsher, poorer sponsors of Saerloon, Selgaunt, Westgate, and Yhaunn.

The Countryside

Archendale takes the form of a long, narrow valley, Arkhen Vale. It surrounds the gorge cut by the swift, cold River Arkhen. The gorge begins where the river cascades down out of the mountains at Arkhen Falls (a spectacular sight) and proceeds along the river's southeasterly run between the Marching Mountains (as this southwestern arm of the Thunder Peaks range is sometimes called) and the Arch Wood. The valley flanks the gorge and spreads out a day's ride in all directions from the Dale's only town, Archenbridge.

¹*Volo*: Archendale is pronounced "ARK-hen-dale," by the way. Visitors who say "ARCH-en-dale" are hooted at.

²Worth at least 300,000 gold pieces!

³For who these Swords really are, see Dheren Ogresbane, Jalia Mossgreen, and Alduvar Snowbrand in Appendix I.



Archenbridge stands at the mouth of Arkhen Vale and is named for the bridge that carries the Dawnpost, which links Daerlún and Ordulin through the rural Sembian backlands, across the Arkhen.

Before the Dale grew prosperous, the lower end of Arkhen Vale was all farms, and the upper end was rocky and largely deserted sheep grazing land. Today, few trees are to be found below Arch Pool, a small pond where the river waters spill down a few rapids and the crowded homes, gardens, and shops of the Arkhenfolk begin. Most farms in the Dale today are little more than large private gardens. Almost all the Dalesfolk make their living at some sort of skilled craft, from gemcutting to woodcarving, or as the wealthiest folk in Sembia do: through investments.

The waters of Arch Pool are open to all, and visitors are encouraged to water their mounts and camp on its upper shore. Caravans and people coming to trade in Archenbridge must rent paddock space and accommodations in Archenbridge, however. No visitors are allowed to settle or build any structures above Arch Pool, and the only buildings above the pond are farmers' cottages, several hilltop strongholds used by the Rides (and usually occupied by bored sentries keeping watch for grass fires and monsters on the prowl), and the walled village of White Ford.

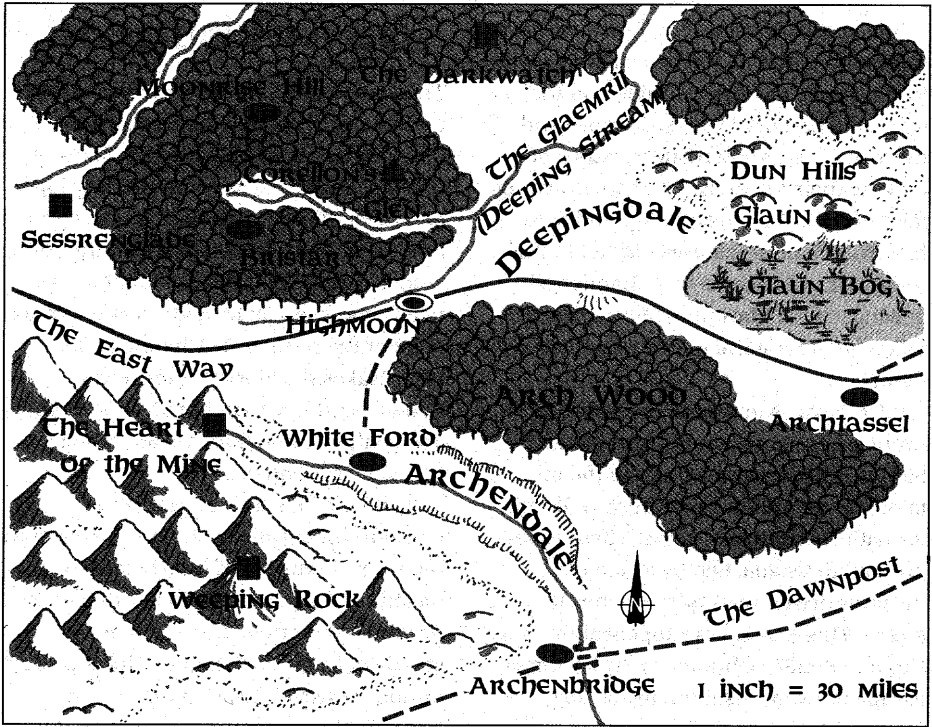
The Arkhen gorge is steep-sided. Although a few foot tracks wind up its slippery rock walls into Arch Wood and the mountains, the only trails into or out of the valley that a mounted man or a wagon can traverse are at Archenbridge and White Ford. Good roads run along both sides of the banks of the Arkhen for

most of the length of the Vale. Save where people have built or tilled, the valley floor of the upper Vale is a misty area of ferns, mosses, shrubs, and small waterfalls that bring the many springs that rise from the sides of the valley down from pool to pool to join the river. The half-elven minstrel Thalaeva Rynthar of Elventree called the upper reaches of Archendale "perhaps the most beautiful landscape east of Everska—much too good for those greedy, churlish Arkhenfolk."

The largest and most beautiful waterfall in all the Dales is Arkhen Falls. Here a spring bursts from the top of Mount Thalgbror (a peak named for a long-dead ogre mage who once dwelt in a cave somewhere on its eastern flank) and crashes for hundreds of feet down the always-wet mountainside to begin its 60-mile run to Archenbridge. Legend insists that pegasi dance and frolic around the falling water, but I've never seen any despite several visits to this isolated spot.⁴

On either side of Arkhen Vale stand what some elder Arkhenfolk call "the Walls of Night" because they block the early rays of the morning sun and hasten the gloom of night: Arch Wood and the Marching Mountains. Few folk in present-day Archendale know the mountain trails or have ever ventured up into their monster-haunted height, and almost as few have ever entered the dense forest that forms the other flank of Archendale. The Arch Wood is a dark, thick wall of shadowtop, duskwood, ash, oak, and elm trees haunted by owlbears and bearing a fell reputation. Old elven ruins and rumored mage tombs lie within the dense woods, but those who go looking for them rarely

⁴*Elminster*: Volo may not, but he lacks something of the soul of a poet. I have seen pegasi—and unicorns, nymphs, nereids, and winged maidens besides.



come out again. If the planned cutting of timber in Arch Wood proceeds as briskly as some Arkhenfolk desire, some of these lost sites will be cut out of the forest into the easy reach of all.

Below Arch Pool, the well-ordered countryside presents a vista of gently sloping tilled fields divided by hedgerows that have grown up around rows of heaped stones. Children here learn to use their slings swiftly and surely when very young to bring down birds for use in hearth pies and to keep the avians from plundering seeds or crops. Their elders make sure that not a foot of ground is wasted.

Amid these neat and fertile farms stand the hamlets of Lady's Belt, Nairning, and Ramblecoats, places which offer farmers' markets and farm supplies stores. All lodgings in these farmlands are safe,

clean, and enjoyable, but there is little of particular interest to the outlander hereabouts except horses: Fine riding mounts are bred around Lady's Belt. All else can be had more cheaply in Archenbridge, where competition is fiercer. Most visitors to the farmlands of Archendale are passing through to White Ford and the lands beyond or are adventurers trying their luck in the mountain mines or in Arch Wood.

Of old, there was much copper and gem mining in the peaks above the gorge of the River Arkhen, especially around Arkhen Falls. Monsters have always made mining dangerous in the area, and yields from the delvings have grown 'more and more paltry with the passing years, so the miners have grown fewer among Arkhenfolk.



Outlander adventurers, however, have increased in the region since Sembia was founded, the elves grew quiet, and the roads opened up. Every year more and more folk visit Archendale in hopes of making their fortunes. They are drawn by tales of caches of elven finery and Sembian merchant treasuries hidden in the many natural caverns and abandoned delvings of the Marching Mountains by folk who did not live to return and claim them.

The most vivid stories of mining in Archendale center on the Sparkling Stones, caverns somewhere in the mountains above Arkhen Vale whose walls glitter with thousands of gems. These caves are said to be guarded by a clan of dwarves driven mad by the riches they guard. These dwarves supposedly seek to slay all intruders, but they may let some escape or even toss them fist-sized gemstones out of insane whimsy. Many folk claim to have seen these shining deeps and escaped through such dwarven folly—but I've never found any storytellers who look any the richer for their adventures.⁵ It is certain, however, that crag sheep, vultures, and wyverns lair in the high fastnesses of the Marching Mountains, and that hobgoblins and worse creatures sometimes raid miners and isolated holds in the upper Vale.

⁵*Elminster*: My, my! Such trenchant cynicism in one so young. I *have* seen the Sparkling Stones and the dwarves who dwell there, though the dwarves would not speak of their lineage to a human. I have also seen some of the gems brought out—including emeralds as big as grapefruit. The tales are true (or almost all true), but overeager adventurers are warned that the dwarves are far more fond of reckless, homicidal rages than tossing out gems as handouts.

⁶*Elminster*: My favorite is the one about the warrior from Mulmaster who leapt onto the back of a roosting wyvern. As it flew high and wild above the Vale trying to twist and bite him, he calmly slew it, thinking he could glide safely and gently to earth after it perished. Instead he ended up as flat as a mudpie beneath it when it crashed to earth.

⁷On the subject of buried riches, adventurers are warned that Archendale has a law that visitors never seem to learn about until too late: The Rides that patrol the Vale have strict orders to dig up anything buried by any outlander—and confiscate it if it is of value. Jokes told elsewhere—not anywhere near Archendale—speak about Arkhenfolk digging up latrines to make sure no coins are lurking among the leavings.

The Arkhenfolk

Those who dwell in Archendale are a difficult, haughty people who regard most other Dalesfolk as backward, rustic simpletons; Sembians as spineless, lazy fops; and most other outlanders as unscrupulous vagabonds. It has been said they only respect hardy folk who see to their own needs and keep quiet, good gardeners (as most of them venerate Chauntea, She Who Makes the Stones Themselves Growl—and those more ruthless, mighty, and swift in battle than the 60-strong Bides of Archendale.

Arkhenfolk sneer at adventurers who come to their Dale seeking treasure and have a rich supply of hearty tavern tales based on the idiotic deeds of this or that band of adventuring fools.⁶ They make steady coin guiding and equipping such bands, however, and do not bar or hamper their activities so long as these visitors do not dig or pry about in the inhabited areas of the Dale. Several successful families of Archendale—notably the Baulaukiirs, the Ithrymm, and the Tantals—are reputed to guard the riches they have won outdoing Sembian merchants at trade in treasure caches hidden in vaults and burial crypts under their grand family homes in Archenbridge.⁷



Many folk in other Dales describe Arkhenfolk as “difficult” or employ less polite phrases. One example of the hard character of the folk of Archendale is of current interest: Large-scale logging has begun in Arch Wood despite protests from Deepingdale and Tassel-dale, both of whom have resorted to hiring bands of adventurers to harry the loggers after Archendale ignored their envoys and went so far as to send Battledale a bill for “our good time wasted” listening to an envoy sent from that Dale to protest the logging. In Archendale’s stated view, Battledale “and other remote locales” have no right to even speak about matters concerning Arch Wood.

This was not a view shared widely at the last meeting of the Dales Council. Archendale agreed to at least discuss the concerns of other Dales—while the logging continues, mind you—after the archmage Elminster arrived unannounced to address the Council. He rather grumpily pronounced that if the good folk of Archendale were not even going to listen to envoys, he would use his magic to render all Arkhenfolk deaf so they could not hear anything else, either! When a minor Arkhen mage openly doubted the Old Mage’s ability to do this, Elminster obligingly demonstrated on the overconfident mage on the spot, restoring his hearing by some arcane means when the Sword representing Archendale at the meeting protested.

Ride captains in Archendale are said to be paying 25 gold pieces to anyone

who suggests a good—and feasible—means of humiliating Elminster of Shadowdale. (It is reported that both the Old Mage and the Simbul, Queen of Aglarond, have claimed this reward by making suggestions while in disguise and then revealed their true forms upon payment.) Apparently in response to this bounty, a glowing, floating scroll has often appeared at the Standing Stone this past season. When unrolled, it bears the title “List of Humble Folk in Archendale,” but is otherwise blank. It promptly fades away when read to reappear to another traveler on a later occasion.

A persistent and totally unvalidated rumor in the Dragon Reach is that one of the Swords of Archendale is a woman who was once the consort of the Royal Wizard of Cormyr, Vangerdahast. The chief reason, then, that Sembia—whose more ambitious merchants often cast covetous eyes on the riches of Arkhen Vale—has never conquered Archendale is that the war wizards of Cormyr (at Vangerdahast’s command) will bring in a defending Purple Dragon army by magic should Sembia ever mount a large-scale invasion.⁸ Different Sembian forces have initiated small incursions over the years, but never succeeded at an invasion. However, given that Archendale’s actions in Sessrendale and in the Dales Council have left it without allies among the Dales, a large Sembian force could hardly fail to smash the Dale’s relatively small defending army. As a saying known across the Realms goes: “If a Arkhen man dies, no one cries.”

⁸*Vangerdahast (relayed by Elminster):* Poppycock. Pure twaddle. As if I would ever let my personal life sway kingdom policy, even if it were true.



Archenbridge

This busy town of more than 1,200 folk is the center of Archendale. A cluster of stone buildings with slate or tile roofs, Archenbridge has always outgrown its successively larger walls, sprawling along the overland road that its bridge carries across the River Arkhen. Its center is as cramped and as bustling as a ward of Waterdeep, with wagons rumbling up and down its cobbled streets at all hours and every building rising at least three floors above ground level. (A typical Archenbridge squarehouse has a shop or storage cellar below ground, a shop at street level, offices or rental storage above that, and one or more floors of residences crowning all.) Excepting the grand houses of nobles and retired gentry, only Essembra in all the Dales boasts private buildings of such height.

Landmarks

The River Arkhen flows swiftly through town, powering both a grist mill and a sawmill. The grist mill is Heward's Mill, operated by the greedy and uncouth Salath Heward, and the sawmill is Sandan's Sawmill, run by Sandan himself, an always-calm retired Ride captain who notices everything and works with slow, deliberate care. The cold, swift Arkhen also affords fishing and boating pleasure to the wealthy folk who dwell in the newly built manor houses along the River Way, the town's most exclusive district. At least one of these manor houses—Whiteturrets, owned by Marler Chandrar of Fairwind Street—can be rented by the tenday or the month by exclusive guests or for parties. (A tenday costs 50 gp per person in winter and 75 gp per head between

Greengrass and the Festival of the Moon. A month costs 120 gp or 300 gp, with the same seasonal variance.)

These grand houses are separated from the sprawl of the ever-expanding town by the trees of Grave Hollow, a glen with a grass-covered barrow hill at its heart. The Hollow is used by citizens of all ages who like to dine at highsun under the open sky and at night by young Arkhenfolk in love—or those who wish to conduct secretive business. (Be warned: The Swords send soft-footed undercover agents patrolling the Hollow at night to listen and learn all they can.)

Rental paddocks (for caravan assembly and the use of visiting merchants) and the market field also restrict the growth of the town. Increasingly, businesses whose trade requires a large workplace and storage area, such as wagonmakers and stonemasons, are maintaining only offices in town and locating their main shops in walled compounds just within sight of the town. They trust, as the lordlings of the manor houses along River Way do, in the readiness of the town garrison in the frowning stone keep of Swordpoint. This old fortress, the largest castle in the Dales, overlooks the town and the West Road leading up into the farmlands and thence the length of the Dale to distant White Ford.

Two large temples lie parallel to each other in the heart of Archenbridge, almost facing each other: the Bounty of the Goddess, dedicated to Chauntea, and the Glory of the Morning, consecrated to Lathander. The homes and shops of the haughty citizens of Archenbridge crowd around these two tall, spired buildings. The only other notable place of worship in Archenbridge is the Shrine of Swords.



which honors Tempus. It stands in the forecourt of Swordpoint.

Several merchant costers are based in town, and every other shopkeeper in Archenbridge has a secret source or three in Sembia. Somewhere in town the traveler can find almost anything. In this guide I have noted only a few outstanding establishments, and separate entries for the most interesting sights follow.

Places of Interest in Archenbridge

Unique Sites

Grave Hollow



The encircling trees and central grassy hill (where no trees will grow) of the “Haunted Hollow” would be a pleasant enough campground for travelers were it not for all the local traffic. Grave Hollow is a picnic place for townspeople, the site of many lovers’ trysts and clandestine (well, shady) meetings—and also, locals swear, haunted ground. A terrible curse awaits anyone who digs in the hill, and moaning spirits fly about whenever fire is kindled or turf is dug in the Hollow.

Owners of the grand mansions along River Way encourage fearful rumors about the Hollow to keep traveling hire-swords and other undesirables from camping at their back gates. Sword agents patrol the Hollow, eavesdropping on folk there, but do not confront or evict them unless they discover battle, torture, mur-

der, or obvious kidnapping or dealing in stolen goods in progress.

Though visitors are told the Hollow is the grave of an unknown warrior, the truth about Grave Hollow, I have learned, (in consultation with a very senior Harper agent⁹) is that the hill is the tomb of an elven tribe poisoned by rivals a long time (thousands of years) ago. They were laid to rest with their belongings by gnomes who feared that keeping any magic or garb of the dead would bring misfortune, so a lot of ancient elven magic must await anyone who can break into the barrow.

Many have tried to break in and failed. At least four baelnorn (undead elven mages) sit unsleeping in the bone-filled darkness inside the hill. They are able to use all the magical items of their people—and at least two spells of awesome power: The first creates the flying phantoms, who soar up out of the earth to swoop and moan, chilling beings who dig, burn, or use any magic to scry or penetrate into the hill. The second instantly enacts a powerful curse on all who persist in trying to pry loose the hill’s secrets after a phantom¹⁰ has visited them. The curse is a year-long *ironguard* effect that cannot be dispelled.¹¹ The cursed person cannot touch any metal, from coins to armor—all such things just fall through them!

Temples

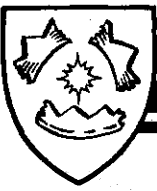
The Bounty of the Goddess

Despite the aggressively expanding businesses of Archenbridge, veneration of

⁹Elminster: He hired someone to ask me!

¹⁰Elminster: In AD&D® game terms, the spirits of the Hollow are identical to wraiths, save that their single touch attack harms living beings as a *chill touch* spell instead of draining life energy. Typically one spirit appears for each being on the hill at the time someone’s deeds cause their appearance. Their moaning has no harmful effect.

¹¹Elminster: There is a way to dispel the curse, by the way—but I’ll leave its discovery to those idiotic enough to incur it. I will tell ye it’s different than the solution to the similar curse inflicted by the baelnorn of Hunter’s Down in Deepingdale.



Archenbridge

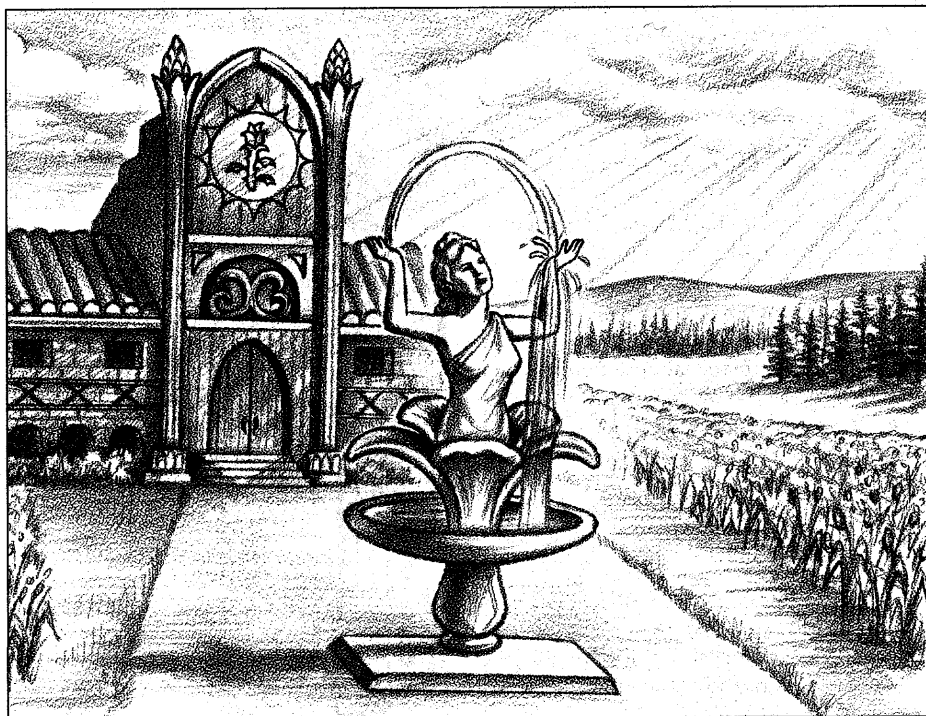




Archenbridge Map Key

1. Swordpoint (army barracks) and the Shrine of Swords (shrine consecrated to Tempus)
2. Grave Hollow (park and haunted locale)
3. Stersen's Paddock (horse trader)
4. Market field
5. Sandan's Sawmill
6. Old Stonebows (inn)
7. The Black Horse (inn)
8. Orosul's Tower (abandoned residence of the mage Orosul)
9. Heward's Mill (grist mill)
10. Elgath's Provisions (shop)
11. The Drunken Lion (tavern)
12. Jendalath's Fine Fruits (shop)
13. The Glory of the Morning (temple of Lathander)
14. The Bounty of the Goddess (temple of Chauntea)
15. Mirksha, Mirksha, & Mirksha (shop and trading coster headquarters)
16. The Stone Crab Coster (shop and trading coster headquarters)
17. The Darkwater Brand (shop and trading coster headquarters)
18. The Arkhen Bridge
19. Arkhen Ford
20. River Way
21. Whiteturrets (rentable manor)
22. The Old Dragon Down (shop)
23. The Bridge and Bow (tavern)
24. Fairwind Street
25. Pelter's Street
26. West Road
27. Forge Lane
28. Watersluice Way
29. The Butcherbar (street)
30. Ummer's Amble (street)
31. Deepwell Court
32. Dorn's Rental Paddocks
33. Drovers' Lane
34. Spindral Street
35. Urserpent Street





Chauntea still outweighs that of all other deities worshiped in Archendale. Her local temple consists of a magnificent facade—an arched door between two towers carved to look like giant growing stalks of wheat—mated to a gigantic tithe barn. In the barn, plants are grown and prayers to the goddess are performed kneeling on tilled earth amid the smells and sights of growing crops.

The Mother of All Flowers is served in Archenbridge by an ambitious High Harvestmaster, Thaliach Mindogar,¹² and four lesser clerics. Under his guidance, the church has turned from the “stolid, but stodgy” faith in town to an influential power—largely through investing

shrewdly in local businesses in return for services, favors, and allegiances.

Visitors are directed to the fountain in the forecourt, whose waters are blessed thrice daily. These holy waters may be purchased by anyone of any faith for 25 gp/vial, or only 20 if the purchaser can prove primary devotion to Chauntea or is a visiting clergy member. The fountain, sculpted by the famous dwarven mason Feldyn Fullbellow, aesthetically and regally depicts the All-Mother as a buxom, nigh-unclad woman emerging from the opening petals of a gigantic flower. Water sprays from one of her spread hands in an arc to fall into the other and be drained

¹²AD&D game details of this priest and the other high clergy of Archenbridge can be found in Appendix I of this work. Consult this alphabetical (by first name, as many Faerûnian folk lack a surname) appendix whenever you encounter a person of note in the pages of this guide.



away, symbolizing the cycle of water in all life.

In Archenbridge it is said that if a priest of Chauntea is slain in Arkhen Vale, the waters of the fountain turn to blood for a day. The touch of that blood purges diseases and unnatural conditions of the body—including the effects of fungi and molds, mummy rot, lycanthropy, and withering—and make barren or even salt-sewn earth fertile. Please be aware that my notation of this tale here is not a suggestion that the reader should test this belief.

The Glory of the Morning

This holy house was recently enlarged to house more wealth, more priests, and more workshops where the faithful can work on various inventions and artistic creations. The traveler can readily find the Gloryhouse, as locals call it, by looking for the slender, tapering tower of white granite that soars up from the heart of this temple. This tower is surmounted by a beacon where priests add certain powders to fires to create pink smoke during major rituals. The tower can be seen from miles away when the sunlight catches it—and thanks to the natural propensity of wyverns to investigate any lofty pinnacle or other feasible nesting site, temple guards armed with blasting magic are now stationed on its heights at all times!

The accent in the Gloryhouse is on practical advice and aid. At all hours, a devotee of Lathander can speak with priests and lay worshipers who are familiar with either mechanics or trade customs and routes in Sembia and the Dales. These Lathanderians can give accurate advice on the feasibility of a planned business venture or an innovative item. This

counsel and the use of the temple workshops are free to those who worship Lathander and cost a nominal amount (5 gp per session for counseling, 5 gp per day for use of a workshop) for those who follow other faiths.

The temple personnel can also be hired to assist in a new venture by anyone of any faith, though they leave this service if asked to destroy or slay rather than nurture or build. The temple rarely gives financial support to entrepreneurs. Instead, it loans the faithful of Lathander sufficient funds to build new things or establish new services and ventures.

The Glory of the Morning's high priestess is Light of Lathander Mornmaster Stellaga Brightstar, and her senior clergy are Hand of Lathander High Morninglord Orblin Storntar, a giant of a man who says little but sees all, and Dawnmasters Alguna, Rassauva, Shirrye, and Tosstra, who are known as the "four ladies" locally. Eleven other clergy members serve under Stellaga's leadership. The successful judgment and diligence of Mornmaster Stellaga Brightstar and her clergy has done much not only to enrich the temple and cause its faith to swell in local popularity, but to make Lathanderians all over Sembia take note of hitherto unknown Archendale. At the same time Stellaga's efforts have brought to the Dale a standard of living surprisingly high and sophisticated for such a small, rough-mining, even warlike place. Services normally available only in much larger centers can be had in Archenbridge—such as the rehilting and blade-tinting of swords, for instance, or gemcutting to match existing stones in a jewelry setting—thanks to the support and guidance of the well-liked local folk of Glory.



The Shrine of Swords

This slim-spired building stands in the center courtyard of Swordpoint (itself covered in more detail in the pages that follow) and presents the shape of an open-faced, spired helm to visitors. It is painted black, but this coating is always flaking off thanks to the rust beneath it: The spire and front arch of the shrine are fashioned entirely of interwoven and hammered swords, shields, and armor captured in battle by worshipers.

Inside, the shrine is sparsely and simply furnished and only enough clergy members to provide the basics. The shrine has sleeping cots for pilgrims and is staffed by two lay servants and Battle-Chaplain Gordon Stakaria, the scarred veteran warrior who serves as Swordmaster of the Shrine. Stakaria is a stern, close-mouthed sort, but he is always willing to trade information with anyone of any faith who brings him news of battle from anywhere on Faerûn. Getting healing potions out of him is not so easy.

Shops

The Darkwater Brand

*Weapons, Armor, Metalware,
and Caravan Shipping*



This large, well-guarded establishment is the best local source of weapons, armor, shields, and metalwares. Its owners sell a lot of buckles, nails, scabbard caps, hand lamps, hooks, and spikes. All of these items come from Glister, Thentia, Melvaunt, and other Moonsea sources. Darkwater Brand agents purchase Archendale ore and vegetables to trade for all the metal goods. The Brand maintains outposts in Hillsfar and Ordulin.

Persistent rumors recount that the Darkwater Brand is involved in slaving, smuggling, and hiding fugitives from the justice of Cormyr, Hillsfar, and Sembia. The Dakkar family certainly does not welcome inquiries into its activities and keeps a lot of well-armed and equipped warriors on its payroll—but the Dakkars explain these unsavory hireswords and the Brand's ownership of carts fitted with cages, small catapults, or multiple mounted crossbows as necessary for their sideline of escorting valuable overland mercantile cargoes (such as captive monsters) and providing bodyguard services to merchants and travelers in the region.

Most folk who have dealt with the Brand say that their prices are stiff, but the merchandise is the best. Expect blades to be oiled and nails to be straight and meticulously inspected in the shop. Arkhenfolk insisted to me that the shop has some sort of invisible guardian creature that hunts down would-be thieves.

The Old Dragon Down

*Relics of Myth Drannor, Minor
Magical Knickknacks, and Pawnshop*



This intriguingly named shop sells relics of Myth Drannor, odd items of beauty or that bear minor enchantments, and salvaged gear from dead adventurers, tombs, and the like. (The magical gewgaws include such items as lamps that glow without fuel, for instance, or cloaks that float in the air by themselves without need of a peg when placed and commanded that can also be stretched out horizontally to serve as small fly tents



against rain without fear of them blowing away.) The cramped, dimly lit Down also serves as a pawnshop. It is much frequented by adventurers down on their luck and by folk with just a few coins who want to hire such rough folk for small, shady services (such as scaring rivals or small thefts) or who are not wealthy enough to afford Darkwater Brand bodyguards and need a short-term escort or champion.

The name and signboard of the shop recall and depict the legendary slaying of Arkhenthus, a gigantic white dragon who once dwelt in Arkhen Vale. He was laid low in the days of Myth Drannor's glory by six human and elven warriors employing only swords and flight magic—if you can believe the minstrels' tales.¹³ Around back one can usually find several warriors swapping even wilder stories as they wait to be hired.

Taverns

The Bridge and Bow



This quiet alehouse is well hidden down a side alley off Pelter's Street and is where the locals go when they would like to relax and talk without a lot of noise, crowding, or rowdiness. The Bow (locals will not know what you are talking about if you refer to this place as "the Bridge") serves a good selection of ales, stouts, and sherries, and one can also get a light meal here. Salted fish, sausage, and melted herbed cheese are available, accompanied by parsley and buttered bread. Five sp buys

you a platter of whatever you fancy. A "Liggins" (named after a former proprietor) is all of the menu items cooked together on a slab of hot bread with the cheese melted over everything like a glue.

The Bow has a meeting room with its own entrance on the floor above the taproom. The room has a closet that allows one to climb down a ladder into the cellars and thence go to either the sewer (which empties straight into the Arkhen, except during the spring run, when the river empties straight into the cellar!) or back up into the taproom by way of the privy passage. The meeting room is hung with thick, plush tapestries and has double walls to make it very private.

The meeting room can be rented for 25 gp/evening, a price which includes a handkeg of beer and a large decanter of wine. It has its own jakes, two dozen mismatched but comfortable chairs, and a huge meeting table.

The Drunken Lion



This rough, sparsely and rudely furnished alehouse is where Ridesmen, shepherds from updale, loggers, trappers, and poor travelers go to slake their thirsts. It is crowded and smoky, and fights often break out. Those who like seeing rather unattractive performers dance on tables while wearing very little clothing are advised that the management maintains a staff of dancers for this purpose—and that they usually perform when a distraction from a fight is

¹³*Elminster*: Not believe that I helped slay Arkhenthus the Mage-Devourer? *Not believe?* Does this young cynic think only his generation had any heroes? How does he think anyone survived to father *him*? Aye, there were six of us, and we used only swords—though as I recall, at least two of those blades were spellswords.



needed to prevent the eruption of a general brawl.

The best-looking of the dancers, a half-elven woman who uses the name Jalandyl o' Stars, is *very* accurate with hurled flagons and the leg-tangling weapon known as "bolas." Over the years, she has often felled folk who tried to leave without paying or take goods that did not belong to them. She is rumored to be one of the owners of the Lion, though the fat, unsmiling ale-master, Meerkun, refuses to confirm this.

The traveler is further warned that the worst sort of folk patronize this house of cheap drink. Those who start fights deliberately are often served sleeping-potion-laced ale and carted into back rooms to be relieved of valuables before being dumped into the Arkhen and revived.

One can get ale, wine, zzar, hard biscuits, and handwheels of strong but often wormy cheese at the Lion. A draft costs 4 cp, and a flagon of cheap wine only 2 sp. My advice: If you can get up and stagger elsewhere for your food, do so.

INNS

The Black Horse



To find the Black Horse, seek the large, black, iron "striding horse" signboard that has been forge-mended so many times that the horse looks like it suffers from giant warts! This always-busy, rambling complex of old houses is the solid, low-budget lodging in town. Prospectors, farm hired hands, drovers, hire-swords, woodcutters, and adventurers all stay at the Horse because it is cheap and clean. It costs 6 sp per night for a private sleeping cubicle (with bed, door-bar, and chamberpot), 1 cp extra for a

lamp, 1 cp more for an ewer of water suitable for both bathing and drinking (the grizzled old man who brings it advises you to keep those two activities in the proper order), 1 sp for a bath, and 2 sp more if you want some hot water in the bath. All meals are purchased in addition to those standard fees: A meal of "whatever's going" (usually rabbit pie or manyfowl stew) costs 1 sp, and a tankard of Archenwood Stout runs 5 cp.

The Horse provides nothing fancy but is easy on the purse. The popularity of its operating credo is shown by its continual expansion into adjoining shops and houses. One new feature is rentable strongcellar rooms: small closets for 2 gp per night or 7 gp per tenday, and larger lock rooms for 6 gp per night or 15 gp per tenday

The master of the house is Sardan Alander, a cheerful sort who recalls faces and names for 40 years or more. The formidably fat chatelaine, Alyth "Elbows" Junter, heads a staff of honest chambermaids who leap on dirt or beetles as if they were hated foes on a battlefield. They can bring food to rooms for shy or injured patrons. Tip them well (2 sp at least for the maid who does your room on a long stopover or 1 sp if you stay only a night); they deserve it.

Old Stonebows



Far and away the best accommodation in all Archendale, this cozy inn is known as "Jalia's" to locals after its owner and host, Jalia Mossgreen. An imposing place of thick stone walls and dark, well-polished wood paneling throughout, this inn has a fireplace in every room, wardrobes, comfortable chairs that some patrons prefer



to beds for sleeping in, and a communal, always-available hot bathing pool in the cellar, reached by a creaking, staff-cranked elevator.

Each guest is provided with a large, fluffy robe embroidered with the inn's badge (a pair of curving golden bull's horns) for wearing down to the pool, but the shy are warned that all guests disrobe and plunge in together. The robes are very handsome, but not for sale, and Jalia's been known to send bounty hunters after guests who somehow absentmindedly packed them in with their own gear before leaving. Scented soaps are free for the using in the pool, and an especially luxurious touch is the serving of hot (in winter) or cold (in summer) drinks at pool's edge to bathers.

The atmosphere in this place is one of

quiet, comfortable, and a trifle worn luxury. The hallmarks of the Stonebows are the silent tolerance of eccentricities and special travelers' needs on the part of the staff and the superb food: Hot soups, roast venison, and spiced fowl offered with an array of sauces (from crushed berries through juiced and peppered cucumber) can be had at any hour after, it seems, a wait of only a few breaths. An extensive menu of smoked fish, roast boar, and similar delicacies is added to this during daylight hours, (The river eel platter and the quail in wine are particularly fine.) All meals are 9 gp a head, so it pays to eat heartily but seldom. Drinks are extra. Be warned that some dishes are salty enough to make enthusiastic diners drain as many as four tankards before their platters are empty!



Elgath's Provisions

Overland Traveling Gear Shop



This expensive¹⁴ but very well stocked shop on Urserpent Street in eastern Archenbridge is a must-visit site for those in need of rope, maps, tents, packs, sledges, rations, and all other manner of overland traveling gear. Established for the mining trade, it now serves mostly adventurers and merchants—and is notable for what haunts it.

The Place

This shop has an unassuming entry. A shopper must traverse a long, narrow stretch of food shelves all around the outer walls to reach the much larger back room of the shop. Most provender is sold in Elgath's specialty: corked bottles packed into wooden no-break frames that were filled with wet clay, and have dried into very sturdy travel containers. In the back room one finds river skiffs slung from the rafters, suits of armor and barding, carts, and a full-sized nine-runner merchants' sleigh.

Everything is clean, well-lit, and very well organized; the staff can find what you want—if they have it—in a trice. Dusting to maintain the cleanliness goes on constantly, aided by a very clever cart-and-lofty-ladder affair that small children armed with mops and swab cloths swarm up and down like Chultan jungle monkeys. The cheery lighting is provided by some skylights and hanging lamps. Two discreet notices on posts in the shop warn thieves that the glass high overhead is not unguarded.

I have heard trail tales of folk bursting into the shop closely pursued by rivals or Ridesmen, buying a disguise or weapons at the full run, and emerging out the back door of the shop with their purchase ready to use without ever slowing. If such stories are true—and I am assured of their veracity by several Arkhen citizens, the staff must be fit and efficient indeed!

The Prospect

This is perhaps the best small outfitters shop I have yet seen in Faerûn—certainly it is the best I have seen in a small town, and the best organized anywhere. The bluff, sleekly unshaven owner, Elgath, usually sits at ease in a chair chatting with other retired Ridesmen while his staff waits on customers—but he'll gladly leap up to assist if need be. (He was badly injured in Archendale's service and parlayed his retirement gold into this superb shop.) He cheerfully admits that most buyers find his pre-prepared rations a bit bland, but he does sell several hot sauces and salty fish-spice pastes for use in making things more interesting. His rations are prepared, he says, to make them last as long as possible, not to make gourmets swoon.

Elgath's boast is that if he does not have an item of gear, he will find out where it can be found within the day. On the one occasion I put this no-charge service to the test, wanting a Thayan web-of-bells dancers' costume, Elgath came through before the next meal of the day. He located a Sembian collector who was willing to sell a spare

¹⁴Add 10% to all *Player's Handbook* prices, rounding odd amounts upward.



costume and offered to send a fast rider for it. I declined, as it was not my size or, well, shape.

Travelers' Lore

Some travelers encounter just one minor problem with buying needed goods from this otherwise superior establishment. A wizard is said to haunt the place—or rather, as he is not dead, to lurk among its neatly arranged wares. This mage, one Thendarion of Turlagol by name, lost a spell duel some 80 years ago and was imprisoned in the shape of a boot. Like a peltast, he can now take the shape of any nonliving object of roughly the same volume. His favorite forms, I'm told, are a lantern or a coil of rope.

This ability is apparently something Thendarion gained by modification of the spells in his mind—which, in a side-effect of the magic which entrapped him, he cannot forget. Thus, though he cannot acquire any new spells, he can cast his familiar magical roster over and over again.

How he came to the shop—which is only a little more than two decades old—is a mystery. Unsurprisingly, the Wizard of the Boot is something Elgath does not want to talk about. I gather he has hired several mages to rid himself of this nuisance over the years, and for all his coins has gotten exactly nowhere.

Thendarion is a nuisance because he is bored beyond sanity by his existence as a boot and tries to get himself bought by adventurers so he can go along for the fun. He usually tries to use his spells to help his new owners, but the results are often unpredictable.

Though he can emit spell effects by will whenever he desires and in whatever form he is in, these magics are often twisted awry by the enchantment that imprisons him. Thus, an attempt to create magical light may result in a nearby tree turning blue, bursting into flame, or being transformed into a silvery shower of gasping, flapping fish. The two spells that still serve Thendarion unerringly are his shape change and teleport—which he uses to return to the shop when he tires of adventurers or they tire of adventures or life or him and behave accordingly.

So if you or a friend happen to purchase a lamp at Elgath's shop that seems to turn into a knife or coil of rope when you need such things, and strange magic seems to erupt when you go into battle, you have probably bought Thendarion. If Thendarion is returned, Elgath will refund the purchase price in full, politely but unhappily. He then will probably ask if you or any colleagues are competent mages who would like to do a little curse removal on a wizard who spends much of his time as a boot.

Before you agree to such a service, no matter how many thousands of gold pieces you are offered, bear in mind that the wizard who placed the curse is said to have crafted it to warn him if anyone tampers with it, that it just might be set to transfer from Thendarion to any meddler, and that the wizard who placed the curse is said to still be alive, very powerful, and living in Thay—as one of the zulkirs. No prizes for guessing which one.



Orosul's Tower

This small, slender tower is ringed by an overgrown walled garden that is busily sending many creeping vines up its stone sides. The visitor to Archendale can find it in the angle formed by the junction of Drovers' Lane and Spindral Street in southern Archenbridge.

Orosul is or was a white-haired but youthful-looking mage who probably employed potions of longevity. He was known for his research into griffon breeding and his efforts to craft spectacles for all in need of them. He came to Archendale from Sembia, used magic to identify the Swords, and reached a private agreement with them. The agreement is said to have involved payment of enough wealth to keep the Swords in luxury for life, fully equip the Ridesmen, and fund the rebuilding of Swordpoint and its cloaking in magical defenses. In return, he was allowed to settle in Archenbridge to dwell unmolested and unwatched, free to do as he pleased in this closed, intolerant-of-outsidere town.

Orosul remained aloof from Arkhen society, never aiding the Ridesmen. He vanished almost two decades ago after warning the Swords not to let anyone enter his tower "lest doom befall them and fair Archendale both." His current whereabouts are unknown, but he is believed to have left Toril and perhaps this plane of existence.

Though his home is an unassuming structure on a quiet back-street corner, it is a popular destination for visiting mages, who seem fascinated by the shut tower and by the guard mounted over it by the Watch. Ten soldiers in chain mail are always around the tower, lounging on benches, strolling, and even playing

at dice—but if anyone looks like they are casting a spell or employing a magical item within sight of the tower, they spring into action, slinging stones, firing blunt-padded arrows, and hurling nets in an effort to ruin the magic and bring the miscreant down. Immobilized unfortunates are bludgeoned senseless and dragged off to Swordpoint for questioning. (I wonder what will happen if Orosul returns? Most Ridesmen active today have never seen him, and they will probably attack as usual.) As far as is known in town, no one has ever gotten into the tower, though there are persistent rumors in the Dales that this or that adventurer-mage has.

Some local Arkhenfolk like to scare visitors by telling them to go look at Orosul's Tower if they want to see what befalls even well-intentioned outlanders who settle in Archendale. In this same spirit, a smug local saying—the equivalent of "It is where you will never find it"—is "It is deep in Orosul's Tower."

The Place

The tower stands 60 feet high, and shuttered windows dot its smooth granite sides in a seemingly random array. Some folk think it has four floors, and others believe only three with a lofty spellcasting chamber—featuring Orosul's floating bed, a local carpenter insists—as the topmost floor. No one knows how extensive its cellars are. Birds flutter around its tangled, overgrown garden, but local reports record nothing larger and more menacing than rabbits and squirrels inhabiting this miniature forest. Two oval iron gates pierce the garden walls, which are crumbling and treacherous for



climbers, though their uneven blocks and falling mortar offer hand- and boot-holds for even the clumsiest ascending intruder. The gates are locked, and only Orosul, so far as is known, has the keys.¹⁵

The Prospect

Over the years, legends about the tower and its magic have grown hand-in-hand. But, it is certain that Orosul was an archmage of power, that he created hidden, permanent *gates* (teleport portals from one place in Faerûn to another), and that he had a fairly extensive collection of magical items and spellbooks—which, presumably, no one has plundered.

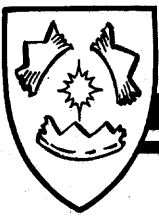
Travelers' Lore

A curious tale arose at the last Mage Fair: that Orosul is trapped on some other plane, awaiting someone to unwittingly pluck him back to his tower by reading aloud a certain glowing inscription or by disturbing a spell globe left behind in his tower. The tale also recounted that his tower can be freely entered by anyone who discovers the gate by being in the right back alley spot nearby and uttering the correct word—which is recorded in Twilight Hall in Berdusk, at Candlekeep, and at the Herald's Holdfast—and may well be written down elsewhere, too.

The tale came from a one-time apprentice of Orosul, Felsharra of the Four Winds, who confirms that Orosul does have a large circular floating bed, which used to be surrounded at night by its own cloud of magical darkness in which small



¹⁵*Elminster*: Vangerdahast actually has a spare somewhere in the royal palace in Suzail, and I believe another was left in the keeping of the Lady Cylyria Dragonbreast in Berdusk.



illusory stars drift and twinkle. (She knows this because important visitors forced her to enter his bedroom and wake him from a sound sleep on more than one occasion.) The bed could split apart to reveal much treasure, both monetary and magical, hidden in an extradimensional space “under” it.

Felsharra also told several wizards that under a cobblestone somewhere in the streets within view of the tower Orosul hid half of an ancient—possibly Netherese—power scepter. (She was never shown exactly where the cobblestone was.) Alone, either scepter half is a useless curiosity—but she reported that Orosul told her the halves glow with a dull, blue-green radiance when within about a mile of each other. If the half here is found and touched

to its mate—which was seized from the now-scattered hoard of the destroyed dracolich Rauglothgor and carried off to Zhentil Keep, where it presumably now lies somewhere in the ruins—they will fuse together, activating the scepter. The whole scepter can restore magical energy to items in need of recharging. It can also heal wounded or diseased folk who sleep with it touching their skin for long enough. Orosul speculated that a tenday or more of such contact would be needed to heal severe injuries.¹⁶

Visitors are warned that Arkhenfolk do not yet seem to have heard of this scepter. They have, however, already exhibited a decided hostility toward anyone trying to pry up stones in the streets around the tower.

¹⁶See Appendix II for full details of the scepter.



Swordpoint

One of the strongest fortresses in all the Dales, Swordpoint is the main barracks of Archendale's widely respected army. A onetime robber baron's stronghold, it crowns a knoll of solid rock—akin to the Old Skull in Shadowdale—high above Arkhen Ford. From this height, it frowns down on the town of Archenbridge. Swordpoint houses the Dale's main armory and war forge, and also contains the Shrine of Swords. Of all outlanders, only pilgrims seeking to worship Tempus at the shrine are normally allowed through the fortress gates.

The Place

From afar, Swordpoint looks little different from its days as the hold of the notorious Sangalar of the Crag. It is a massive but crumbling keep whose heights are adorned with a bristling forest of ballistae surrounded by a stout palisade.

Anyone who gets inside Swordpoint immediately sees that the Arkhenfolk have quietly been making this a far more formidable hold. The palisade was always dubious, as the bases of the logs were set in a trench laboriously hacked out of the solid rock with the whole flammable affair kept upright by cross-straps that linked each log to the next. Since taking the place over, the Ridesmen have lined the inside of the palisade with stone walls several feet thick and built a continuous slate-roofed barracks and stable on the inside of that, giving them a broad platform behind the parapets where they can easily wheel catapults and ballistae about. These engines of war are mounted on carts that can be taken down from the heights by means of a ramp in the northwestern part of the cobbled courtyard. I

have seen with my own eyes that they can hurl missiles over all of Archenbridge, Arkhen Ford, and both banks of the River Arkhen for a considerable stretch. I saw over a dozen catapults and a dozen ballistae, allowing a defending force with enough loaders and ammunition the ability to devastate any attacking force that gets within reach.

Within the fortress's courtyard, the Shrine of Swords stands facing the gate. It is flanked by two rolling wooden barriers fitted with many crossbows, so that a few defenders could bar the way of many attackers should the massive metal-plated gates be breached. Keen-eyed Tempus worshipers can see vegetable growing frames located on log rollers (so that they can be quickly muscled out of the way of catapult and ballista carts) atop the barracks and stables.

Beyond the shrine stands the central keep inside its own inner moat. I saw chutes projecting from the keep walls. Flaming oil can no doubt be poured into the moat to give forces in the keep a last wall of defense.

The Prospect

The Ridesmen of Archendale are the most alert and deadly members of an aggressive and suspicious populace and spend much of their time at practice in the skills of war. A visitor dismissing them as local thicknecks is making a great—perhaps fatal—mistake. Three 60-strong rides (units) of this standing army are always in Swordpoint as a garrison. They are extremely wary of anyone approaching the fortress and of large armed bands who come within their view in general (that is, to Archenbridge or the mouth of the Dale).



This makes them an alert, war-ready garrison with little tolerance for the whimsical or pranksome. They do not buy anything from merchants who come to the fortress gates, and they see everyone as a spy. Only those who firmly profess their devotion to Tempus, prove this by making a substantial donation to the faith (which is shared equally by the garrison and the shrine, though anyone who reveals their knowledge of this arrangement is instantly and roughly ejected), and surrender their weapons are allowed in. Such visitors are escorted at all times and not allowed to approach either rolling barrier or tarry for a look around inside Swordpoint.

In fact, one can see little but bleak, forbidding stone in Swordpoint. The excitement is all hidden, and includes (my reliable sources¹⁷ affirm) a deep and extensive network of tunnels and dwarven-hewn tunnels under the keep itself, deep in the heart of the rock (which is called the Sword). Legend insists that at least two underground ways lead into and out of Swordpoint: one of them connecting with Archenbridge (which may have been originally sited to conceal the tunnel mouth) and the other with the River Arkhen — underwater!

The tunnels hold the armory and treasury vaults, as well as deep wells and living quarters and provisions enough for all the folk in Archendale plus several thousand mercenaries to subsist on through a siege lasting at least four seasons. Many of these storage caverns are crammed with crates of crossbow bolts (both normal

quarrels and the giant sort hurled by the ballistae) and by piles of shaped stone projectiles for use in the catapults. Two hand-cranked elevators allow carts of this ammunition to be quickly raised up into the fortress. The carts are fitted with harnesses to allow soldiers to drag them like draft teams. I am told that the making and stockpiling of these missiles is an Arkhen obsession. They probably already have enough in storage to equip all the armies of Thay, Mulmaster, Hillsfar, Cormyr, and the Zhentarim several times over—though this does nothing to prevent them from gathering more with each passing month.

I say “probably” because Swordpoint is known to have both resident wizards and powerful magical defenses to prevent teleportation and scrying into and out of the fortress. These wards are rumored to involve a slurry of gorgon’s-blood-treated whitewash on all interior stone surfaces and a very expensive, constantly renewed network of shielding spells whose precise nature has been the source of constant (and largely futile) speculation and spying from many powers of the Inner Sea lands. For their part, the Swords of Archendale seem bent on acquiring a small army of golems to defend this and every other important site in the Dale—an undertaking that has so far proven largely fruitless. In the past, they have hired several adventuring bands to try to seize golems that they were unable to make or pay coins enough to have made for them.¹⁸

¹⁷Elminster: Sigh. Me again.

¹⁸Elminster: The gorgon’s blood acts as proof against access from the astral or ethereal planes—and the spells are and will remain secret (sorry). One really cannot use scrying or divination magic into Swordpoint or the Sword beneath it, nor effectively use magics that try to analyze the shields. I am also unwilling to tell ye (*Continues.*)



The alert visitor can see one iron golem standing just behind the Shrine of Swords, but when I asked when it had been acquired, my escorts growled, "Yon thing is something to do with the shrine—statue of Tempus, perhaps. Ye'll have to ask the Swordmaster—'tis nothing to do with Swordpoint or the Ridesmen of Archendale." Then they hustled me out of the place—probably so I could not ask the Swordmaster anything. When I paid a pilgrim to query him about the golem, Swordmaster Stakaria said it was a toy of those who were not strong enough in their faith to leave the affairs of war to the wits and thews of people—and that it had nothing to do with him. Another source, over drinks a safe distance into Sembia from Archendale, told me that he believes the Arkhen forces cannot make the golem work—so it is just a statue as I write this.

This brings me to something all who come within sight of Swordpoint should know: Arkhenfolk take a very dim view of what they deem to be spying. Instant and permanent exile from the Dale, plus confiscation of all goods, is a sentence both common and (in Arkhen eyes) light for this offense. It is meted out on the spot and cannot be appealed. This hasty and paranoid policy has created a small legion of merchants who use false names and clumsy disguises when trading in the Dale thanks to past suspicions that have fallen on them.

Many folk believe the Arkhenfolk accuse people of and sentence people for spying largely to entertain themselves and



to make other Dalesfolk respect—nay, fear—them. After all, *real* spies are not treated in this way: Known agents for other powers are hustled into the keep, searched mentally through arcane and other means thoroughly by the mysterious wizards therein, and sent forth under a *geas* to carry out a dangerous mission for the Dale. (Typical missions are to spy on or perform sabotage against a rival power or enemy of the Dale.) It is also widely thought that mind-prying spells are habitually used against unfamiliar folk sighted in the vicinity of Swordpoint.

Travelers' Lore

No guests are permitted to stay or sup in Swordpoint save in dungeon cells. One is not even allowed to courteously use a privy. Do not expect to enjoy any hospitality here.

(Continued.) anything about the wizards other than that they are dedicated to the defense of the Dale and pose no danger to other lands, that they want to be left alone, and that they are not what Arkhenfolk think they are. Well, I will give ye one hint: Not all the folk of the Elven Court went west, and the folk of Archendale may one day find their Dale girt with trees that somehow they *must* defend and keep all other folk away from.



The Heart of The Mine



The source spring of the River Arkhen bursts out of one wall of this large natural cavern and gushes across its floor to flow out and first see the sun of the surface world above Arkhen Falls. Though one end of the cavern opens out in a mountain flank, connecting it directly to the open air of Archendale, this cavern gained its subterranean-sounding name because it is the hub of the old Arkhen mines. Miners using its water and sunlight hewed many tunnels out its soft rock walls. They broke into other, smaller natural caverns and each other's workings. Veins of metal-bearing ore attesting to their efforts still gleam on some of the tunnel walls today.

The mining did not stop here because the riches ran out, but because an adult black dragon of exceptional size flew into the Heart of the Mine and forcibly established its lair here over 200 years ago. It "cast a shadow half as long as the Dale," as one (probably exaggerating) sage recorded. Arngalor was its name, and for a time the folk of Archendale cowered in their homes at the sound of its wings, and dug themselves deep cellars to flee into when it flew down through the Dale snatching up all the living meat it could find. The miners all either starved trying to dig their ways out of their delves without coming back into the Heart cavern or were slain by the dragon when they tried to slip past it to freedom.

Over the years in which the mines were inaccessible and other, less

profitable delves were established in many places in the Marching Mountains, legends grew in Archendale of the fabulous size and value of the dragon's hoard. Arngalor flew out often to raid nearby lands, defying Sembian mages and rival dragons alike to bring home load after load of riches. These were seen, and their nature was often confirmed by coins spilling out of the sky from the seams of some chest shattered by the dragon's mighty claws. But then there came a day some 70 winters ago when a blue dragon of even larger size swept into Archendale and roared its challenge.

Unwisely, cloaked in arrogance, the wyrm Arngalor flew forth to do battle. The challenger pounced on him from above and behind, rending and raking, bearing the black wyrm's mighty wings down until they crashed to earth together. Arngalor fought free, and a long and terrible fray ensued that scarred the very rocks of western Archendale. (Many fissures and rock scars are still explained away today by Arkhenfolk as "done in the dragon war.") At the end of that day, Arngalor lay torn apart and half-devoured beside the river, and the challenger flew raggedly away west into the mountains, never to be seen again.

Many miners and adventuring bands have braved the difficult trails up to the Heart of the Mine since that day — and found no treasure at *all!* It is likely something or someone long ago spirited away whatever treasure the dragon had amassed, but no hint of such a success has ever been heard. Local Arkhen lore still whispers optimistically of a hidden hoard awaiting those who seek it



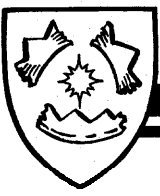
diligently enough. The Cult of the Dragon, based in nearby Sembia, is determined to find Arngalor's hoard and can often be seen slipping through White Ford into the Dale, heading for the mines. Cult members are said to offer furious battle to Ridesmen—or anyone else they meet.

And why did the miners of Archendale not simply move back to the delves around the Heart, a known source of rich ore deposits? Because the mines are haunted. The miners who died trying to get out by tunneling past the dragon have left something of themselves behind: ghostly, spectral

hands that appear out of the solid rock to attack the living—only to vanish back into the stones if faced with a serious threat.¹⁹ These perils always appear in pairs, but they may gather into a raking, gouging group of as many as a dozen pairs. From time to time a determined mining band destroys all of these ghostly attackers—but gains only a day of mining in peace before all the hands reappear!

Determined miners have learned to sleep out on mountain ledges, not in the Heart or any of its delves. Sleeping miners are almost always throttled by silently attacking hands!

¹⁹ Aside from their ghostly appearance and ability to instantly phase into and out of solid stone, these spectral claws are identical in all respects to crawling claws (see the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* tome).



The Weeping Rock

This well-hidden spot is one of the best campsites in the Marching Mountains. It is a dell overlooking the midpoint of Archendale where a spring rises at the top of a rock pinnacle (the “weeping rocky”) to create a lovely bathing pool before cascading down out of the mountains to join the River Arkhen. A rampart of natural rock walls in the dell hides it from the open Dale below. Many Arkhenfolk have seen the lower reaches of Weeping Stream, but few climb the perilous trails suited best to mountain goats that must be traversed to reach this beautiful dell. The fact that so few see it is a pity, because the dell has by far the most beautiful scenery in all Archendale.

Plants can be found in the dell that are highly prized by mages, alchemists, and perfumers alike, though a few travelers have spread rumors of plants with deadly poisonous stings and even man-eating growths lurking in the thick underbrush, too. Birds and game both remain plentiful because many prospectors and miners will not go near the Weeping Rock, and the old fire rings of its camp see scant use.

This shunning is due to the curse that lies on the Bell of Auros—a bell-shaped rock next to the bathing pool that stands as tall as two human males and has an archway carved in one of its sides. The inscription over the arch reads: “Auros of Elmere, Bard Beyond Peer,” but the curious visitor finds nothing inside but

heaped stones—stones that have often been dug out, disturbing the dead minstrel’s bones, in search of the enchanted harp that Auros is known to have played. A day after being disturbed, the stones are always found back in their original state, and no one has yet found the harp.

Would-be grave robbers do find something, though: an identical curse to the one found in Grave Hollow in the town of Archenbridge that is visited upon anyone who moves any of the stones inside the Bell. Afflicted persons are the recipients of a year-long *ironguard* effect that cannot be dispelled.²⁰ Affected beings cannot touch any metal—all metal items fall harmlessly through them! Such a state is ruinous to the livelihood of all miners and adventurers, so those drawn to digging for treasure dare not go near the Bell of Auros.

The curse is said to have been put in place by elves who grieved for the loss of Auros, a man who loved the Fair Folk and their forests and stubbornly fought against the tree-clearing that took Archendale from the elves who dwelt along the Aluivyn (the River Arkhen) and gave it to the humans, axe blow by axe blow, in the early days of settlement in the Dales. Sages across the Dragon Reach agree that the Howling Harp²¹ that Auros played for most of his life—a gift from the elven queen Ciyradyl Phenthae, who is said to have gained it from a dying archmage of Netheril or some elder empire—was buried with him or hidden somewhere in the dell of the Weeping Rock and has never been found.

²⁰ *Elminster*: It can be dispelled the same way that the one from Grave Hollow can—but that would be telling.

²¹ *Elminster*: The writings of the sage Mildras tell us that the *Howling Harp* had the powers of a *philosopher’s stone*, a *robe of eyes*, a *rod of lordly might*, the ability to evoke *continual light* and to make all magical auras within 90 feet glow brightly with a white light, and the powers of *pipes of haunting*. Each ability was evoked by different played tunes.



White Ford

This hamlet is named for a nearby whitewater-girt ford on the River Arkhen but is actually located well north of the water crossing on the north slope of the Arkhen Gorge just west of Arch Wood. It is closer to Highmoon in Deepingdale than it is to Archenbridge, which is located 45 miles downstream at the other end of Archendale, and is a decidedly more relaxed and civil place than the other Arkhen settlements.

White Ford is a sleepy, picturesque village of woodcarvers, farmers, mushroom-pickers, and shepherds. It has a horse pond and a well that all can freely use, a paddock field for those who like to camp out with their wagons, a single establishment that serves as both inn and tavern, a smithy, and a furnituremaker whose shop is worth a look. It is a useful, pleasant waystop, but it is not an exciting destination in itself.

Landmarks

The white froth of the ford's rapids has been augmented by the dumping of boulders into the current to serve to break some of the force of the water and to mark the safe footing area of the ford. Aside from the rapids that mark the ford itself, the only landmark notable from a distance in White Ford is Beacon Tor, which stands just west of the village, facing Arch Hold across the small cluster of cottages and shops.

Arch Hold is a ditch-and-stone-ring stronghold with a dug-out sleeping chamber that is used by Rides on patrol. It is raised enough to overlook the entire run of the third local landmark: the Wolfwall.

The Wolfwall is so called because it keeps out wolves in winter and most two-legged wolves (brigands) in summer. This castlelike ring wall links Beacon Tor (where the Rides have, of course, several ready-laid beacons for signal use) with Arch Hold in a wide oval that encloses the village of White Ford. The wall has a firing platform along its inside surface and ladder platforms at periodic intervals, but no weapons are kept ready along it after years of steady pilferage of such a ready arsenal. The gates of this wall usually stand open, but permanent, counter-weighted, swing-down, tree-trunk barriers are lowered across both gate mouths whenever Ridesmen want to halt traffic and inspect a few wagons (or, as the merchants of other Dales put it, collect a few passage bribes).

It is rumored that some part of the Wolfwall up near Beacon Tor is a living wall or some other sort of strange, deadly entity that sucks those who touch it inside the wall and feeds on them, draining their life and body away together! Ridesmen I spoke with scoffed at the notion—but did not offer to inspect the wall with me, even when offered a *lot* of coins.

Local lore insists that an ancient orc tribal relic, the Talking Bone, was walled up somewhere in the Wolfwall by an Arkhen warrior who had gained it in battle but grown tired of fighting for his life two or three times a day as orcs showed up to challenge him for it. It is said to allow anyone holding it to talk to an orc god (just which one has been forgotten in White Ford) or to another (nondeific) being of the bearer's choice, no matter how distant they may be. Collectors are warned that the folk of White Ford take a very dim view of anyone



tearing apart their defensive wall in search of this relic.²²

Arch Hold gets its name because it overlooks the western edge of dark and dangerous Arch Wood. Several ballista emplacements along its walls can rake the trees' edge with giant crossbow bolts. Quite a few of these giant bolts in the Hold's arsenal are coated with pitch to serve as fire arrows.

White Ford has a single municipal building: the Arkhenor, a combination meeting hall (aboveground) and jail. Below its 400-person capacity great hall are rows of dungeon cells known as "the Lockholes."

Market Square stands in the center of town, and though it is no longer the site of a market, one can often find a single stall

or peddler's cart there. At the center of Market Square, in the shade of a huge, gnarled felsul tree that is (correctly) said to be more than 400 summers old, stands the village well. And there, traveler, you have all the landmarks of White Ford.

Places of Interest in White Ford Shops

Felsharp's Furniture

Furniture, Dolls, Snow Sledges



This workshop and factory looks like what it once was: four cottages clustered closely about a barn. Felsharp joined them years ago, and in this dim, sawdust-filled, labyrinthine firetrap he makes jointed

²²See Appendix II for details of the *Talking Bone*.



wooden dolls, deliciously smooth-finished rocking chairs and recliners custom-fitted to the patrons ordering them, and snow sledges. The dolls are sometimes ordered life-size by Sembians needing garment display mannequins or shady folk needing decoy humans to lure enemy fire. And the rocking chairs and recliners are truly the most comfortable things to lie in to ever touch my back and backside!

Felsharp is a fat, wheezing man who is always chuckling or humming to himself in a high, strange, birdcall-like voice as he scuttles about covered in sawdust and hung about with tools and measuring cords. But he is shrewder than he looks. He demands payment up front and stores all his takings in hollow wooden cylinders raised and lowered by pull cords at the bottom of narrow boreholes hidden under sliding floorboards. These holes are blocked part of the way up by iron cross-bars that only he knows the ways of drawing back

Felsharp's work is of the finest quality and is done as speedily as possible—sometimes involving all-night sessions, if a client is in a great hurry. Felsharp is easygoing and always ready to amend things if a client desires—a welcome departure from the tantrum-throwing artistes so common in creative professions across Faerûn. The traveler who is able to visit White Ford and then return to it two tendays or more later will find ordering one of Felsharp's chairs an action whose wisdom will shine forth many times over through years to come.

Three Shoes Smithy

Blacksmith



This tall, fire-blackened stone building has a distinctive cedar shake roof.

Because Eduard the smith is a better forge master than carpenter, it slopes sharply down to the southeast. Eduard keeps four apprentices busy turning out barrel hoops and wheel rims, weapons for the ever-bloodthirsty Arkhen forces, and more mundane but useful items, such as hooks, bolts, strap-hinges, ladles, and horseshoes—to name the things he has the most of in stock. His specialty is the fast, expert (but not cheap!) emergency reshoeing of horses.

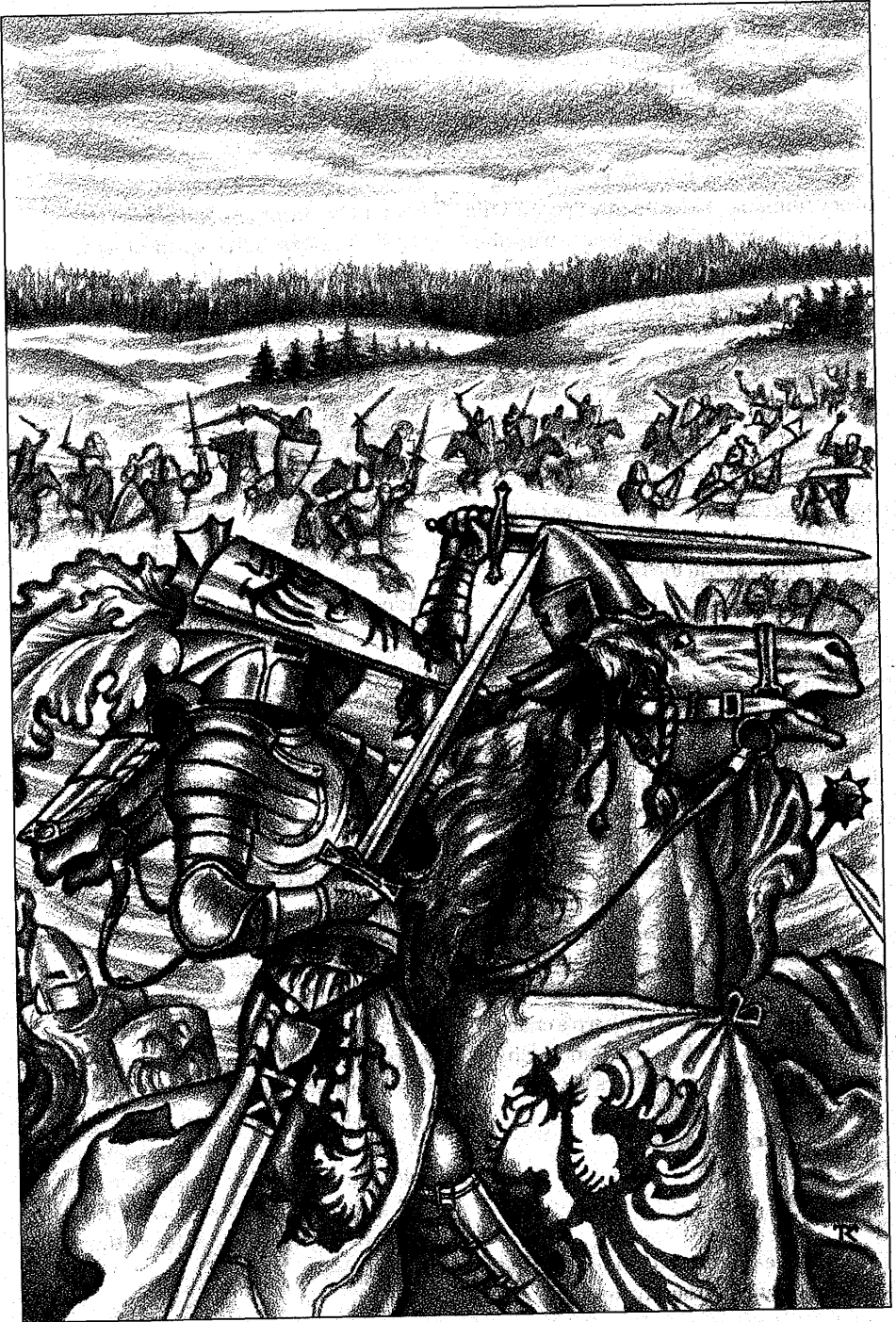


His forge mark is a winged bird rising out of an open hand. I have found it on ladles as distant as the Moonshae Isles and the wine-and-sauce-houses of Tashluta! His shop is worth a visit, if only to see anvils leap when a man of mighty thews brings his hammer down!

TAVERN & INN Hanged Hobgoblin House



This gruesomely named establishment is no other than a large, rambling barn in the last stages of seedy decay. But it has a kindly, attentive staff and all the comforts one can expect in a village inn, in addition to a ground-floor tavern taproom that sports several impressive sets of antlers that flank a goggle-eyed mounted hobgoblin head known to all as "Urbert." In a larger settlement or more welcoming Dale, the 'Obgoblin might well soon go out of business—but in White Ford it is a thankfully mediocre resting place.





BATTLEDALE



he most-traveled and the most famous of the Dales, Battledale also boasts the bloodiest history of all the Dales. It has been the battlefield for warring powers in the Dragon Reach lands for centuries. In the words of one minstrel, this huge field of fray is “a Dale without a heart.” It would be a mistake to interpret his words as meaning that folk in Battledale have no pride, pluck, or regard for each other or for their land. He meant what the travelers in the Dale soon discover: There is no one geographical center to this sprawling territory, no place where visitors feel they have reached the defining spot or heart of the region. Essembra, the Dale’s sole settlement of any size, feels like a waystop on the road rather than the seat of any government or the center of any land.

And yet Battledale is probably the richest Dale of all. The unmapped lanes that wander and crisscross along the north bank of the River Ashaba west off Rauthauvyr’s Road hide many manor houses and country estates where retired Sembians and others who have made much money in the Dales or around the Moonsea—and would like to relax and enjoy their coins a little before going to the gods—dwell. Some folk call this little-known region the Rauvedon Hills after a half-elven brigand who once had a (now-vanished) keep at its heart. Others refer to it as Circle of Stars country after the most famous druidic circle (also now gone) who dwelt in it. Sage lore and minstrelry hold references to a local steading called “Yevendale” because it

overlooked the Pool of Yeven. But folk who say this is the name of a lost Dale that flourished here are mistaken or—like the treasure-map sellers in Ordulin and Feather Falls—indulging in deliberate mischief.

Private armies and other nasty surprises await the overaggressive traveler down these winding lanes; more than a few wizards dwell in the rolling hills. One can even find teaching academies, artificial lakes, and gardens that rival those of the wealthiest Cormyrean nobles.

The Countryside

The Circle of Stars country is but one of the backlands of Battledale. The other is the hill country that divides Battledale from Featherdale. A band of broken country running roughly southwest to northeast, this natural rampart consists of steep-sided, tree-girt hills studded with rock faces, crags, and small but heavily overgrown ravines—perfect brigand country. Known to some as the Hap Hills (after Haptooth Hill, the highest and most northeasterly of the Dun Hills), these debatable lands teem with deer and smaller edible game and are choked in berry bushes and brambles. “Lost and Hapless” is a once-famous Dragon Reach ballad whose title has become a Faerûnwide expression for hopelessly wandering in the trackless wilds.

All most visitors see of Battledale—and think of, when they picture the Dale in their minds—are the open, rolling farmlands along Rauthauvyr’s Road, referred to



by folk all over the Dales as “the Belt.” Holdings in the Belt tend to be small. They are usually composed of stone cottages and barns inside stone walls or timber palisades, which have been erected against both trolls and brigands—including otherwise honest caravan riders who just happen to indulge in a little horse-theft as a sideline.

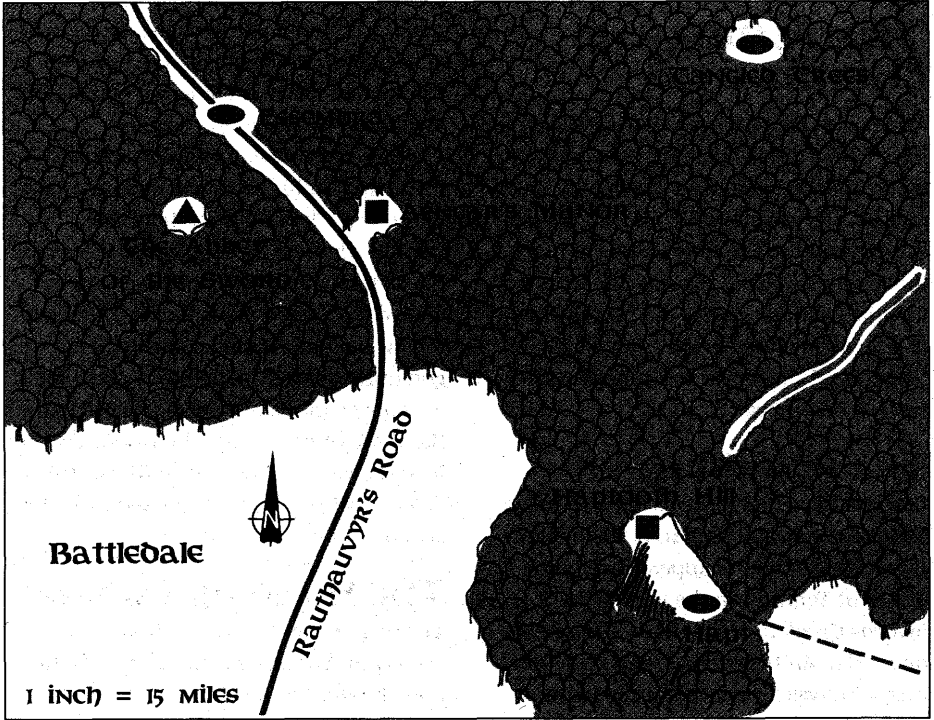
Walled gardens and orchards can be found in the Belt—particularly just west of Essemбра, along the trails known as Hunter’s Lane and Kelty’s Amble—but it is mainly open grazing lands used by shepherd families. (These families buy needed goods from peddlers or in Essemбра, augment their tables with game brought down with slings and in net traps, and defend themselves with sleep-poisoned crossbow bolts.) Streams and ponds are plentiful in this verdant land, and many shrines to Chauntea and Silvanus dot the countryside. The former usually take the form of a stone table laden with food offerings (which sustain many a hungry traveler by design—the goddess does not frown on the needy eating from her table. The shrines to Silvanus most often consist of a small bell hung over a pool or rising spring in a small forest clearing that has been planted all around with herbs and rare woodland flowers.

In summer this is marvelous country to camp in, although one should always beware of brigands on the run from the law in Sembia and spoiled and lawless merchants’ younger sons who have come here for some hunting and may well indulge their high-spirited cruelty on the persons of those they meet.

One may also meet with pilgrims, foresters, and doppelgangers who imitate all of these sorts of folk—as well as raiding

bands of trolls, bugbears, mongrelmen, leucrotta, and similar menaces that lurk near civilized lands and prey on the unwary. The occasional depredations of owlbears and other more dangerous woodland creatures have kept the beautiful and fertile Three Rivers lands (where the Semberflow and the Glaemril join the Ashaba northwest of the Pool of Yeven) sparsely settled, but many an adventurer dreams of building a keep thereabouts. A few find the time and funds to do so, and these uplands are dotted with the monster-haunted ruins of such keeps, left lifeless when adventurers were overwhelmed in their beds by dragons or more mundane foes—or went off on one too many adventures and never returned.

One of the most famous of these abandoned holds is Wolfjaw Towers, the once-palatial stead of the Sembian adventurer Amberlan Wolfjaw. Said to stand atop a warren of twisting, hand-dug tunnels crammed with the loot brought back from his adventures, it fell into ruin as Wolfjaw’s wits failed. He ended his days as a mumbling eater of berries and squirrels in a roofless ruin laid waste by fire, heavy snows, and lack of upkeep—for the crazed Wolfjaw slew all of his servants. Many folk have searched for his fabled riches, but so many overgrown ruins dot the region that no one is now sure just where Wolfjaw Towers is. Companies in neighboring Deepingdale and Tasseldale mount hunting expeditions into the Three Rivers uplands, but the traveler is warned that the operators tend to pick this or that ruin to camp in so they can look for Wolfjaw’s gold. Should they ever find it, the personal safety of anyone who is on that expedition is not likely to be long-lasting.



Folk looking to make a less hazardous living in Battledale are advised that the Yevenwood, the forest that stands between the Pool of Yeven and Rauthauvyr's Road north of the River Ashaba, is rich in small game and deer. More dangerous denizens of this wood—sometimes known as the Wood of Many Names, because it has also been called Battle Wood, the Satyrs' Run, Sardhwood, and Foresters' Freehold—were exterminated long ago. It is home to a common and delicious mushroom, the relshar, that can be harvested by the cartload by those who know where to look. Ferns and fiddleheads can also be gleaned from the Yevenwood.

The stretch of the Ashaba south of the Yevenwood has banks of blue clay, and several local potteries use this to make

rounded clay bottles and carrying jugs, dishes, and mugs for sale in Sembia and the neighboring Dales. Arsith's Old Fires is noted for its beautiful glazes, but Elboar and Thorntree are names almost as highly regarded. Their firing marks can be found on pieces in use from one end of Faerûn to the other.

The Battledarrans

Battledale is a meeting place for traders and warriors. Over the years, its folk have become as eclectic and tolerant a mix of races and backgrounds as one can find anywhere east of Waterdeep. Even half-orcs can expect a wary welcome.



The Abbey of The Sword

Aside from the years of relative peace that have allowed Dale farmers to bring cartloads upon groaning cartloads of grain, cheese, ale, greens, fruit, and ale for sale throughout the Inner Sea lands to market, the most promising recent change in the fortunes of Battledale is the establishment of a fortified abbey in the heart of the Ghost Holds, just over five miles southwest of Essembra.

The Founding

It began hard on the heels of the Time of Troubles, when a Amnian priest of Tempus heard about the appearance of the avatar of Tempus on the battlefield of Swords Creek in Mistedale.¹ The priest, one Eldan Ambrose, reasoned that Tempus, who was seen striding across the field of fray, must have been walking *from* somewhere—and to find that point of origin all he need do was follow the god's footsteps until he could find no trace of the war god before him.

This Priest-General Ambrose did, and he came at last to a shattered, ancient castle. It was at this site where it seemed, despite claims to the contrary, Tempus had descended to Faerûn in the Fall of the Gods.

Ambrose camped in the ruins with a small escort, and in his dreams Tempus appeared to him, confirming that this place—once the hold of the warrior Belarus, a worshiper of the war god—was henceforth to be held sacred to the Lord of Battles. So Ambrose, an energetic and charismatic leader, caused the castle to be cleansed and rebuilt, deep wells sunk to

reach a lake of cool, sweet water far below (a lake in the Underdark, some murmur, from whence trouble may yet come), and an altar to be raised to Tempus.

All of this was done, and Ambrose made known his presence and intentions to the War Chancellor of Battledale, Ilmeth, who was much pleased. From that day to this, the priests and warriors (called the Sword-Sworn) of the Abbey of the Sword have staffed a shrine of the war god in Essembra, helped the Lords Men to scourge monsters and other evil from Rauthauvyr's Road and the woods around it, and begun to cleanse the Ghost Holds. (The Ghost Holds are discussed in a later section of this chapter.)

The Hand of Tempus

The work detailed above may take years, even with the strong contingent of faithful now dwelling at the Abbey: Full priests number 27, novices are a dozen strong, and 46 Sword-Sworn guard the holy house. Ambrose and his holy warriors have discovered that some of the Ghost Holds stand over tunnels that descend into the Deep Realms and are patrolled by drow and that others house portals of fell magic that connect to a strange and deadly city, known as Sigil, on another plane, to a cavern on the flanks of Mount Helimbrar near Waterdeep, to the heart of the High Forest near the mysterious Star Mounts, and to a room with invisible walls and floor that hangs some 70 feet above the back streets of Iriaebor! The arrival of explorers to this last destination is frightening in the extreme to inhabitants of the city below, who have taken to paying wizards handsomely for swiftly hurling fireballs up at anyone appearing above their heads.

¹As recounted in the novel *All Shadows Fled* by Ed Greenwood (TSR, Inc., 1995).



Exploration of the room is also scary for those using the *gate* to reach it, because the invisible chamber has one window and a part of the floor missing, and it is easy to fall from either of these.

Worse than these perilous means of transport themselves is the news that many beings—including beholders and illithids, as well as at least two veteran and deadly human adventuring bands—make regular use of these *gates* and are quite prepared to slaughter anyone who tries to stop them. At least one human group seems to be making a very good living as fast couriers between Waterdeep and Sembia, transporting messages, treaties, and small items of value halfway across Faerûn in a trice!

The faithful of Tempus have set up watches over the known gates and do battle with all who come through them save those who convince the priests that their entry was accidental or that they are adventurers from afar exploring these *gates* for the first time. Attempts to destroy or magically close the *gates* have thus far failed. They are unaffected by physical changes around them such as the collapse of the room they are in, and spells sent against them twist awry. Divination magics show only confusing scenes of the mysterious beings known as the sharn.²

In addition to pursuing the secret of the *gates*, the faithful of the Abbey practice the use of arms, pray to Tempus, and go out on patrols tirelessly, seeking to find and destroy all evil they encounter. Those who worship the war god find them quick to help in battle and generous with both healing spells and potions. The Abbey clergy ask only for a service in return for

such aid to others of their faith and never for payment.

Those of other faiths or unknown intent who meet with Temple patrols are challenged as to their identities and purpose. If their answers are not pleasing to the faithful, they may find themselves under attack. The priests always signal imminent hostilities with the order: "Submit!" The folk of the Abbey of the Sword do not consider it honorable to slay folk who would surrender if they had a choice. Those who surrender are taken to the Abbey and questioned sternly but with courtesy with the aid of prying magic to be sure of their true intent and likenesses. Such individuals are often later fed, apologized to, freely treated for any wounds or diseases they may have, and set free if they prove earnest and aboveboard in intent and purpose. An announced intent by questioned folk to settle in one of the Ghost Holds—so long as one does not intend to live by brigandage, work malicious magic, or establish a place of worship to a rival faith—is not considered a bad thing by the priests, but rather something to be encouraged. Assistance to such settlers is provided eagerly.

Life in The Abbey

Those who dwell in the grim stone towers of the Abbey of the Sword share the same plain and martial lives as those who visit: waking hours devoted to Tempus and sleep in a bare stone cell holding only a bed, blankets, wall pegs for all clothes, and only battlefield relics and weapons consecrated to Tempus allowed as adornment. Hardly a room is without its battle axes and two-handed swords.

A typical day begins at dawn with a sung hymn of remembrance to those who

²Detailed in the *Ruins of Undermountain* boxed set.



have fallen in the service of Tempus that is followed by weapons practice to the sound of a priest intoning the names of the Valorous Fallen. Then the faithful take communal baths, which are followed by a hearty meal accompanied by prayers to the war god.

The day's work begins with an address (battle orders would be a more accurate term, I am told) from the abbot, followed by everyone pursuing one of the Tasks he sets them: guard duty at the abbey; repair or building work at the abbey; hunting, pumping water, buying food in Essembra, and tending the walled abbey gardens. (The abbey gardens are given over nearly entirely to fruit and vegetable growing; only such flowers are necessary to encourage pollination of the crops by bees or are vital ingredients in *potions of healing* are grown here.) Other Tasks

include going on armed patrol into the lands around; forging new weapons and armor for the greater glory of Tempus and for sale to all (to raise funds); and the making of healing drafts for the use of the faithful and all those who battle valiantly and can thus be said to have furthered the influence of Tempus, whatever their own primary faith may be.

Any highsun meal is casual, and work on the Tasks continues until sunset, when a clear-voiced clergy member sings a hymn, another preaches a sermon, and evenfeast is enjoyed by all. Then those on Night Vigil begin their patrols or guard duty, and the rest of the abbey sleeps.

Abbey life is too simple an existence for me, but guests are always welcome at the Abbey of the Sword for stays of up to nine days to sample the monastic way of life, and they may stay longer if wounded. In this way, the hand of Tempus reaches out to gather in new faithful. Such guests are known as Seekers and are closely watched by senior priests, known as Battladies and Battl Lords, who lead the Sword-Sworn. No guest has any chance to get near the abbey wells, armory, or kitchens, nor to accompany abbey patrols anywhere.

Beings the folk of the Abbey of the Sword want to capture, disarm, or force into surrender are often struck down by the application of a *dance of the fallen* spell, a grisly variant of the *blade barrier* spell, that calls into being a whirling, bludgeoning cloud of the severed limbs of warriors fallen in battle! This grim magic usually batters its target into senselessness or submission and is also used to force folk whom the Abbey faithful have no wish to fight, such as paladins or righteous folk of good faiths, to turn back.



Aencar's Manor

Ruined Manor Estate and Castle



The ruined manor house of the Mantled King of the Dales stands in full view of travelers. It is located just east off Rauthauvyr's Road not quite four miles south of Essemбра. Aencar's Manor still looks like a stately home, and its outer grounds serve as the local site of Shieldmeet. It is an impressive landmark that tempts adventurers and fools alike into "just an afternoon" exploring its many towers—a side trip from which many never return.

The Manor's low, ornamental outer walls lean crazily amid the trees and creepers, and in places have fallen down entirely. They enclose only traces of the once-splendid gardens, but at the heart of the brambles the massive, roofless central castle still throws its stone spires to the sky. Its huge size and air of rich splendor—thanks to splendid relief carvings of mounted knights on the ramparts—can readily be seen from the roadside.

This splendor is belied by the haunting of the ruins: The folk of Battledale swear that Aencar's ghost, his face a melting ruin, rushes with silent menace around his castle, attacking all intruders with a spectral blade that withers all flesh it

touches.³ Aencar's true foe is the ghostly remnant of one of the sorcerers who slew him at a feast in Essemбра by summoning a dracolich, only to die in a trap while plundering the Mantled Ring's manor for magic. This evil mage (one Alacanthor of Arrabar) is also said to survive—as a wraithlike form that can hurl spells.⁴

The two undead creatures are locked forever in combat. Folk who have seen them come to blows say they usually rend each other into nothingness as they tumble into the now-dry moat, only to reappear the next nightfall to chase each other around the ruined castle in furious battle. again!

Yet this fearsome pair is not the only peril of the Manor: Crumbling stairs and ramparts often fall on, or out from under, those disturbing them. The bones of several unfortunate explorers can be seen protruding from under various piles of fallen rock throughout the castle. Other, more fortunate adventuring bands have fled the place after reaching the cellars and discovering not just more impending collapses awaiting them, but a dracolich and a deadly band of human adventurers who seem to serve it! Such sightings suggest to me that the Cult of the Dragon has installed a Scaly One in a lair here, using the Manor's haunted reputation to discourage intruders. The folk in Essemбра prefer to simply say the Manor is haunted and best left alone rather than speculate on the truth of such reports.

³*Elminster*: In truth, Aencar is a watchghost (detailed in the *Ruins of Undermountain* boxed set) who actually tries to aid those dedicated to cleansing the Ghost Holds, fighting brigands and monsters to make Battledale safer, or defending the Dales against external foes. He renders this aid by imparting knowledge and by directing adventurers to his hidden *potions of healing* and other magics. His enchanted *broad sword* +1 at every hit causes its victims make a successful saving throw vs. death magic or suffer a withered limb (effects identical to a *staff of withering*).

⁴*Elminster*: Alacanthor survives as a wraith who cannot be turned—though he often fades into invisibility when someone tries, wafting until everyone's guard is down before attacking again. He can also hurl random offensive spells every second round. He usually attacks with *Evard's black tentacles* first and then flits about whoever is trapped, draining their life forces and hurling *fireball* and *lightning bolt* spells at those who try to aid them.



With that caution firmly in mind, let me recommend that every traveler on Rauthauvyr's Road in full daylight at least halt here—in an alert and armed group, mind you—for a good look at the Manor. Its crumbling splendor is a reminder to all that the Dales have not always been rustic backwaters, poor and uncultured next to rich and bustling Sembia, but rather that they preceded that proud land and reached splendid heights of their own.

Aencar was the only person to unify the Dales (except Archendale and the High Dale). The measure of his achievement can readily be taken by recalling the recent folly of Lashan of Scardale. Upon the Mantled King's death, the various wolves he had held at bay rushed in to rend what he had wrought,

plundering what riches Aencar's lieutenants had not already taken for their own.

Yet there have always been legends of riches that were not found—and more: strong magic intended for the defense of the Dales and given to the Mantled King by approving elves and human mages and priests who hoped to dwell in a stable realm. This magic was hidden in places only Aencar knew and was lost forever at his death, the fireside tales tell us—but was it? Or does it await the fortunate adventurer still in some concealed niche or secret passage in the ruined Manor? Certainly someone at a recent Mage Fair thought so—and when last I checked, no fewer than six outlander mages had traveled through Sembia to the Manor—and disappeared!



Essembra

This town serves as a market center for the folk of Battledale and a supply waystop for the heavy traffic between Sembia and the Moonsea lands that passes along Rauthauvyr's Road. Visitors usually find Essembra pleasant but curiously unimpressive: Except for its walled center, whose ramparts are cloaked by maple trees, it consists of long rows of cottages fronting along the trade road for a mile or more with only a few cross streets and back alleys. The trees of the Elven Court woods hem the community in on all sides.

The center of Essembra is marked by watchposts⁵ and fields. The north field is the site of the market. In the summer months, some carts and stalls are always open for business here, and local farmers bring their livestock and produce to sell to traveling merchants, merchant companies, and customers. The south field, with its horse pond, is where all visitors are allowed to camp or tether their beasts.

Essembra is named for a famous long-ago adventuress who was born in a cottage that stood more or less on the site of the present-day statue of Aencar. Before Aencar was born, she carved out a name for herself Faerûnwide with her sword and her daring when lawlessness was the rule in the fledgling Dales. Famous for spurning an elf lord's advances and for wrestling a dwarven king to the death when captured in his gem mines, Essembra's flame-red hair and smoldering red eyes betrayed to all that she was more

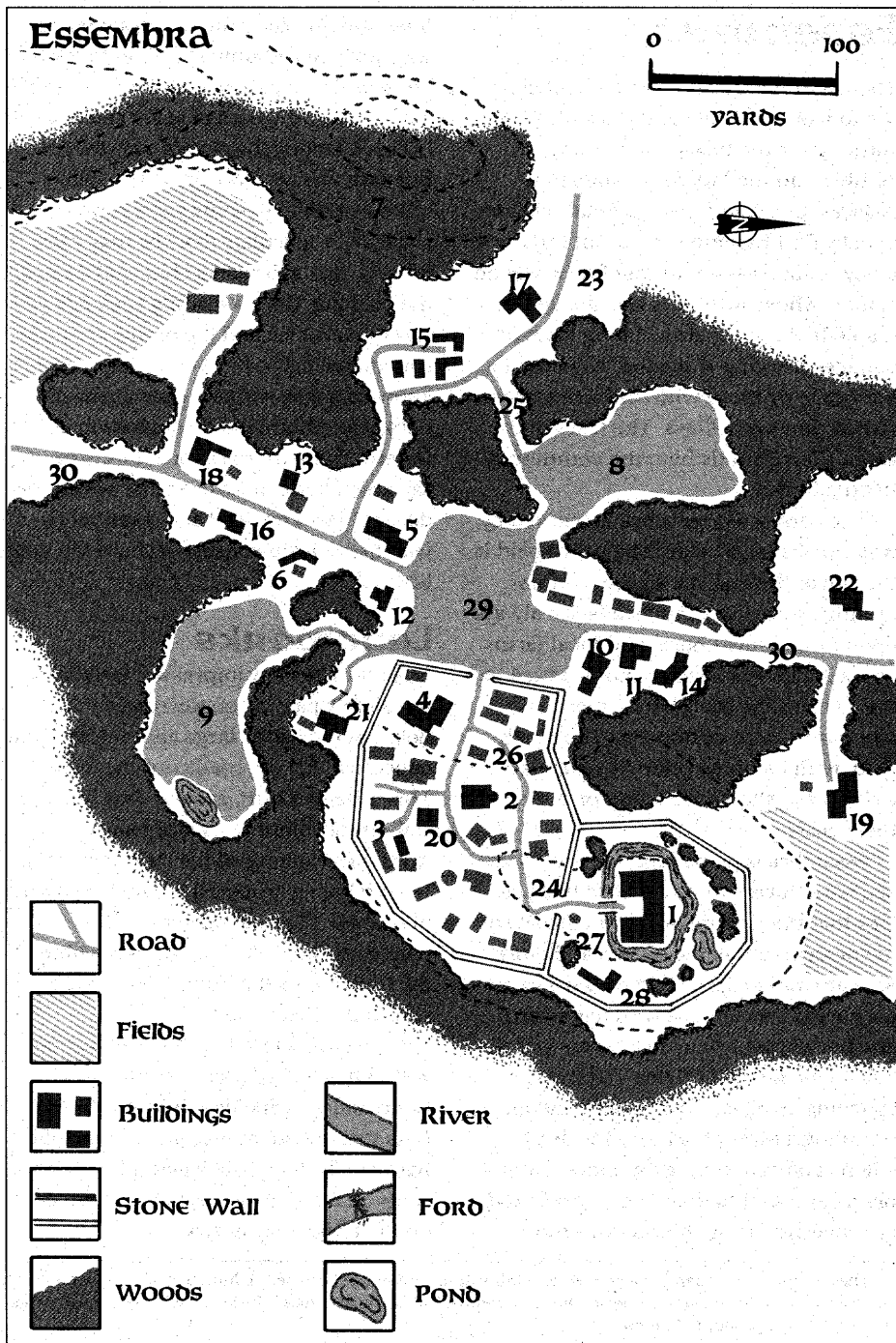
than human. Her true weredragon nature was not revealed until she abandoned all her worldly wealth and achievements to wed a silver dragon. For years she rode on his back among the clouds over Faerûn, but then was seen no more. Her fate is unknown, though some sages have gone so far as to speculate that she may have tried to bear a dragon's child and died in the birthing. Others dismiss such talk as errant nonsense and the prattle of overly romantic fools—why would she, a very knowledgeable woman, doom to death herself and her child through such an action? These more rational loremasters say Essembra sought out other worlds or distant places on Toril and dwelt there with her dragon consort—where she may live still.

Landmarks

Essembra has few impressive buildings, but all folk passing on the road cannot help but notice the large and muddy open courtyard that the road runs through. This is Battle Court, ground kept free of stalls or encampments by an ancient agreement among all the Dales, for use as "a marshaling ground for armies in times of red war." The old center of Essembra, where most of its folk dwell, lies within the walled area that forms the eastern side of the Court.

Two consecrated places rise proudly within this walled area: The House of Gond and a shrine dedicated to Tempus. Less striking but as elegant are the Bold Banners festhall, which stands outside the walls on Rauthauvyr's Road, and the Elf on the Flying Stag eatery.

⁵These are small wooden archers' towers fitted with spars that can be lowered down across the road to block horses and carts. Except in wartime or when someone in Sembia or the Dales is looking for important fugitives in earnest, they are usually unmanned.





Essebra Map Key

1. Ilmeth's Manor (residence of the local lord)
2. The House of Gond (temple of Gond)
3. Swordpoint Shrine (shrine to Tempus)
4. The Hitching Post (tack and hardware shop)
5. Durn's Forge (smithy)
6. The Watchful Eye (inn)
7. Aencar's Watch (pinnacle lookout)
8. North field
9. South field (and horse pond)
10. The Silver Taproom (tavern)
11. The Green Door (inn and festhall)
12. Four Flying Fish (tavern)
13. The Lonely Mermaid (festhall)
14. The Bold Banners (festhall)
15. Dunstable's Sleeping Cat (guarded warehouse facilities)
16. Adderposts (junk and pawn shop)
17. Findar's Bag O' Nails (carpenter and woodworker, home and shop)
18. Sarguth's Wheelworks (wagons made, repaired, and refitted)
19. Tantul's Old Tankard (brewery)
20. The Elf On The Flying Stag (restaurant)
21. Beldarag's Finest (stables)
22. The Old Hoof (horse-powered grist mill)
23. Hunter's Lane
24. Bowshot Lane
25. Elndar's Watch
26. Glyndar Street
27. *Aencar Vigilant* (statue)
28. Armory and Stables of the Lord's Men
29. Battle Court (marshalling ground)
30. Rauthauvyr's Road

The Old Hoof grist mill, on north Rauthauvyr's Road, serves a dual purpose. Aside from the mill's prosaic and obvious function as a mill, the town uses a push bar fitted with manacles in the Old Hoof as a jail. Miscreants temporarily too weak, tired, or wounded to grind grain are draped over the bar or bound in place along it with their chains.

The most splendid structure in Essebra is Ilmeth's Manor, home of the hereditary lord of Essebra and war chancellor of the town. It stands at the innermost or rear walled area in a garden where one can see the statue of *Aencar Vigilant* — a sculpture of the Mantled King in granite that was enchanted by a mischievous wizard long ago (more about that later).

PLACES OF INTEREST IN Essebra Unique Sites

The Ghost Holds

A likely source of treasure for curious adventurers—as well as discarded gear and even possible homes—are the many abandoned and overgrown farmsteads and manor houses that lie both east and west of Rauthauvyr's Road just south of Essebra known as the Ghost Holds. The most famous of these ruins is the crumbling castle of Aencar's Manor (dealt with in its own section earlier), but between it and Essebra are several dozen lesser dwellings cloaked by the forest. Despite their collective name, it is rare to encounter undead in these fallen structures, since the Lord's Men, the volunteer band of adventurer-soldiers led by War Chancellor Ilmeth, chase out ghouls and other predators regularly. Nevertheless, the usual horrific tales of monsters and



tantalizing rumors of treasure are told about the Ghost Holds.

The traveler can readily see seven or so of these ruins by ascending the splendid natural lookout of Aencar's Watch (said to be the reason the Mantled King chose this spot for his capital in the first place) by means of a very steep footpath west of Dunstable's Sleeping Cat warehouses. Be warned that on several occasions brigands using trip cords and push poles have caused the deaths of lone visitors on this path, and plundered their bodies with impunity. Ascend alert, armed, and preferably with several companions.

Some of the larger ruins still have towers, stone-walled compounds, moats, and extensive storage cellars that are more or less intact—and most of the ruins are either home to, or regularly hunted through, by woodland monsters seeking easy food. No maps of the Ghost Holds area are known to survive, and some local shepherds say that bandits have purchased and destroyed the last of these available locally and have even despoiled maps in the libraries of nearby Sembian cities. Brigands and fugitives from justice in Sembia, Zhentil Keep, and Hillsfar have long been rumored to use the ruins as homes, moving from one to another whenever the Lord's Men or other large armed bands intrude.

All Essembrans agree that the woods south of the town are dangerous. (If they cut wood, set traps, or pick berries, they usually go north and west.) They also agree that the Ghost Holds are so numerous that one could spend several years just exploring them all! They are a relic of times when Essembra was much larger and more pros-

perous, and the Dale served as a woodland retreat for wealthy Sembian nobles and as Sembia's trading outpost with the elves and the few humans who then dwelt in the heavily forested western Dragon Reach lands.

One dark rumor even asserts that at least one ancient magical *gate* to other planes and several connections to the Underdark are hidden in the cellars of these ruins—and that slavers and some monstrous things still use them. The logs of the Lord's Men support this belief. They recount battles with a wide variety of creatures usually known in Faerûn only through the writings of sages and the wilder sermons of priests.

Residences

Ilmeth's Manor

It is a surprise to find a miniature moated castle in a town as small as Essembra, but that is what the hereditary local lord, War Chancellor Ilmeth—descended from Old Ilmeth, right-hand swordcaptain to King Aencar—lives in. Ilmeth is a grim, moody veteran warrior overly concerned with the safety of Battledale. He leads the Lord's Men, his band of soldiers, against monsters, brigands, and the like and has a small armory and stables for them here. The walls also enclose a garden (a gloomy place in the perpetual shade of several huge, old oak and walnut trees), a fish pond cloaked with lily pads, and the fortified manor house of the Ilmeth family.

The current war chancellor has no wife or descendants and may well prove to be the last of his line—but he is well protected: His magnificent wood-paneled home houses a comfortable domestic staff



and a six bodyguards. Visitors are admitted only on business—proposals of advantage to Essembra, in particular, get the gates to open—but the lucky few let in see maps to rival the libraries of Candlekeep and royal palaces elsewhere as well as the tattered banners, war trumpets, and battered shields of the great Dale heroes. All these fragments of history are preserved securely here largely because some sort of enchantment involving both watchghosts and invisible stalkers ensures that anyone who carries off a relic soon brings it back again.

Such relics include the mace of Aencar and the arm of Halondras. For those not familiar with ancient Dales history, Halondras was a petty king remembered mainly for his success at tirelessly conquering one self-styled lord's hold after another and adding each one to his own lands. He hewed out a small realm before dying in battle. His daughters found his body on the battlefield clutching in one hand both his own crown and the larger spired one made from the circlets of three lords he had conquered that he normally wore on his helm.

They could not pry his fingers open and did not want the crowns to fall into enemy hands, so they cut off his arm and burned his body that night. They spirited themselves and the arm away so that his slayer, an otherwise forgotten lord named Salygrar, found only bones and ashes where the king had fallen. The arm disappeared, buried by the daughters before they fled to other lands (from whence they never returned), and it was not until Ilmeth's adventuring days that it came to light in a monster-haunted network of tunnels under his own manor!

Local rumors tell that the tunnels go a long way into the woods and there come to the surface, allowing the war chancellor to enter and leave Essembra unseen. It is certain that with their aid Ilmeth never fell into the hands of Lashan's forces or the Sword of the South Zhent army that briefly occupied Essembra during the Time of Troubles. Tales are also told in the Dale about chests of gems and gold dust from Aencar's treasury being hidden down in the tunnels, but Ilmeth is not polite to folk who ask him about such things.

From my own researches I can tell you that secret passages honeycomb the thick stone walls of the manor and definitely connect Ilmeth's bedchamber with the kitchens, the cellars, and at least two other bedchambers. I can also say that one entry to this web of passages is gained by moving a suit of armor aside. However, since visitors may encounter over 60 full suits of armor standing throughout the manor amid the old weapons and blazoned shields, finding the right armor may take some time.

The sense of battle and long history is everywhere in Essembra. Local lore insists that somewhere in or near the town—in a magically hidden lair reached by stepping between a certain pair of trees, perhaps, or in the pit of a back-of-the-house privy—is the hastily hidden treasury of Lashan of Scardale: several chests of gold and platinum coins brought here to pay his mercenary troops and lost amid the confusion of battle and the collapse of his dreams of empire. Essembran citizens insist just as firmly, however, that any folk who start tearing apart homes, shops, or anything else in town looking for treasure will find



short and sharp endings to such careers and possibly to their lives, too.

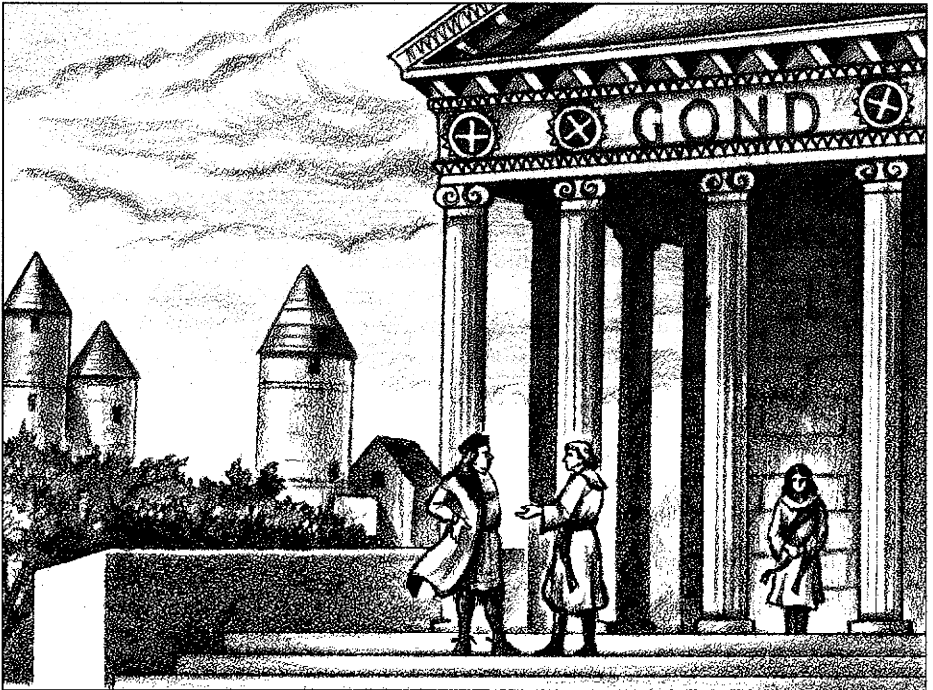
Temples The House of Gond

This temple has an impressive facade: broad stone steps ascend between massive pillars that support a portico adorned with gears—stone cogs that turn endlessly thanks to enchantments that also make them glow faintly in darkness. But the quiet splendor of this temple is marred by an air of snobbery and inertia. Here there is none of the excitement over new things and devices seen in other temples to Gond.

Visitors are not allowed to do more than view an entry hall crowded with interesting-looking but minor mechanisms—such as the screw-lift water pump

and the two-powder-mix cooking hot plate—while facing eloquent pleas for donations to the greater glory of Gond unless their devotion to the God of All Artifice impresses the underpriests. Then they summon Lord High Smith and Artificer Gulmarin Reldacap.

Only those who in Gulmarin's sole and haughty judgment serve Gond with sufficient dedication (that is, large monetary amounts) and style (conservative and respectful) receive any aid from Essembra's House of Gond. All others are treated to a blessing from the god and a further entreaty to join the faith—or if one of the faithful, an exhortation to renew and strengthen their dedication by undertaking a task of Gulmarin's choosing—and then shown the door.





Swordpoint Shrine

This simple stone chapel stands always open to the street, and travelers of any faith are welcome to take shelter herein if the weather is inclement. Those who attempt to set up camp within the walls, however, are directed firmly to the south field.

Swordpoint Shrine is staffed by priests from the nearby Abbey of the Sword, who can recount much of the war history of Battledale. If shown a map, they will readily point out battlefields and known ruins. They will display proudly the rusty shards of a blade said to have belonged to Aencar the Mantled King, as well as a plain dagger left behind in Esembra by Lashan, the self-styled Lord of the Dales, and several more dubious relics such as a blackened blade purportedly used by an elven warrior to slay a local red dragon several centuries ago.

The priests tend the sick and wounded for reasonable fees and also provide bed rest in the back room of the shrine. For tending the injured they ask a typical donation of 5 gp for an examination, the dressing and cleaning of wounds, the lancing of swellings, and the application of simple poultices and herbal medicines. Bed rest at the shrine costs an additional 1 gp per night, which includes bedpan and linen services plus simple fare of bread-and-milk puddings and watered wine. Medicines and *potions of healing* are also sold here. What is not in stock can be brought from the Abbey of the Sword in a day.

I am told that the usual shrine stock of holy water is 30 vials, which sell for 25 gp each, and 14 *potions of healing*, which can be had for 450 gp each; however, a discount of 20-30 gp is sometimes given if the person to be healed is a worshiper of Tempus who was afflicted as a result of battle. The priests will not sell more than 12 potions to any individual or group in case other needy persons arrive later.

Shops

Adderposts

Curiosities and Secondhand Goods



Named for its curious serpentine-carved spiraling door pillars, this notorious shop deals in secondhand and, occasionally, stolen goods.⁶ Because of the door detailing, rumors linger that this old, lofty-ceilinged building was once a temple to some dark serpent god.⁷ Adderposts enjoys a growing reputation in northern Sembia. It is *the* place to transact shady business for Sembians who do not want to be seen engaged in such activities by their fellows at any of the local Sembian shady establishments!

The proprietor, Duskar Flamehaern, is a soft-voiced man of few words and nocturnal habits who is known to have a loaded crossbow handy at all times. He dwells above the shop with his three daughters—beautiful, tall, thin, silent women with black curly hair that almost sweeps the floor when they unbind it. It is rumored that they are excellent forgers

⁶*Elminster*: By these coy words, Volo is attempting to imply that Duskar is the local fence for stolen goods. This implication is true, and Duskar has some very unsavory allies. His daughters are even more ruthless. They love to lure amorous travelers into situations where drugged wine can lead to easy robbery at best and a quick introduction to slavery at worst.

⁷*Elminster*: These rumors about a cult are true. Have fun finding out more, for I shall not tell you—other than to quote the motto of the cult: “The Serpent Never Sleeps.” Still words some live by today. . . .



and limners, able to paint holes, nail heads, and seams where none exist so well that only the closest examination can uncover the deceit!

The shop is a fascinating jumble of old masks, armor heaped up in piles, and rickety stairs ascending to this or that overhead bedchamber. (All of the bedchambers are probably linked above the uneven plank ceiling.) Lamps hang in profusion from the ceiling on bars that can be lowered by means of pulleys, and clothes hang on shoulder racks from every tread of the various ascending stairs. Only Duskar can quickly find anything in the chaos of his shop, but he knows where everything is and is enraged by browsers who pick up things, carry them around for a while, and then set them down elsewhere.

Adderposts is the place to come if you need something unusual in a hurry—particularly in the line of disguises, where a certain type of armor or uniform must be had and no other will do. Duskar seems to have specimens of every sort of military garb from the Moonsea and Dragon Reach lands. Coins he takes in payment are poured into one of a dozen or so speaking tubes that stand against pillars here and there around the shop—tubes that pour their contents down to unknown regions below. Change is brought to customers by one of Duskar's daughters, so it is likely thieves will not find any coin at all in the shop itself.

Beldarag's Finest Stable



This waystables is busy night and day swapping fresh horses to travelers in

exchange for their lame, exhausted, or mistreated mounts. To keep his reputation good, Beldarag never sells any mount he has just received in trade. This way sick and lame animals have a chance to heal, and the truly useless mounts do not earn him a customer's ire. (All such trade animals are taken to Beldarag's farm on Hunter's Lane.)

Beldarag is a very good judge of horse, and has bred certain of the beasts he has acquired in trade so shrewdly that horses bearing his own sword-and-stars brand are now ranked very highly in the Dragon Reach lands. Local Dale farms provide Beldarag with most of his stock, though, and the produce of other farms feeds the animals. The one-eyed old ex-warrior gets good prices on feed because he always harvests and takes away what he needs himself, freeing the farmers from the hauling work and expense.

Many merchants using Rauthauvyr's Road swap mounts here even when they do not really need to, knowing that they will get good horseflesh in the peak of condition. A typical riding horse costs 100 gp, and one can be traded in for 35 gp. A typical draft animal costs 260 gp and can be traded in for 100 gp.

Dunstable's Sleeping Cat Rental Storage



This row of rental warehouses is named for its most attractive fixture: the fat, furry, constantly snoring monstrosity that is the owner's pet cat. Indyn Dunstable is a spice merchant who grew tired of the ruthless, frenetic cut-and-thrust of Sembian trade and retired here to eke out a more meager but much eas-



ier living by offering clean, secure, no-questions-asked rental storage to all interested patrons.

The rules are: no unsecured magic, no kidnap victims or other living captives, no molds or other fungal growths, and no live or undead monsters can be stored. Everything else is fine. The staff will tend plants that need watering and take care of similar minimal maintenance tasks.

The warehouses are constructed of fused stone (that is, stout stone blocks melted together by magical means) and seem able to withstand almost everything. Each wall is pierced by a door and a ventilation grating, both of massive metal construction and covered by rolling shutters of even heavier metal. There may well be other defenses I am not aware of, but one can readily see the rooftop ballista emplacements, the triple-key locking system (so that intruders must overcome three specific guards to gain entry), and the 20-blade strong standing guard contingent. Above each door is also a weighted drop net that those on the roof use without hesitation to entangle intruders—even if their fellow guards are embroiled in some sort of fray. At least half of the guards are expert slingers who strike first at anyone who looks to be employing any sort of magic.

At least one of the guards is armed with a *wand of viscid globs*, and some four or so of them wear *rings of spell turning*. If you get past these, you must still face Dunstable, who has comfortable apartments in one of the three warehouses, and his cat. Dunstable employs an unknown personal array of magical items, and the cat is actually some sort of shapechanging monster that has reached

an understanding with the retired merchant. It can turn into something far more fearsome than an portly cat if facing intruders.

These defenses make Dunstable's *the* safe place to store your valuables—if you can afford the 25 gp per day per cubicle fees. A cubicle is 6 feet wide × 10 feet high × 10 feet deep, and the rental fee includes keys to its padlocked, openwork-grating front door. The walls, floor, and ceiling are solid stone. On my visit to the warehouses I swear I saw a throne with a crumbling, long-dead crowned occupant inside one cubicle!

Many adventuring bands virtually make Dunstable's their home while on forays in the area—but be aware that he does not allow patrons to cook, eat, bathe, or sleep in his warehouses, and that he removes all goods in rental space no longer paid for into "safe storage cellars" underground nearby. These cellars have their own monstrous guardians (rumors of links to drow are simply talk, I assure you). Goods are recovered from these storage cellars only upon payment of the lapsed daily storage fees plus a penalty—though I have also heard that Dunstable can be flexible in negotiations with the needy.

Durn's Forge

Weaponsmith and Blacksmith



This smithy is known as "Durn Blacksmith" to some folk because that is what the sign over the door says. Here lives and works Durn the Red, a jovial giant of a man who once fought as a hiresword all over the Inner Sea lands. He once picked up a haughty Zhentilar commander in full



plate armor and with one arm threw the man, underhanded, across the smithy, out its open door, and into the horse trough outside a good six paces beyond. Many Essembran folk tell tales of his breaking what he deemed an inferior sword blade simply by grasping it at both ends, barehanded, and pulling his fists down and toward each other! Most of the time, however, Durn spends his days hammering out horseshoes and tools of solid, dependable quality. His scythe blades are favored by farmers all across the Dales.

Durn loves to make swords of large size—and his parlor trick to impress haughty visitors is to casually snatch down a two-handed sword from the rafters and with a single backhand swing, not looking at his target, “behead” a solid oak post as large around as the great helm perched on it! Durn does not want to become every Sembian’s pet swordmaker, however, so he requires both huge fees in advance (up to ten times the normal price of a blade) and notice of a month before beginning work on a commission. He discourages thieves by pointing out his guardian sword: a naked, floating long sword that appears and disappears silently and at random here and there around the smithy. Durn warns that it hunts down and slays all who take things from his smithy without paying for them in full.

The truth is that the sword is a harmless apparition, the result of a wizard’s miscast curse against Durn. The curse was upon him during his mercenary days for his part in the pillaging of a mage’s tower. The sword never manifests far from him and has no solid exist-

tence, but more than one of the smith’s lady friends over the years has been terrified by its sudden appearance during more intimate moments and complained of feeling a chill as it floated *through* her!

Durn must be wealthy, but shows no sign of having a great deal of money. He employs only a few apprentices and lives simply, enjoying the company of ladies awed by his mighty size and strength.

Findar's Bag o' Nails

*Woodworking, Carpentry
and Findings*



Findar’s is a pleasant, crowded place dominated by trestle tables, shavings, half-finished items, and the smell of fresh-cut cedar. Run by a man who seems eager to help, Findar’s is a fast-growing business: The wing that houses a selection of ready-made chairs and travel chests seems as new as the wares it contains. This woodworker and carpenter also deals in nails of all sizes, hooks, and locks. Findar tries to have at least one sample of each regular (not custom-made or specially ordered) item he makes on display, which makes this shop very useful to the traveler in a hurry.

Findar is a young, slim man with a pointed black beard and an air of nervous energy. He is no fine craftsman, but his work is solid and dependable and boasts reinforced corners and stress points. A dozen local youths are learning the trade as apprentices alongside him—and with ever-growing orders for packing crates and strongchests from Hillsfar and Sembia, their hands are needed.



The Hitching Post

General Store



The Post is an unexciting but very useful place. Many a passing merchant has found its stock of spare wagon wheels, tarps, and lashing cords to be a boon from the gods! This large, well-stocked general store sells oil, spices, rope, clothing from Sembia, parchment and a variety of inks, and fine metalwork from the Moonsea. In other words, it sells all the things that the verdant farms and thick copses of Battledale cannot produce. The sleek proprietor, Rhannon, overcharges shamelessly. If customers cavil at her prices, she shrugs and tells them they can no doubt find what they need more cheaply “just down the road in Sembia.”

Every town seems to have one citizen who knows all, sees everything, and wields a lot of local power behind the scenes—and in Essembra, Rhannon seems to be the one. Adventurers are warned that this wily, stout little lady is not as old as she looks, has an exciting past adventuring career of her own, and is quite able to defend herself.

The Old Hoof

Grist Mill



This grist mill serves the needs of both local farmers and the brewery in town. Its millstones are powered by horses harnessed to the spoke spars of two gigantic driving wheels. The horses walk endlessly around and around in the straw-covered turf when the mill is grinding, working in hour-long shifts that overlap slightly, so

that one wheel is up to speed before the other winds down to a stop.

As mentioned before, miscreants may be sentenced to a day or a shift at the wheel, pushing or pulling as they please in their manacles. On one recent occasion, a band of brigands was caught lurking in the woods near the north field by the Lord's Men. They had no loot and hence could be convicted of no crime but failing to leave the area when ordered to do so by the Lord's Men on an earlier patrol. They were sentenced to dawn-to-sundown duty at the wheel.

As the brigands numbered 14, all the horses were unhitched from one wheel and the brigands alone—men and women, sweating together—were harnessed in their places, with cleverly knotted ropes tied about each of them and one other brigand to prevent them from pulling free of their places. Once word got around, many of the townsfolk turned out to watch and even bid for chances to switch the increasingly hot and exhausted brigands with twigs. Not one of the brigands lasted through the whole day until sundown. By eveningfeast only two warriors (who had recovered from being pulled by their fellows earlier) were left grimly plodding along, dragging the groggy, scraped, and bruised bodies of their fellows through the straw.

The brigands were revived, tended overnight, and in the morning put to work at the pull wheel again to finish their shifts. It took the weakest of them most of three days to accomplish one day's worth of shifts. When the punishment was done and they were freed, they all fled and have not been seen in Battledale from that day to this.



Sarguth's Wheelworks

Wagonmaking, Wheelmaking, and Wagon Repairs



This shop does more than just make wheels. It is a fast, efficient assembly line where teams of skilled workers under the watchful eye of fat, shrewd, old Sarguth make, repair, and refit wagons. "While-one-waits" jobs are always steeply priced here (usually 25 gp per hour or more), but the replacement of single wagon wheels at Sarguth's is cheaper than at the Hitching Post—and here the coins cover the lifting of your conveyance and installation of the wheel, whereas at the Post you simply come out with a wheel in your hands and some crippling work ahead of you!

I recommend a visit to this shop to any shopkeeper interested in how swiftly things can be made by many folk working together, each one skilled at one or two tasks. Such entrepreneurs should find it fascinating!

Tantul's Old Tankard

Brewery



Tantul's, the local brewery, stands at the edge of its own barley fields and atop deep, cool wells that almost gush with water; little pumping is required. Here one can buy flagons, handkegs, or butts (cart-sized, and requiring at least six people to shift when full) of the thick, nutty-flavored local brew, Tantul's Dark. This stout is doctored with crushed berry juice and even more secret ingredients and is very much an acquired taste. Its spicy ropy thickness makes it almost a meal rather than a thirst-quencher!

If you like what locals call "proper Battledale beer," however, this is the place to

buy it. A flagon is 1 cp, a handkeg is 8 cp, and a butt is 1 gp. Do not expect prices less than twice that elsewhere!

The fat, lazy brewers here seem to partake liberally of their own wares and are rarely hurried into doing anything. I also noticed that huge wheels of cheese and black bread seemed to be lying on every handy surface ready for carving and eating with one's fresh-drawn tankard. I would have been happier if the waiting knives buried in the bread or cheese had not so often been adorned with an equally fat, lazy rat!

Taverns

Four Flying Fish



The name of this dark, smoky drinking spot comes from a fight between the one-time proprietor and his wife. Business was slow and getting slower thanks to bad beer and a rougher clientele than other local tankard houses, so Balooout Ornysh unwisely told his wife Daera to stop waiting on tables and start dancing on them.

She refused in no uncertain terms, and said it would do more to bring in the louts if *he* danced on the tables instead! A fight developed and raged throughout the tavern—to the vast amusement of patrons—before it ended in Balooout's unconsciousness. During the festivities, he was struck in the face by no fewer than four (frozen!) thrown fish from his own larder.

Business has picked up over the years, and both of the taverns in town are now full from the time when roads grow hard enough to be used in spring to the first bad snows of winter. Through three sets of subsequent owners, however, the tradition of throwing fish has remained.



The Four (as locals call it) now does have hired dancers atop its larger and sturdier tables from time to time—but patrons who take liberties with them or who disturb the peace are likely to hear a shouted chorus of “Fish!” moments before a cloud of frozen and rather battered-looking longjaws strike them down. These fish are kept for the purpose and reused. It is popular in Essembra for folk who have no money to bet with to offer to eat the most shapeless longjaws from the Four if they lose.

This amusing tradition aside, travelers will find the Four to be very ordinary. Dim lighting in the Four conceals flies in the beer and a general unclean condition,

and no one stops customers from getting too drunk to hold in previous meals or keep their manners. The price of the beer—1 cp per talltankard with a free refill thrown in—keeps the place packed, however.

One hears a lot of muttering in dark corners as unsavory business is done here—but beware the doppleganger on staff (and on retainer to the war chancellor, whose friend he is), who can send an earstalk snaking along under tables to eavesdrop on talk that the participants no doubt think is safely private! This eavesdropper goes by the name of Erritt, and usually takes the shape of a silent, slack-witted, very petite wench.⁸

⁸*Elminster*: Erritt is the only shapechanging monster who holds official citizenship in Essembra. “She” once rescued Ilmeth’s life during the war chancellor’s adventuring days, and they fought side by side often until Ilmeth inherited the lordship of Essembra. Erritt still has rooms in Ilmeth’s Manor and some folk in town whisper that this “weird man-eating monster” is the war chancellor’s consort. I tell you here that the local belief about Ilmeth and Erritt is true. Do not attack the doppleganger, and she will not harm you. There is more to her tale and doings than should be revealed here.



The Four is currently owned by a couple from Daerlûn, the half-elven Taladar Snowstars and his human wife Ildaeryle. They regard Errit as their best friend in the world. That is, overall, a good thing, because the doppleganger spends a lot of time helping to raise their two infant children.

INNS

The Green Door



Until Lashan of Scardale occupied Essembra and slaughtered most of the folk working at this establishment in search of the woman who tried to slay him when he commandeered her bed with her in it, the Green Door was the most riotous and notorious festhall in all the Dales. Its roaring parties and ribaldry, however, concealed its secondary role as a shrine sacred to Mielikki.

The Door is a place of pilgrimage for followers of that forest goddess because it stands on the site of a pool whose waters held visions sent to her faithful by her. These tranquil waters, now preserved in their own wooded backyard bower, are the real "Green Door," not the green-painted front entry door that most folk think the establishment's name comes from.

The faithful say Mielikki appeared in person to the famous ranger Florin Falconhand here, and that it was Mielikki's hand that caused the three swordsmen who slew the ladies of the Green Door on Lashan's orders to wither like dead leaves and die horribly, desiccated into hollow husks. Worshipers of the Lady of the For-

est still come here for private reverence, and the proprietors still give them everything at half price.

Lashan's word, however, did what the most scandalized Dalesfolk could not: It ended the Green Door's reign as the foremost festhall in all the Dales. These days it is officially just an inn, though some say the permanent guests on the third floor provide the same escort services formerly so brazen and popular at the Door.⁹

The Door is run by four half-elven ladies. Elves and the half-elven are particularly welcome here. I met Lady Sharlee, one of the four, when I visited. She was both graceful and gracious, and she showed me around a house that is clean, simply furnished, and given over to quiet rest. Harping chambers have been set aside at the hearth end of each floor for people to meet and talk in, but the layout of the building provides no common dining hall or taproom. In a touch harking back to the true meaning of the inn's name, wall tapestries throughout the building display splendid forest scenes.

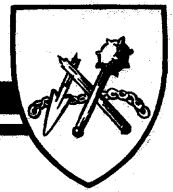
Festhalls

The Bold Banners



The house of the Bold Banners stands on Rauthauvyr's Road, its balconies looking out over the passing traffic. It is the most exclusive and expensive festhall in Essembra—and probably in all the Dales. The formerly wanton banners for which it is named are now tasteful pennants displaying the badges of satisfied past patrons who have consented to the use of their coats-of-arms as an endorsement.

⁹*Elminster*: Of course they do. Why else would folk pay such prices to stay at what is a simple—if clean and quiet—inn?



The escorts of the house often take their meals out on the balconies—and the house bodyguards have instructions to keep the road watered in front of the festhall when necessary, so that no dust rises to sully them.

That careful attention to detail is typical of the kind, graceful owner and senior escort of the Bold Banners: the lady known as Belurastra. Her wits brought her house intact through a Zhentilar occupation during the Time of Troubles despite the Zhen-tarim mages making the Banners their personal home. Folk in Essemбра believe she actually managed to slay the most powerful wizard, Spellmaster of the Sword of the South army, and survive.¹⁰

Under her reign, the Bold Banners has lost all trace of the bawdy, and become an exclusive inn and dining club whose heavily padded meeting rooms offer Essem-brans and visitors their best venue for conducting private business—as well as pursuing private pleasures. As a result, entire floors of the Banners are often reserved for months or even years in advance by Sembian cabals who meet to do business behind closed doors here and unwind only afterward.

The sensitivity of some of the negotiations here—which have included quite separate but uniformly unsuccessful overtures by both Sembia and Cormyr to various Dales regarding the possible annexation of those Dales and meetings between Maalthiir of Hillsfar and Elminster of Shadowdale to establish just what behavior on the part of the former would and would not be tolerated by the latter—have made necessary a skilled and capable security force equivalent in training

and magical might to a very successful band of adventurers. On at least two occasions these house bodyguards have been reinforced by Harpers and by certain of the Knights of Myth Drannor, and they may well possess means of calling on their aid again. Disagreeing with the good swords of the house would not be a wise thing to do.

The menu of the Banners is varied and accomplished, with a small but judicious selection of wines fronting dishes whose minty or spicy side sauces need conceal no shortcomings in the cooking or portions. The ring of a bell brings swift personal service, or one can choose to dine with one's choice of a comely companion who both enjoys the meal with one and serves one with the viands throughout. After my stay, I must join the folk of the banners out front in recommending that all travelers on Rauthauvyr's Road, whatever their personal tastes in entertainment, patronize the Bold Banners just to see what good taste and wealth can do in presenting all patrons with quietly luxurious accommodations.

The Lonely Mermaid



The oceanic theme of this house is hard to miss: Blue-green draperies are hung everywhere, interspersed with pedestals bearing marble miniatures of the striking life-sized sculpture that dominates the front hall: a mermaid rising from a wave with a longing expression and both arms outstretched to embrace the viewer.

Except for these sculptures and the plethora of very beautiful and well-

¹⁰And so she did, as recounted in the novel *All Shadows Fleed* by Ed Greenwood (TSR, Inc., 1995).



dressed ladies wandering the halls with decanters and goblets in their hands, the Mermaid resembles the best inns everywhere. It is clean, brightly lit, and tastefully—if sparsely—furnished. Good meals (firmly in the “good hearty roasts” roadside inn style) are served in a dining room on the ground floor.

All festive activities take place behind discreet closed doors except in the cellars, where a spiral back stair leads down into the Mermaids’ Grot, a spell-lit, lukewarm bathing pool where guests and staff can frolic. Here wine flows freely, and private bowers and dive-tunnels sprawl on all sides. There are even rumors that a real mermaid dwells down here in the dimmest depths and rises to embrace evil men or those who mistreat her staff members, dragging such miscreants



down to drown in her embrace. I questioned my hostess, Merilee Glesta, the Lady of the House, about this—but she smilingly turned my queries aside and gave me no straight answer.

RESTAURANTS

The Elf on the Flying Stag



Thanks to its fanciful signboard, it is hard to miss this eatery in the outer walled “ward” of Essembra. (Who ever heard of blue stags with pegasi-like wings—or an elf deciding to wear not much more than a silly-looking winged helm and a sly expression when agreeing to ride such a thing, either?) The Elf is also the only place in town that whole families of local citizens can be seen trudging toward early on most evenings.

One might expect such a universally patronized place to serve good hearty food but to also be both crowded and noisy—and one would be right. The Elf is as wild as a busy market. Younglings run everywhere and throw food into all areas they have not yet disrupted. The din is terrific: Everyone bellows away at full blast, and metal dishes and tankards (wisely, they don’t use anything else here) crash and clatter in the midst of it all in an almost continuous cacophony.

You share your board with whoever else wants to worm in beside you, here—and youthful patrons and frequent customers seem to take deliberate delight into breaking up groups or even separating married couples. As my nearest table companion remarked, “It’s a bit like being in the midst of knights hacking away at other knights in full battle—only noisier.”



The Silver Taproom

Tavern



The Silver Taproom is the most popular stopping place for travelers anywhere on Rauthauvyr's Road in Essembra. The Tap, as most regulars call it, specializes in swifflly serving ice-cold draft (or in winter, hot cider) and a meat-filled hand pastry meal to one's stirrup or wagonboard. Its popularity comes from the fact that folk with their coins ready can get food and drink in a trice and continue on to camp elsewhere by the roadside for free—or for a few silver pieces on a farm front outside of town.

The Place

The Tap fronts on Battle Court and stands just outside the walled center of Essembra. Once an inn and later a fortified guardpost, it presents an impressive stone front to the road with a welcoming front archway flanked by two smaller entrances out of which the well-trained tavern staff leap to deal with wagons and riders pulling to a stop outside the gate. A mounting block assists patrons in getting down from their carriages and the staff in reaching those perched aloft.

Travelers who pull their wagons in beside the inn or surrender their mounts to the hostlers and go inside to enjoy "a sit by the Tap" with the locals find themselves in a justly popular, pleasant taproom. The room is hung with stag's heads and candlewheel lanterns, crowded with glossy-polished tables, and filled with folk good-naturedly chuckling away over jests. The spirit of the place is warm and friendly,

and the taproom is attached to unusually large and well-lit jakes for both sexes and a few back rooms where drunkards can sleep off their disgrace in peace.

Upstairs are gaming rooms and rooms that can be rented for meetings at a flat 20 gp per night in season and 12 gp per night—plus 4 gp for firewood if the hearth is to be lit—in winter. Though one is not supposed to sleep overnight in these rooms, the staff members turn a blind eye to adventuring bands doing so—so long as they do not disturb the folk in neighboring rooms with weapons practice or similar excitements in the wee hours.

The Prospect

The Tap offers hand meals—that is, pasties and filled buns that one can eat one-handed while drinking or riding with the other—and a small selection of good beers, from the local Tantul's Dark through Dragon's Breath Beer, Shadow-dark Ale, Purple Dragon Ale, Archenwood Stout, and Bitter Black. Brandies, zzar, sheries, and a few white wines can also be had. These are priced by the tall-tankard or bottle according to availability. In cold weather, hot cider and soup can be had by the talltankard, too.

The accent here is on getting what you order into your hands fast. To do this, the outside staff members employ leather-covered pitchers equipped with long pour spouts to dispense beer, and reach baskets (covered wicker bowls affixed to long poles) to lift hot buns, slabs of cheese, and hand pastries up to all customers. The inside staff members use covered pitchers to prevent sloshing, and chest trays to keep spills to a minimum—and they hustle!



The Provender

Fare at the Tap is made on the premises. Roast fowl and stewed sauces are ladled into buns baked in the kitchens or pinched into dough with spiced potatoes, mustard, and cold cut roasts. The only form of hand food not served here is the sausage, because the owner, Roliver Thynd, has a hatred of sausages—or more precisely, of the cold, decaying lumps of fat and offal that his mouth found in the sausages that were fed to him when he was young.

The venison pies here are particularly fine, because the cooks toss powdered almonds into the red wine used in the simmer sauce. The venison soaks overnight in the sauce and is then simmered in it for the morning so that the pies can be baked and ready for early evening.

The Prices

All beer at the Tap is sold by the talltankard. It is 3 cp for Tantul's Dark, 4 cp for Dragon's Breath Beer and Shadowdark Ale, 6 cp for Purple Dragon Ale, and 1 sp for Bitter Black. Other beverages are priced by the talltankard or bottle and by the season except for cold tea, which is always 1 cp. In winter, hot drinks such as cider and soup—usually duck soup—are 1 sp per talltankard. Food pricing is simpler: 5 cp per pastry and 2 cp per bun in the winter, and 1 sp per pastry or 5 cp per bun in all other seasons.

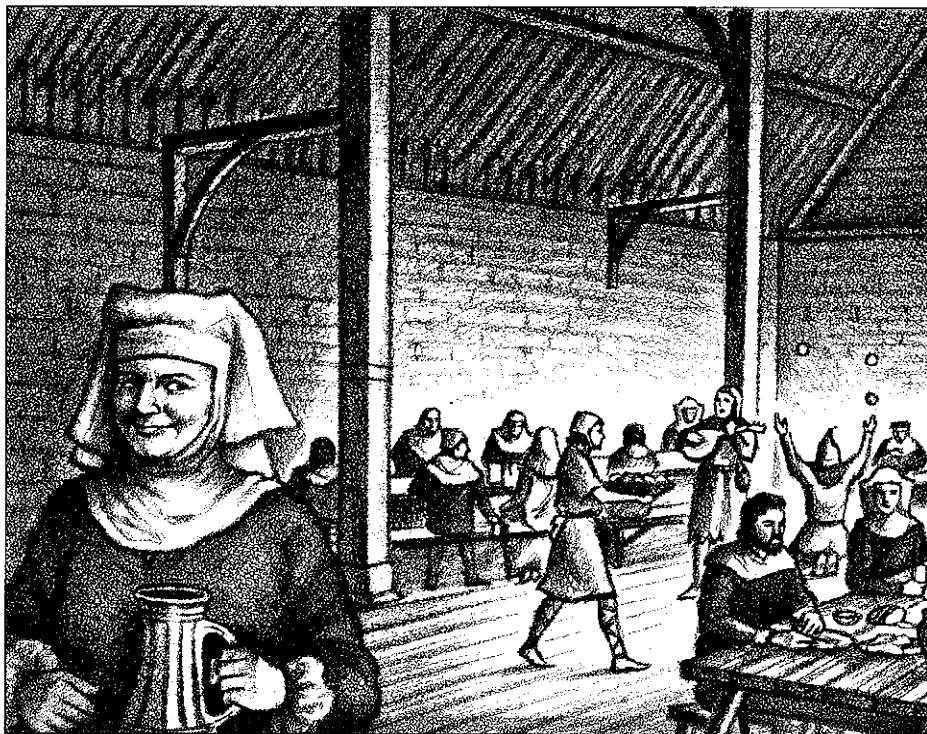
Travelers' Lore

The reader may well wonder why I have covered such a mundane—if popular—place at length in these pages. The reason is the Curse of Anadar.

Anadar was a one-legged mage whose mobility was severely limited when he was not using a *fly* spell. As luck would have it, Lashan's forces rode into Essembra while Anadar was in his rented room at the Tap feverishly researching spells. Unable to move from his chair, he died there when a fearful invading warrior discovered him and his cat familiar and impaled them both on a spear that thrust through the chair and deep into a suit of partially enchanted armor on a stand behind it. A blue flame is said to have slowly consumed spear, armor, chair, cat, and wizard, as the transfixed mage gasped out a last agonized incantation—and the Curse of Anadar was born.

From that night on, random folk who drink anything inside the Tap are overcome with the Curse: Their wits leave them, ghostly armor seems to surround their forms, and they stalk toward the nearest human male warrior who served under Lashan, seeking to slay that man by any means. Some of the targets of people afflicted by the Curse have been brigands living in the woods near Essembra, others were successful merchants now flourishing in Scardale or Sembia—and a few have been mercenaries serving in Hillsfar or Zhentil Keep. The Curse cares not how distant or well protected Lashan's former soldiers may be. It simply selects one quarry, who does not change thereafter even if another former warrior of Lashan moves or is positioned closer to the curse victim, to die.

Sages say it is the limited, pain-filled mind of the familiar that drives victims of the Curse to slay in vengeance for the dead mage—and the remaining vestiges



of Anadar's sentience that keep the Curse's victim from walking off cliffs, charging into leveled weapons, and the like. Victims of the Curse cannot be roused from thrall or swayed from their mission by any known means, although the enchantment wears off by the next dawn or when they have slain their quarry. They take no notice of any folk save their quarry and any who attack them and stride along determined to deal death with whatever weapons are at hand, regardless of their own class and skills. Enthralled mages never employ their own spells, but Anadar does protect them after a fashion.

The shimmering armor that appears around those suffering from the Curse seems to lessen all physical damage

suffered by the cursed victim by half. It also intercepts any and all spells and magical fields of effect, harmful and beneficial, and converts them into a *flame strike* (just like the spell used by priests of many faiths) on the quarry if that being is within view of the Curse victim or onto a random being or item if the quarry has not yet been reached.

Various means to end the Curse of Anadar have been tried, but all attempts have been utterly without success. These days, the folk of the Tap just keep quiet about the Curse unless pressed for information in the presence of someone obviously afflicted by it and hope that each affected drinker is the last.



The Watchful Eye

Inn



This justly popular inn is a favorite stopover on Rauthauvyr's Road. Folk can easily find it by the large, open, lidless staring eye that looks down the road painted on each side of the inn, so that the inn seems to stare in both directions. The eye that faces south was liberally used for target practice by certain drunken cross-bowmen during Lashan's occupation and hence has a worm-eaten look.

The Place

This large, half-timbered building looks like just what it is: a converted former manor house. The ground floor is made of stone and has arched casement windows whose shutters have been adorned with crude but striking silhouette carvings of dancing bears, leaping stags, charging boars, and running hares. Drainpipes lead down to huge rain barrels at many places along the walls. The barrels are big enough to bathe or sleep in, but beware: Some folk have been found drowned within them after sudden storms! Chimneys at either end of the angled building and at its bend (underlaid by the busy kitchens) keep folk warm in winter, and the building's large windows are opened in hot weather to let breezes blow through. Overall, the Eye is a solid-looking, welcoming place with good furnished rooms, even if it is a trifle sparsely and simply decorated.

At one time the Eye was home to the now-extinct Iskyl noble family exiled from Chessenta. The Eye still has the extensive storage cellars they dug out, including one, local lore whispers, that stretches out into

the trees south of the inn and comes to the surface there. This long tunnel cellar allows certain folk to sneak in and out of the place without being seen, which is how the three beautiful daughters of the innkeeper escaped the hands of Lashan's soldiers.

These cellars formerly held great quantities of food and firewood against the harsh winters when the manor stood isolated in elven-held deep woods, kept the riches of the family safe behind concealed doors, and held the bones of fallen Iskyls. Some of the Iskyl riches—notably a chest of pearls “bigger than an ogre's eyeball”—are still hidden down in the cellars in now-forgotten hiding places. The Iskyl crypt lies at the westernmost extent of the cellars under Rauthauvyr's Road. It has several times been afflicted with the rise of undead. The present owner of the inn does not discourage talk about these undead creatures in an effort to keep thieves from descending the many back stairs of the Eye to wander freely about the cellars.

The Prospect

The Watchful Eye offers comfortable accommodation, to be sure, but its fame is built on the output of its kitchens. Housewives of Esembra line up at the serving shutters of the kitchens to take home the same thing that guests crowd into the dining room for: the best chicken and turkey pastries in all the Dales!

Folk come from all over Battledale to dine here from a menu that consists of little more than drink, various pickles, roast boar, venison, hare, sauces, and the famous pies. Not a few rich and haughty Sembians who hurry past the crude backlands of the Dales on their important travels between their own realm and the bustling cities of the Moonsea make a



point of stopping here to eat. Their expectations have led to small but steady improvements in the amenities offered to guests, so that the Eye has become a good—if not spectacular—hostelry.

The owner of the Eye, Chesduk Malrit, is a weary and bitter man today. The death of his wife a few winters back took all the life from him, it seems. He spends most of his time these days walking the woods and smoking his pipe and lends a hand with inn work only to repair chairs, tables, doors, boot jacks, and other wooden items that need work or replacement. Luckily for travelers, Chesduk's three daughters—energetic, laughing beauties who have grown adroit at resisting the blandishments of many smitten guests over the years—have taken over the running of the Eye without any formal agreement or arguments.

On my last three visits I recognized undercover Harper agents among the staff, and I suspect Harper assistance helped the daughters rebuff several Sembian high-pressure offers to buy the Eye. More recent purchase overtures have come from the Darkwater Brand of Archendale, whose owners are *most* anxious to buy the inn, and from the Sword of the South, who wants the inn for his (or her) troops during their stays. I would not be surprised to soon learn of a daughter or two wedding Harpers in the future—but for the time being, Aleesha, Baernysse, and Lathyleea remain in the hopeful dreams of many travelers on Rauthauvyr's Road. And every

one of these women knows how to make the Eye's famous pies.

The Provender

Though modesty forbids too much discussion of such things,¹¹ your scribe can claim several accomplishments in life, and one of these can only be delicately described as “a way with the ladies.”¹² It is my bound duty to assist the reader in every way, and it was with this diligent task in mind that I set out—armed with a bottle of the very best elverquisst, I might add—to learn all I could of the superb viands served in the dining room of the Eye from Lathyleea, the, er, most lonesome of the owner's daughters. It is with a humble mien¹³ that I can report success. On the handwritten insert on the next page, then, is the simple recipe that has made the Eye famous.

As you can see, the recipe is rather straightforward. There must be some trick to the doing Lathyleea omitted telling me or some superb peculiarity of the local ingredients that makes the pies so special. I am also told by regulars that some gravy from the roasts and some tiny forest mushrooms sometimes find their ways into the pastry dough when Aleesha is running the kitchen—and that the pies are especially fine on such occasions.

The Prices

Folk buying their meals through the window can expect to pay 7 cp per pie, or 5 cp per trencher (yes, a trencher is a thick

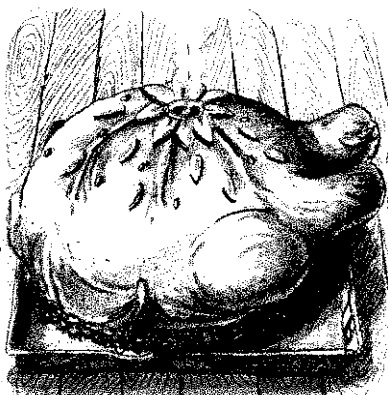
¹¹*Elminster*: Insert derisive snort here.

¹²*Elminster*: I can only wonder what way he means here—the way to make women give polite or rude excuses to get rid of him?

¹³*Elminster*: Humble mien and a twinkle in the eye designed to make ye think he got more than just the single recipe out of her. Don't worry, he did not. I was watching the whole time in disguise. Lathyleea has better things to do than spend her evening listening to the honeyed words of some idiot who is actually proud of the name “Volo.” The disguise spell was simplicity itself, and the elverquisst as good as always, but how women wear those tight-laced bodices I do *not know*.



Stuffed Turkey Pie



- 1 large turkey (plucked, innards turned out, and head and feet removed)
- 1 turkey liver (chop it fyne!)
- 1 end of old sausage
- 1 pour of brandy
- 1 handful goose innards (chopped fyne)
- 1 fist of butter ¹⁴ (let stand and soften)
- 1 end of leek or onion (chopped fyne!)
- 1 finger ¹⁵ of ground black pepper
- 2 handfuls of salt
- 1 handful truffles (or black wrinkle Dale mushrooms)
- 1 pinch of sage
- 1 pinch of parsley
- 1 pinch of chives
- 1 egg (yolk only)
- 1 pour of milk
- 3½ cups flour
- 4 knives ¹⁶ bacon fat
- Cold water

Set first thy oven to warm with a goodly fyre. Let it be made hot and kept that way.

Do any chopping ye must to make the ingredients be as listed above, then take the liver and half the salt and pepper, as well as all the onion, sage, parsley, and chives, and mix them all in a bowl so that no single thing clumps together with itself, but all are mixed very well.

Take also the sausage, and chop it cold; overly fatty sausage is fyne — discard not the fat. Then mix it in with the rest, drizzling in the brandy as ye do so.

When all is mixed, spoon the mixture into the cavity of the turkey. If there is space to spare within, add extra mushrooms, onion strips, and potato peels to fill. Then truss up the bird with thread or fyne stryng. Place the bird in a roasting pan, brush it with the butter until it is all used, sprinkle it with the rest of the pepper, and salt it until ye have held back but a finger's worth.

Put the bird in the oven and let it roast whilst ye make the pastry.

Sift the flour, then add in the last finger of salt and sift again. Cut in the fat with a knife, and sprinkle the mixture sparkingly with cold water (use thy fingertips) until ye have added just enough to make the dough all hold together. Use the knife to mix it lightly.

Move the turkey to the lip of the oven to cook at a lesser heat while ye roll out the dough. Turn the pan around at least once during the rolling so that one syde be not burnt and the other cool.

¹⁴Elminster: Unsalted, of course. As I have said before, only barbarians salt their butter.

¹⁵A finger of spice is a heap large enough to thinly cover the top of a cook's finger.

¹⁶A knife is the amount of something sticky or gluey that will balance atop the blade of a goodly sized cook's knife. Elminster says that in our world, four knives is about one cup.



Flour thy board and roll out the pastry upon it until it the flattened dough is large enough to wrap around the entire bird.

Take the bird from the oven and let it stand until cool enough to handle. (While waiting, drink beer or cool minted water and wipe the sweat from off ye!) Then put the turkey in the center of the spread pastry and with thy knife pluck out the truss thread.

Wrap the bird entirely in the pastry, moistening its edges to pinch them properly and make a good seal. Then make a hole in the top of the pastry about as large around as thy thumb to vent the steam and juices.

Set the encased bird upon a flat shield sheet to cook in the oven again, first brushing it all over with a mixture of the

egg yolk and the milk stirred together in a bowl with the fingers. Bake until golden brown and crisp — and 'tis done!

If the pie is to be served forthwith, lay out three table bowls and cut the bird into pieces, letting the pastry break off and scooping out the stuffing into one bowl and the turkey and the pastry into the others. Serve with a poultry sauce if desired.

If the pie is to be eaten later, cook it until the pastry is just beginning to show brown and then take it from the oven and place it in a covered tureen or great pot and take it to a cold cellar. When the pie is to be eaten, take it out and sprinkle it liberally with water, then heat it in the oven until golden brown and serve as said above.

slab of bread) of whatever roast is available. Prices in the dining room are 2 cp higher for each, and all drinks are 6 cp per talltankard or tallglass. The wine selection is good but very limited. A bed is 1 gp per night, a private room runs 2 gp per night, and a suite with private jakes and bath cost 4 gp per night.

Travelers' Lore

Guests who slip the porters 3 cp can see the cellar door carved with the Iskyl arms: a shield, surrounded by ornate scrolls and bunting, whose sky¹⁷ is forest green and bears a bronze hawk in flight from low on the sinister toward high on the dexter. One talon of the hawk is manacled in silver, and from this manacle trail three links of silver chain, the last one broken open. The family motto is unreadable on

the door and has been lost with time in other records.

This pleasant coat-of-arms is said to be carved in miniature on many chests and coffers that held the Iskyl family wealth. One of these can be seen in a market hall in Ordulin, where it is now used to hold the ivory vote tallies used by merchant organizations, but most of the others are lost. These treasure chests still sit in dark places, local lore insists, holding the family wealth ready for the one bold (or lucky) enough to find them!

One local belief puts the largest treasure vault under the family crypt, accessible only through the false bottom of a coffin that houses the skeleton of a family foe slain at the manor when he came to seize an Iskyl maid and marry her by force. If this coffin exists, it has yet to be found by the Malrits.

¹⁷Elminster: In thy world, ye would use the word *field* here instead of sky. In either case, what is meant is the background.



Hap

This village is located off the good roads and at the base of Haptooth Hill, the best landmark for travelers cutting across country from Essembra and points north to Scardale, lower Featherdale, or Harrowdale. Scarcely more than a dozen major buildings stand amid the trees here, although more than a score of cottages belonging to woodcutters and herbgrowers are scattered along winding lanes that spread out in all directions from Hap's well and muddy open market.

Haptooth Hill rises like a gray-white tooth out of the oak, beech, and maple trees, towering above the village. Its southern face, above Hap, is almost a sheer cliff. Its summit is crowned by the ruins of a tower where a Red Wizard of Thay once dwelt surrounded by dragons! Many caverns and tunnels lie within the Hill, too. They are the abode of drow, who emerged to seize control of the village not so long ago!

Today, travelers find now drow-free Hap a peaceful place where acorn butter, carved carrying boxes and other woodwork, and pots of preserved herbs can be bought for resale elsewhere. The adventuresome still scale the northern and western flanks of Haptooth Hill in search of rumored treasure—and still go missing.

The law in Hap is War Watcher Elphron Pharlyn, a veteran officer in the Lord's Men of Essembra appointed to this post of judge and chief watch officer by Lord and War Chancellor Ilmeth of Essembra. Elphron has a staff of two men-at-arms and a messenger boy. He is a slow, even-tempered man whose

tolerance of small transgressions but firm upholding of the general peace has won him the grudging respect of locals; they come to his aid if he is challenged. Elphron reports all suspicious visitors and activities to Ilmeth via patrols from the Abbey of the Sword and through the Lord's Men, who swing through Hap every two or three days.

Adventurers inclined to laugh at the small staff of War Watcher Pharlyn, its provincial ways, or the apparent inability of Elphron to put teeth into his judgments are warned that he can issue a ban on entry or passage through Battledale that is enforced by the Lord's Men and by Abbey of the Sword patrols—a crippling prohibition to a traveling merchant who must use Rauthauvyr's Road. Halfaxe Trail is littered with the bones of merchants who were under such a Ban and tried to go around Battledale with cargo.

Places or Interest in Hap Unique Sites

The Tower of Dracandros



Haptooth Hill is the stump of an old volcano. Its rock is iron hard, and its splendid natural location as a lookout has made it the site of a score or more keeps over the years, as each successive human lordling sought to make it his or her home. The last of these towers was the home of Dracandros, a Red Wizard of Thay who was involved in some way with a dracolich, Crimdrac (known for his belligerent aggressiveness, which was extreme even for a red dragon), several living dragons, and drow who



inhabited the echoing network of caverns inside the Hill.

Those evil beings are all dead now, slain by intrepid adventurers, and the tower lies broken open into rubble and ruin with dragon bones strewn around it. These bones have not yet been taken away for sale to alchemists or to be sold as trophies to Sembians who want others to think they are great dragon-slaying heroes. This state of affairs is so because even after the wizard's death, an item he crafted continues to emit defensive magics¹⁸ that have slain more than one band of adventurers who came looking for the treasure everyone says is here.

The top of the Hill is a wasteland of rubble inhabited by snakes and at least one leucrotta. Who knows what riches may lie buried on it in the remains of so many keeps? Of the caverns below, all I could find out when consulting adventurers who have explored the Hill and survived¹⁹ is that the caverns do seem to descend into the Underdark, and along the way one passes through several caves full of fungi and one place where the drow found something that slew them by the dozens. Their bones still lie in the darkness, but no sign of what brought them their doom remains.

The closest that citizens of Hap come to the summit of the Hill is to a cavern on the north flank used by local farmer Hober Deljack to grow the strong-tasting²⁰ black wrinkle Dale mushrooms. Hober will demand payment if you pick

or despoil his crops, as several adventuring bands have done—and War Watcher Pharlynn will support his demands. In so poor a community, the loss of a few coins' worth of produce is a serious affair.

Shrine **Lathander's Open Hand**

Despite the tiny size of Hap this plain stone building is a bustling center of activity. It is both the center of schooling for local children and a popular meeting place.

All can see a sign of the Morninglord's favor inside the shrine: Aside from an altar, a few cots, and pews, the only furnishing in the high-windowed converted barn is the *Blood of Lathander*, a glowing piece of amber said to contain a few drops of the blood of the god locked away forever to aid the folk of Hap.²¹ The *Blood* floats about 30 feet off the ground near the ceiling of the chamber and emits a faint rosy glow that can blaze up fiercely when Lathander approves or is roused to notice or act upon something.

Lathander is served by a new priestess, Dawnmaster Cathalandra Dovaer (who replaced the previous one, Mumfrey Mimly), and her obvious sincerity and energetic help with mending fences, clearing land, and even digging cesspits has won her the hearts of the village folk. I was nearly smitten myself. Pay her a visit if you want to be inspired by someone who is simple, earnest, and good.

¹⁸The *Crown of Dracandros* is detailed in Appendix II.

¹⁹ *Volo*: I found them in the Fall of Stars adventurers' club in Harrowdale. It is a good place to learn about dangerous sites all over the Dragon Reach if you can learn to sort out the truth from all the wild tales of derring-do.

²⁰ *Volo*: I can only describe them as tasting like smoked corn—that is, roast corn kernels that have acquired a strong smoky taste.

²¹Consult Appendix II for what Elminster could reveal of the powers of this item.



Shops

Delmuth's Barrel

General Store



This large, well-stocked general store is one of those fascinating structures that rambles up and down a few hillocks throwing out ramshackle wings in all directions and presenting the patron with a wild variety of roofing materials, building styles, and prospects—from about-to-fall-down to like-new-and-proud-of-it. Inside, Delmuth, the retired dwarven warrior, defends an incredible jumble of wares with deftly hurled axes and a gruff, almost bristling manner.

When I visited him, he was in the process of stacking all of the things that he had not sold in the last seven seasons into a new storeroom with the aid of two assistants. Like any dwarf, he was taking care to build the pile like a wall, fitting and wedging items just so. Those items may sit unsold for another seven summers, but they are now a very stable pile.

Delmuth sells wine, beer, *zzar*, and other beverages picked up at bargain prices in Sembia, but some of the hand-kegs looked suspiciously dusty to me. His wife Maerl also bakes fresh garlic buns every morn, which causes a line to form at his shop when the noses of everyone in the village tell them the buns have been set out to cool. Delmuth himself makes *saveloy* for which he is justly famous from the output of his hog farm. It tastes like a gift from the gods—even when used as iron rations a winter or so after it was made!

Delmuth will never surrender his secret and highly prized recipe—but I did not even ask him for it: *Saveloy* is dried,

highly spiced pigs' brains sausage! Just eat it, enjoy, and do not think about what is inside it.

True to its name, Delmuth's shop does sell barrels, mostly old but well-sealed ones of various sizes. Some of the barrels have interesting legends branded into them: "Maidens' Breath Beer/Too Light to Be Good for You!" or "Old Bladderwort Beer/It's Sure to Grow on You." All-in-all, Delmuth's is an establishment that is fun as well as useful to the wayfarer.

Glarth's Anvil

Blacksmith



Glarth endures endless ribbing from Delmuth because he is not a dwarf and therefore cannot be any good as a smith in the dwarf's oft-voiced opinion. I found this slow, baby-faced giant of a man to be an adequate blacksmith, however, with a talent for doing rough but sturdy work surprising in so small a community. He is capable of constructing whole wagon wheels from scrap metal, for instance, or turning 16 shields into a watertight, if crude, boat.

One of the local men-at-arms working with War Watcher Pharlyn sports a suit of armor made by Glarth. Although it resembles a clanking kitchen tree of pots and pans with various overlapping plates only loosely laced together, it seems to do the job: The man proudly showed me dented parts of the metal that he claimed were the marks left by an owl-bear's beak just before he beheaded it. This smith is nothing to travel here for—but could be useful indeed to a traveler needing repairs, even for surprisingly ambitious jobs.



Haestar's Woodworks

Woodcutter



Haestar is the local sawyer. He turns rough-felled trees brought in by less skilled woodcutters into boards, posts, shingles, barrel staves, and kindling. His place is a wild litter of sawdust, shavings, and warped pieces of wood, hanging or leaning everywhere. Haestar and four strapping assistants wield two-man back-and-forth saws so fast you can hear the wood scream as it is cut. During my visit a woodcutter brought in a cart of duskwood trunks—and before nightfall Haestar had turned it into a cart full of dressed boards.

The only finished furniture Haestar makes is tables. He is very proud of those out back that his men use for their highsun meals. Haestar does age wood, smoke it for extra strength, and soak it to bend it, too—but he charges steeply for such work, preferring straightforward cutting to all else. The traveler may find the twin barrels of whittled wooden pegs and split kindling that stand on either side of the door to alone be worth the trouble of a visit.

INN & TAVERN

The Millery Inn



The Millery Inn is run by Silas Genk, who serves as its bartender and the village's meister, a sort of ombudsman for the local people. Hap's only inn survives by doubling as a rooming house for local citizens too poor to own land. They dwell on the upper floor while the cooler, more spacious rooms on the



ground floor are left for paying guests. A stay here costs 8 sp per night, but this includes stabling, a bath (if desired), the washing and repair of your clothing by the staff (they will ask if you want this service and your preferences), the cleaning and polishing or waxing of footwear, and all meals. (The roasts are a trifle too salty, and everything else is bland, bland, bland.) Drinks are extra; it costs 4 cp for a tankard of anything—and I mean anything: Wine and zzar are brought to you in tankards, too! A large common room on the ground floor doubles as dining room and taproom—and is rarely without a visiting minstrel. Overall, the Millery Inn is a simple, adequate wayhouse that serves filling but unexciting food—a stolid but uninspiring, workaday place to stay.





Daggerdale



If the gods were more disposed to smile on the Dales, this pretty wooded Dale (once known as Merrydale before a tragic infestation of vampires changed its people's character) could well be the most popular destination for hunters in all the Dragon Reach. Its rolling hills are only lightly settled and teem with game of all sorts. Streams and unspoiled ponds are everywhere, and one can see in this pleasant land many ferny bowers, caverns, and picturesque ruined cottages.¹

Over its many years of occupation of Daggerdale, the hand of Zhentil Keep has left its mark on the Dale, but the future for once finally shows a glimmer of hope and prosperity. After battling the Zhents for more than 30 winters, Randal Morn is once again lord of Daggerdale.² The folk of this Dale are slowly working toward establishing themselves as an autonomous Dale—all the while casting a wary eye toward the crumbled walls of Zhentil Keep. While many adventurers are still found wandering the roads and vales of Daggerdale, the eyes of the Daggerdalesmen hold a glint of hope—hope that Daggerdale can rule itself once again, hope that they will be able to defend themselves when Zhentil Keep rebuilds itself, and hope that Zhentarim spies will grow bored and leave the Dale in the interim. Obviously, some hopes are more realistic than others.

Orcs, hobgoblins, and bugbears—former mercenary troops of Zhentil Keep now left to their own devices—roam the Dale freely, though they and the reformed Freedom Riders of Dagger Falls come to blows on an increasing basis. In addition, Randal Morn has sent various bands of adventurers out into the Dale to secure trade traffic along the Tethyamar Trail. Still, a lot of monsters roam the Dale, and travelers are advised to travel with a weapon at the ready.

Adventurers looking for fame and glory can encounter packs of wolves, leucrotta, and owlbears lurking in the woods and waiting for someone to venture within reach. Human outlaws also skulk about the Dale, and these people still tell tales of finding doppelgangers in their midst, spotting beholders drifting across Dale meadows, or spying even worse monsters prowling the feet of the Desertsouth Mountains. In the deepest woods, spiders and stirges swarm over all intruders, and as the years have passed, the woods and its underbrush vegetation have grown to reclaim more and more of once-fair Daggerdale, choking ponds and valleys that once held farms until treacherous swamps and dense thickets remain. Giant wasps and similar pests have been recently seen in Daggerdale for the first time.

While Daggerdale is governed once again by the Morn family, the outlying

¹A map of Daggerdale showing most settlements and points of interest is found in the section on Dagger Falls later in this chapter.

²Randal regained Daggerdale late in the Year of the Serpent (1369 DR), as told in the trilogy of adventure modules, the *Sword of the Dales*, the *Secret of Spiderhaunt*, and the *Return of Randal Morn* by Jim Butler.



areas of the Dale are still ruled by the law of the sword. Randal Morn's Freedom Riders and mercenary bands are slowly driving monsters away from frequently traveled trails and roads, but a vast majority of the Dale is fit only for women and men who follow fortune and wield a mean sword or spell. Few coins can to be had in Daggerdale by such adventurers, however, unless they are lucky enough to find old ruins or a cache of Zhent-buried gold. The rebuilding of Daggerdale—and Dagger Falls in particular—is perhaps where the greatest adventure awaits. Women and men who are confident in their abilities to run farms, inns, and other businesses will ultimately decide the fate of Daggerdale, replenishing or ultimately bankrupting the depleted treasury of Randal Morn.

The Countryside

Daggerdale is all rolling wooded hills and small, labyrinthine valleys broken by rocky crags and tors and here and there by meadows left in the wake of wildfires caused by storm lightning. Large settlements and steadings are not to be found here; rather, folk huddle in small stockaded villages and farm only within running distance of the walls, scratching out a living in this perilous land. Often they construct pitfall traps to battle marauding monsters—and these can slay unwary travelers just as well as a deliberate attack.

Many of these holds are abandoned—or stand empty after the inhabitants lose their struggles with winter cold, disease, or the predators. Wayfarers are warned

that other stockades are now home to monsters, some of whom keep human captives as food, playthings, or as lures to bring in more human prey.

Savage and persistent monster attacks reduced the last heavily armed merchants' foray into Daggerdale that I accompanied to a few battered folk who in the end were forced to turn back. I cannot stress this strongly enough: Unless you are eager for deadly adventure, venture not into the Dale very far from Dagger Falls. Within the rest of the Dale awaits deadly danger, but with that danger abides the potential for wealth for those who would dare to tempt fate.

The Daggerdalesmen

Daggerdalesmen (a term used regardless of their actual gender) are hunters who use slings, crossbows, and spears or blades and hurled axes for in-close fighting. They are also farmers, though for safety reasons in recent years keeping sheep and goats has largely supplanted growing crops. Some see Daggerdalesmen as a cruel, surly, suspicious people who deserve or have earned their monstrous neighbors. This outlook is hardly fair; how else could any survivor in such a land become but ready-armed, quick to strike, and wary? Nevertheless, it is wise when approaching a hold in this Dale to call out one's name and business—and then let fall a shield or a light-hued cloak and slowly drop all carried weapons onto it so that any watchers can see that one approaches the gates empty-handed.



Anathar's Dell

Inn



This little-known inn occupies one of the many nameless valleys in southern Dagerdale. Since knowing its whereabouts could well save the lives of beleaguered travelers, know then that Anathar's Dell lies just southwest of the red-topped crag that rises into the sky halfway between the northern tip of the Spiderhaunt Woods and Serpentsbridge, where the Tethyamar Trail crosses over the Dagger River (as the western Ashaba is sometimes known).

The Dell is the only known above-ground holding of the Brightblade dwarves, who have rich silver mines far below the surface here. The mine shafts are concealed by the barns of the self-supporting farm that fills the valley, a collective farm worked by the Blacklock and Talop human families and the Snowgold and Winterwood half-elven families.

Dozens of relatives seem to work about the farm secure in the knowledge that their borders are defended against monsters by 10 or more trained hunting cats. These seemingly extreme intelligent giant tigers were gathered or transported from I know not where as cubs, but they have been reared here in utter loyalty to the farm families. These "fangs," as the folk of the Dell call them, attack any nonhumans or demihumans who approach the farm. If the battle goes against the cats, one flees

back to the Dell to raise the alarm. If they sight humans or demihumans entering the valley, one comes to Tall Oak, a treehouse at the eastern end of the Dell where one of the farm family elders keeps watch, for instructions. The fangs understand the commands: "attack," "stay clear," "follow and see," or "escort but do not harm."

The dwarves have equipped the farm folk with weapons and armor (a mixture of types from chain mail all the way to full plate) to spare. Whatever their sizes, visitors willing to fight in the Dell's defense can be fully equipped for battle and if they acquit themselves well, they are typically asked to keep the gear they have used. Several apparently friendly bands have reached the heart of the Dell and then attacked, but the farm families have dealt with them somehow without taking harsh casualties, so they probably have other, still-secret defenses.³

In addition to raising poultry and pigs, the folk of the Dell plant all manner of food crops. They do their own curing and smoking of meat and keep massive pantry cellars full of staples, grain, and produce (and free of rats and mice with the aid of a large cohort of small cats). They are able to feed the folk of many other nearby holdings as well as paying guests who stay in the small circle of cottages in the Dell orchards and dine in Anathar's Hall at the center of the ring. (Apples are free for the taking.)

Anathar was a mage who came to Dagerdale long ago. On the spot where the dining hall (an open, pavilion-with-kitchens affair) named for him now stands, he built a

³*Elminster*: Among these defenses is sleep gas. Containers of this swift-acting gas developed and furnished by the dwarves are placed everywhere around the Dell, masquerading as water pots, vases, lamps, and like. If they containers are broken or opened, the gas causes most beings to fall senseless in a breath or two. (A successful saving throw vs. poison at a -3 penalty must be made every round for 1d6 rounds or the victim falls unconscious for 1d4 turns. One container full of gas fills a cube roughly 30 feet square on a side—or a 30-foot-diameter sphere—when opened; the actual volume may be larger or smaller depending on the size of the original container.) All of the farm folk are immune to this effect after years of exposure.



small tower near the existing dwarven mine. He offered to defend the dwarves with his magic should they be in need and provide them with ready food and protection for the top of their mine shaft⁴ if they in turn agreed to allow him to found a farm where elves, humans, and halflings could dwell and work together. The dwarves agreed only reluctantly but were delighted with the results until a dragon descended on Anathar's Tower and tore it apart.

The wizard perished even as he slew the wyrm. Many of the farm folk fled or were killed, but the dwarves built the survivors a stout stone stronghouse still to be seen under the largest barn here and asked them to stay. The descendants of that first farm are the families still here today, and Anathar's Dell still provides a refuge in southern Daggerdale in these times of rebuilding.

Guests at the Dell find their accommodations simple but cozy. All guests have a private guesthouse with a handpump-filled bath large enough to share with a lounging partner. A bite to eat or drink can be had at all hours by wandering over to Anathar's Hall, ample water and weak wine are provided in each cottage, and main meals are laid on at dawn, highsun, and sunset. Guests are free to walk in the valley but horseback riding should be confined to the orchard fields. Guests can also play lawn games, sleep, or take weapons practice in the upmeadow north of the Hall. Paying visitors may stay as long as they wish at a price

of 2 gp per head per day, which includes all drinks, meals, and services such as stabling and even bedside care, if needed.

Most guests quickly notice a lot of visitors strolling informally into and out of the valley. Some are prospectors bringing in the raw emeralds they have mined in the Dagger Hills⁵ for sale, and others are Harpers who have come to check on the safety of the Dell and to buy these emeralds and the 25-gp-value silver trade bars sent up from the depths by the busy dwarves for sale and trade in the wider Realms. The Harpers pay in coins, magic, seeds, and whatever else the folk of the Dell need. As part of the trade bargain, they serve these farmers as fetch-and-carry transport of the goods they require and run news and errands to other steadings in Daggerdale, too.

Thieves and brigands are warned that dirty work undertaken at the Dell earns instant attack from the farm folk and their cats, the dwarves from below, and any Harpers within reach—and that Those Who Harp track down and enact appropriate justice (whether rough or civil) on any who escape, patiently following the trail for as long as need be. Since large foraging bands of hobgoblins, bugbears, orcs, and similar predators could live for two winters or more on the food in Anathar's Dell, the Harpers have deliberately spread word of the strong, Harper-reinforced defenses of the Dell in the Dales and the Moonsea to discourage such bands from being tempted to strike at so rich a prize.

⁴A favorite goblin tactic in those days was to roll boulders down a mine shaft and then go down to dine on the smashed dwarves below.

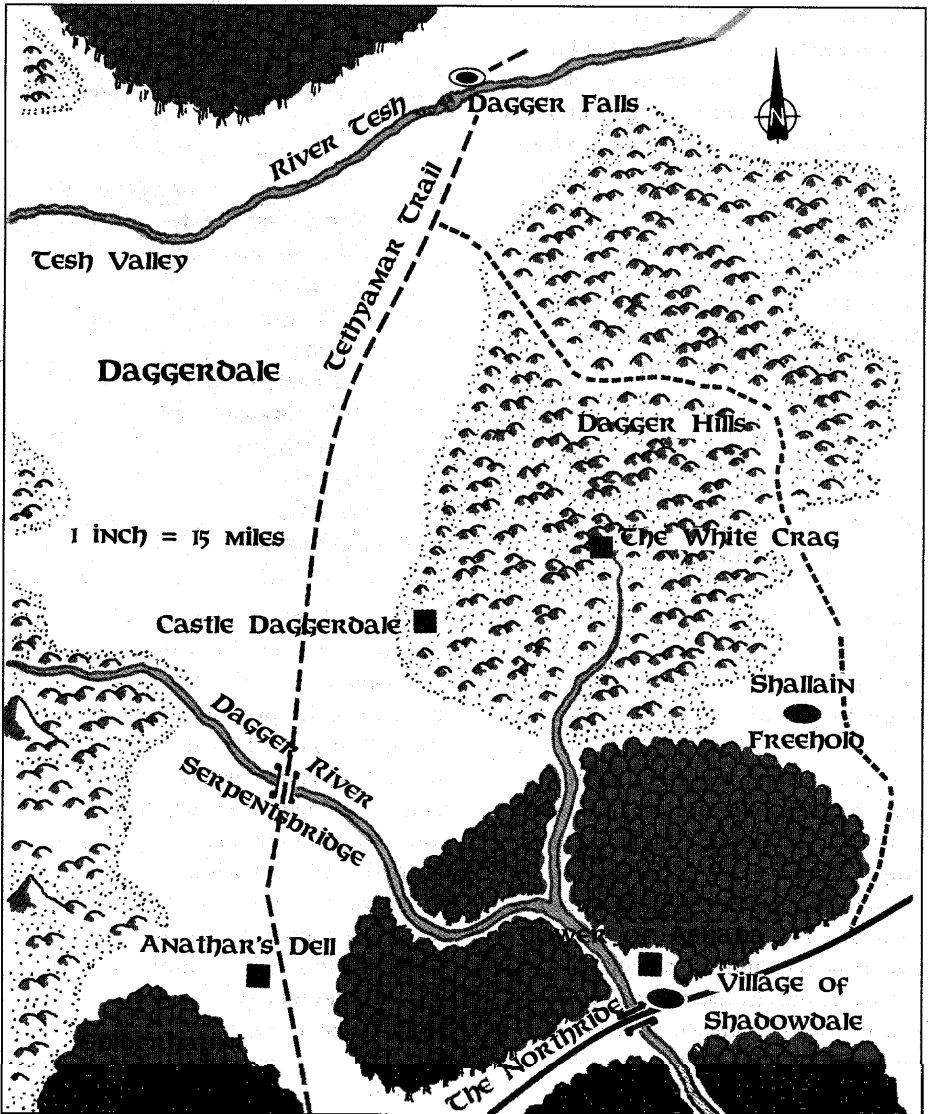
⁵The rocks of the Dagger Hills are studded with emeralds. Mining them is an age-old, dirty, and deadly occupation of hewing out crawl-tunnels to reach the veins of gem-bearing ore and fighting off monsters, brigands, and competitors alike. Dagger folk and others desperate for wealth have always gone to the bramble- and monster-rich heart of the Hills to try their luck because the emeralds are so close to the surface that anyone lucky enough or well-informed enough can recover them. An experienced miner with good strength and an eye for where to dig can gather enough emeralds in a day to shallowly fill his cupped hand, though most of them will not be of gem grade. Most will be smaller than the little fingernail of a human infant in size, but the occasional stone as big as an eyeball turns up.



Dagger Falls

This village is the only dependable haven against the depredations of monsters and brigands to be found in Daggerdale today. The town of Dagger Falls remains a resupply center for all intelli-

gent inhabitants and wanderers through the Dale and probably survived being overrun and pillaged for years for this reason. Only 800 or so folk call Dagger Falls home, many buildings in town lie empty, and most of the outlying hamlets where Dagger Falls was wont to expand





(south along the Tethyamar Trail and east down the River Tesh) have been abandoned, though the town is showing signs of filling up again now that Randal Morn is back.

Always the largest settlement in the Dale, Dagger Falls began as a trading post and storage site for dwarven metals being shipped downriver. All cargoes destined to go down the River Tesh had to be unloaded from barges above the deadly falls and reloaded onto other craft below. Humans and other folk wanting to trade with the dwarves took to coming to the site of the future Dagger Falls community once the Stout Folk had fortified the transshipment facilities that were the birthplace of the village enough to discourage raids. (The dwarves thereby gained enough sense of security that they no longer tried to slay all nondwarves they saw in the vicinity.)

Soon after the fall of Teshendale, the forces of Zhentil Keep slew or drove out all folk of power and influence in Daggerdale and occupied Dagger Falls. They installed a local lord of their own choosing, Malyk. When he perished with most of his garrison under the blades of Randal Morn, the rightful lord of the Dale, and the heroes Florin Falconhand of Shadowdale and Mirt and Durnan of Waterdeep, the Zhents marched an army into Daggerdale and installed a constable to enforce their rule instead.

For years, Dagger Falls was a place of treachery, beatings, night murders, and torture—and although Zhentil Keep has fallen and the city has Randal Morn to rule it, not all Zhentarim have been flushed from the city. The most obvious of Zhentarim agents were driven from the

Dagger Falls Map Key

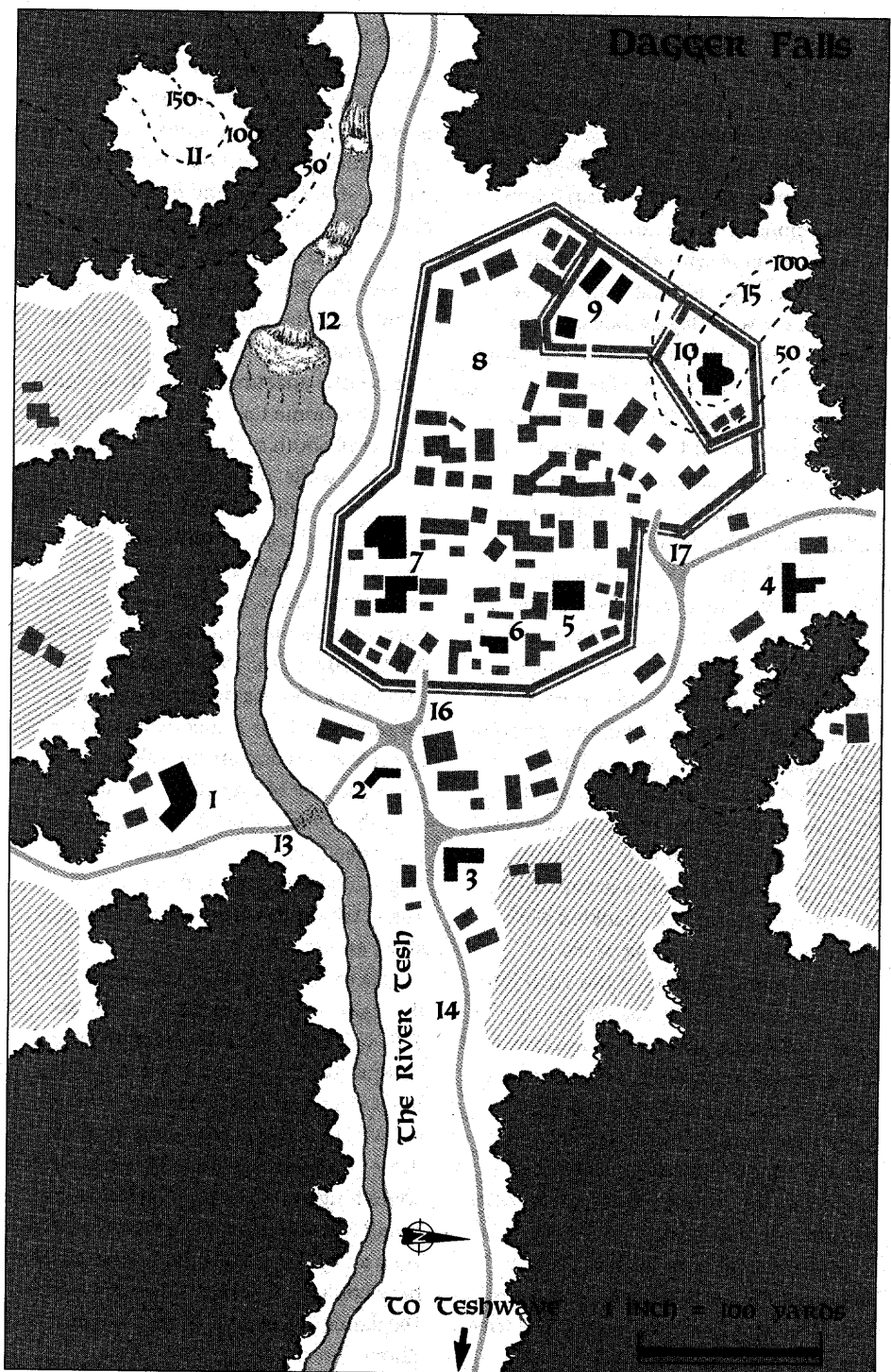
1. The Teshford Arms (inn)
2. Dulwar Leatherworker (leather goods shop)
3. Fulgath's Caravan Supplies (caravan goods store)
4. The Red Rock (tavern)
5. Lathander's Light (temple of Lathander)
6. The Broken Dagger (tavern)
7. Thund's Warehouses (rental storage)
8. The market square
9. Freedom Riders' Barracks (also current home of Randal Morn)
10. The Constable's Tower (haunted partial ruin)
11. Eagles' Eyrie (lookout point and caverns)
12. Dagger Falls (not navigable)
13. The Tethyamar Trail
14. The Tesh Trail
15. The Spur
16. The River Gate
17. The Forest Gate

city at first light following the fall of the Zhentil Keep constable, Guthbert Golthammer (who was transferred to the village from his previous post in Teshwave). The more shrewd—and hence more dangerous—agents remain in the city, undoubtedly reporting Randal Morn's every move to interested Zhentarim wizards and priests.

Dagger Falls was lucky that there were few Zhent mercenaries in town at the time of Guthbert Golthammer's demise. Lack of pay and regular food convoys had forced all of the vagabonds to leave town, foraging across the Dale or seeking better places of employment, such as the



Dagger Falls





increasingly violent mining country around Glistar.

Although the defeat and withdrawal of Zhent forces has meant that coins are a lot scarcer in the streets of Dagger Falls and that most of the camp followers, weaponsmiths, armorers, and other skilled craftsmen who accompanied the Zhents have also left, the taste of freedom has allowed Daggerdalesmen to trust each other far more than they have dared to do for decades. They have seized this opportunity and are using it to build and rebuild freely. Devotees of Lathander have even finally restaffed and begun rebuilding the local temple of Lathander, which had burned down mysteriously during the Zhent occupation. (Efforts at its renewal were previously plagued by a series of strange and unlikely "accidents.") However, Dagger Falls is still a rough frontier town, lacking many amenities and featuring a populace quick to lash out at real or suspected troublemakers, but at least a wayfarer in need can now get supplies, hire aid, and find a refuge in which to sleep or recuperate without too much fear of awakening as a shackled slave about to begin a grueling overland march down the banks of the Tesh into sale and servitude (the usual fate of undesirables the Zhents did not find it wiser to slay on the spot). Weapons are openly worn in the streets and Daggerdalesmen expect everyone who has come from outside the walls to be armed, so the traveler must use extreme caution when in town.

Sources who have been in Dagger Falls recently say that local businesses are opening up with rapidity, so the traveler may well find changes to what is

related hereafter. In brief, Dagger Falls is a small, walled town of stone buildings with steep slate roofs. (Steep roofs are necessary since snow loads can be fearsome during winter.) Its streets are cobbled in some places and dirt or corduroy elsewhere, and it lies just northwest of Dagger Ford where the Tethyamar Trail crosses the River Tesh in shallow safety below the falls. The only inn to be had that is not in the main a tavern or a long-term rental apartment in a loft or cellar of a town home lies beside the Tethyamar Trail south of the ford, well outside the town walls. A handful of working farms surround the town, and the settlement itself climbs from the River Gate up a slope to the northwest, where two fortified areas defend the Freedom Riders' barracks (also the current abode of Randal Morn) and the Constable's Tower. The Tower, once a dwarven catapult redoubt and later a succession of robber baron's keeps and strongholds, overlooks the rest of town from its height atop the Spur, a flat-topped tor that is exceeded in height locally only by the Eagles' Eyrie to the south (across the Tesh), which has seen use as a lookout since ancient times.

It is too early to say if Daggerdale is on the right road to recovery or if Dagger Falls will rise to achieve the stability and prosperity of other centers in the Dales, but it is a place where change is being allowed to occur at last—and most of those changes are at least strivings for something better. Folk in the Dales are trying (via daring traveling merchants) to keep an eye on Dagger Falls. What befalls here could well herald the future of the Dalelands in the wake of the ruin of Zhentil Keep.



Places of Interest in Dagger Falls

Unique Sites

The Constable's Tower



This once-isolated keep has been rebuilt repeatedly until what remains today is a forbidding-looking, round, crenelated tower standing three tall floors above the ground and larger across than any single fortified tower between the Citadel of the Raven and Cormyr. Two rickety wooden gallery wings thrust out to the east and west. They are sheathed rather sloppily in slate shingles and old, rusting shields and scrap metal plates to make them as fireproof as possible. These wings end in balconies and are where all of the retainers and lady escorts dwelt in the days when Zhentil Keep occupied Dagger Falls in great numbers and planned to make of it a Zhentish realm extending from Tilverton (and, ultimately, Hullack Forest and whatever else could be seized from Cormyr) east to the Standing Stone and Hillsfar.

In the days of Zhentish occupation, the cellars and dungeons of the Tower were full, and some inevitable rumors even speak of them connecting to the Underdark via tunnels that also allowed Zhent slavers to hustle captives out to the River Tesh unseen. Supposedly these tunnels even linked up with the cellars of the temple of Lathander, which was burned down, some local tales insist, after the priests lost a vicious spell battle in the dark spaces under the streets of the town

against Zhentarim mages on one hand and drow boiling up out of the Deep Realms on the other!

These days, the Tower's wooden wings are left to roosting birds except for limited service as increasingly shaky places to hang laundry. Once-deadly ballistae and mangonels stand rotting, rusting, and idle on the broad roof of the central keep, and the apartments, armories, and great hall within it lie empty—save for fell magic.

It is not known precisely what is going on in the Tower, but some sort of strange, deadly cycle of magic holds sway in here. It seems to have been first encountered after Ilthond was killed by the demishade Gothyl.⁶ (Ilthond was the mage who occupied the tower after Tren Noemfor,⁷ the first Zhentish constable.) The effect is something that most mages of Faerûn would be very interested to see: Within an all-pervasive mist, a wild variety of destructive spells lash out within the Tower. Fire, lightning, shapechanging, frost, and similar forces rock the keep continually and slaughter folk foolish enough to step inside, but in this swirling chaos these forces are countermanded by just as energetic rebuilding and mending magics. Some of these renewing magics seem to have kept the Tower from flying apart or collapsing in the magical struggle that has gone on for at least a season now. This titanic unleashing of forces can be detected in the town below only by the occasional flash of light or tremor, but some people claim it is beginning to

⁶As told in the adventure module *The Return of Randal Morn* by Jim Butler.

⁷Tren left Daggerdale, was transferred out by his superiors, or was killed. Events are unclear and difficult to determine since Dagger Falls inhabitants do not answer questions about the man, merely spitting in the dirt at the mention of his name while grumbling under their breaths. Tren was the constable during the events of the adventure module *Doom of Daggerdale* by Wolfgang Baur.



emit drifting areas of wild magic and may ultimately force the abandonment of Dagger Falls itself!

At least a half dozen powerful arch-mages (including, it is said, Vangerdahast of Cormyr) have investigated the Tower and either perished or fled its interior in precipitous haste, unable to stop or escape the effects of the cycle. Such forays may grow fewer as the wild magic areas make visits to Dagger Falls more deadly for wizards, but until then I predict that tourism in the form of visiting wizards is going to grow more brisk in town—another good reason for honest merchant folk to avoid Daggerdale! Randal Morn thinks that the effect is either a by-product of the demishade Gothyl's death or proof that Gothyl is not dead but somehow trapped in the Constable's Tower.

Randal wants this disturbing effect gone from the Tower because of the magical problems it is causing and because he wants to take over and renovate the keep, using it as the initial tower in a new castle for the ruling family of the Dale. Randal is offering to immediately grant titles and an estate, along with a future reward of 5,000 gp to be presented in five years, to any person or adventuring band who can prove they have cleansed the Tower of this bizarre problem.

Eagles' Eyrie



This splendid natural lookout is a bare rocky knoll rising well above the town. It provides a natural firing platform for assaults on the Constable's Tower or anywhere else in Dagger Falls. These days it is guarded constantly by some of

Randal Morn's loyal Freedom Riders, battle-hardened and wood-wise warriors and rangers who are always vigilant and have a score or more of ready-loaded crossbows with which they can fell intruders who fall afoul of their alarm tripwires. They dwell in caverns beneath the summit, one of which has watch windows very well hidden among the cliff-face rock. Observers inside the apparently deserted Eyrie have a good view of the falls and the Tethyamar Trail.

Visitors to the heights of the Eyrie are few. The always-tough climb up the crumbling sides of the knoll has been made deadly indeed by several collapses of the spiral trail and by a colony of intelligent mimics who occupy some of the gaps, aping rock ledges. Smart enough not to attack either Randal's garrison or dwarves of the Brightblade clan who sometimes come here and feed them, these monsters strike at all other climbers. Prey able to fight back is dumped into probably fatal falls down the cliff onto the rocks below and eaten later.

Nothing crowns the Eyrie these days but the stones of a long-fallen watchtower and a beacon fire laid ready to signal Randal if an approaching army is spotted. The stones are kept ready in a pile to be rolled down the path or fired away by means of a siege engine. Three disassembled catapults and a mangonel are kept in the caverns.

Most folk in Dagger Falls know that monsters lurk around the Eyrie, and that the place has something to do with the dwarves. Dagger Falls inhabitants recall wyverns, beastmen, trained hunting eagles, ropers, and stirges as having



infested the knoll in the past if they are questioned on the topic. Few remember that the Eyrie was once a dwarven stronghold guarding busy dwarven trade routes or, for that matter, that humans and dwarves once dwelt happily together in Dagger Falls before the bitter feud between House Morn and the Brightblade clan developed.

Randal Morn, assisted by the Harpers, has been trying to end that feud. One of the results of these efforts is that Brightblade dwarves come to the hidden, inner caverns here from time to time to visit the graves of the clan chieftain and elder priest, who were slain here by the evil Morn Mage-Lord, and the Altar of the Last Stand, dedicated to Dumathoin. The two dwarves' tomb is a cairn watched over by an animated war hammer, and a rich array of gems left at the altar in homage to Dumathoin are guarded by special alarm spells. If these spells are triggered, Randal Morn's forces here are notified. As they charge to the defense of the altar, they sound a horn that in turn alerts Harpers and dwarves in Dagger Falls that the altar has been violated. Thrice now humans have defended the altar against thievery, and once it has cost the life of a Daggerdalesman; the new friendship between humans and dwarves in the Dale is growing firm.

Reliable dwarven sources assure me that although exploratory delves were made into the heart of the Eyrie, no gems or metal of worth were ever found. Persistent rumors of rich lodes in the Dagger Falls area are mistaken and are probably fueled by the old saying (whose origin has been forgotten): "Seek out gems under wyvern's claw; silver waits by dragon's

maw." What is found in great numbers west of the town are edible blackwrinkle Dale mushrooms (in the deep woods) and blackberries (at the trees' edge all along the upper Tesh).

Freedom Riders' Barracks

The former Zhent barracks compound, a walled area that served as a stronghold for Zhent mercenaries and military, now serves the interests of Randal Morn and his Freedom Riders, the new law in Dagger Falls. Randal Morn lives behind the high walls of the compound as well, meeting with business leaders, adventurers, and common folk as he tries to set matters right after years of Zhent occupation.

Getting an audience with Randal is a simple process only if one enjoys dealing with bureaucrats. Townsfolk in Dagger Falls still claim that both Elminster and Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun were present at the liberation of the village, and I am certain that Elminster provided copies of his own mountains of paperwork so that Randal would have something to create his own forms with. Yet, getting an audience with Randal Morn is still easier than visiting an eccentric old wizard—and there is not as much pipe smoke in the air, either. I have heard rumors that magic does not work in the audience chamber, but no one has confirmed this for me. To be truthful, I never got to meet Randal Morn, but the townspeople claim that he has been fair and just since he took power.

The ranks of the Freedom Riders have been swelling since Randal's return as more and more townsfolk make the decision to cast their lot in with Randal. The compound still holds



plenty of room for the troops, though, and once the old Constable's Tower is cleaned out, the military can spread itself out a bit more. Assuming the Tower can be cleaned out, of course, for I note with some degree of irony that neither Khelben nor Elminster bothered to "clean up" the Constable's Tower before they left Daggerdale.

The Market Square

A key element in the rebuilding of Dagger Falls into a stable, pleasant place to dwell is the availability of a variety of goods for local citizens to buy—and not just at the inflated prices that Fulgath charged unchallenged for so long, either. With that in mind, the rebuilt temple of Lathander has been busily sponsoring any peddlers from outside the Dale and enterprising Daggerdalesmen alike to open and stock stalls here. In this sponsorship, the temple has even established the Morning Shields, a "pay-per-use" mounted escort band of armed and battle-hardy Dagger Falls residents, to safely bring wagons of produce from outlying Dale farms here to sell their goods.

All of this has made this formerly pitiful market into a bustling place every tenday or so and an adequate place for the undemanding visitor to browse, though in Sembia such a selection could be bettered in many single shops and considered a bad joke when viewed as the market of any town. The local merchant Fulgath is suspected of several early acts of vandalism and theft that plagued stallkeepers when the renewal of the Falls market began, but he was caught setting a fire under a wagon of potatoes one night by some of the Lathanderian priests. He had to pay a fine

and endure a private audience with the High Radiance of the temple—and the market's troubles abruptly ceased.

Temple Lathander's Light

This large, solid square stone building sports a new tiled roof, but its walls still bear the scars of the many fires that beset it when Dagger Falls was in the hands of the Zhentarim. It now houses a new contingent of Lathanderian priests and warriors who have come here from all over the Inner Sea lands to where they see a real chance to serve the Morninglord by fostering new growth and renewal where it is really needed. Inside the temple, conditions are still primitive and simple cots, stools, and bearskin rugs are the sole furnishings of the sleeping chambers used by priests and guests alike, but the heart of the building has been left open as a great hall for assembly and worship. It is lit by a network of rose-red *continual light* spells cast by the resident clergy.

Here servants of the Morninglord heal the sick or wounded, sponsor those with plans for new businesses and endeavors, help folk to settle in and around town, or aid peddlers and merchants in getting their goods safely to market by organizing regular and well-armed caravans. The Daggerdalesmen recognize just how crucial the success of this temple is to the survival of their community and will fight to the death to avenge any threat to a priest of Lathander's Light.

Sixteen priests, 22 novices, and 15 lay warriors ("Sword Brothers") sworn to Lathander, and three Lathanderian paladins of the Order of the Aster live here



under the guidance of His Radiance, High Mornmaster Harndarr Oryn. Harndarr is a short, squat man who some say has dwarven blood in his lineage. He walks with the aid of a stick, but he has a mellifluous and confident voice that can rise to impressive volume and the wits to use it well. In just a few seasons he has become one of the best-loved and trusted men in Dagger Falls. He is working hard to build a sense of trust and hope in the town and make it again the proud and close-knit community it once was. Much of the pride and hope of the Daggertalesmen has been put on the shoulders of the near-legendary Randal Morn for years, but Harndarr is trying to bring the hope of peace and healing and renewal to lay alongside Randal's now-victorious struggle.

The temple has little riches beyond food, medicines, and some healing potions. The priests part with the healing drafts only at very stiff prices to raise funds for the town.

Under the temple lie tunnels that have been notorious more than once in the town's past. Though numerous tunnels lie beneath the streets of Dagger Falls, those that lead to the temple have been walled off, and some sort of warning spells have been woven across the work to alert the faithful to any disturbance in their cellars.

The tunnels are said to lead to the dreaded Underdark to caverns that twist along under the riverbank, where smuggling probably continues to this day, and to the crypt of the Mage-Lord of House Morn, the dark sorcerer Colderan. Colderan may or may not lie dead in his tomb, depending on what tales one hears or believes.

Shops

Dulwar Leatherworker

Leather Horse and War Harnesses, Tack, Scabbards, and Clothing



The small, wiry, and lithe merchant Dulwar came to Dagger Falls from southern Daggertdale just over a decade ago. The war harness, scabbards, sheaths, bracers, clothing, and rather crude, but warm and dry, boots Dulwar makes here in his smelly tannery are very popular with the citizenry (and were with the Zhent garrison while it was here, too). Dulwar gets many of the hides he uses through the work of his tanning team, a group of well-armed, strong souls who go out with a wagon into the perils of the Dale to butcher livestock for landowners and buy and bring back the hides.

Dulwar's friendship with Randal Morn has become an increasingly open secret around town since the Zhents left, and he and the priests of Lathander's Light obviously like and respect each other. Dulwar donated his own time and that of his tanning team to hauling supplies when the priests were repairing the temple, and he and the temple's priests have helped each other on many projects since.

Do not expect any stylish stuff here, or even simple adornments or scrollwork. Dulwar makes plain, solid, serviceable gear, and many a weary warrior or local in need has been right glad of that.



Fulgath's Caravan Supplies

Wagon Wheels, Chests, Tools, Horse Harnesses and Other Caravan Goods



This large, barnlike shop resembles a miniature castle gatehouse. It boasts thick stone roofs with slit windows, heavy twin entry doors (one just inside the other), a night portcullis that crashes down outside the metal-plated outer door, and an always-alert staff who seem to have ready-loaded crossbows at hand wherever they are.

Inside, the always-softly-chuckling and heartily hated rogue Fulgath cheerfully overcharges patrons up to thrice what items sell for elsewhere. "If you want it, that is the price," is a dry phrase he has uttered so often that it has become a bitter local motto. Unfortunately for most purchasers, they almost always sorely need the replacement wagon wheel, chest, tools, harness, or whatever else they come in here seeking, and, as locals often mutter wearily, "Fulgath gets his price."

Recent competition from the Falls market has caused Fulgath to cut down his selection of goods and lower prices just a trifle, but he is always watching for new ways to make coins (in other words, shady or unfair deals to swing with visitors). Fulgath's is still the only place in town that deals in stolen goods, dubious magic, found goods or items scavenged from corpses, and sleeping potions (and even poison some folk whisper). Watch your back when in this shop—and *do not* try to be cleverer than Fulgath. Remember: He always gets his price—one way or another.

Thund's Warehouses

Warehouses



These two buildings were the former Zhen-tarim goods and supplies warehouses and are the two best-built structures in town. They are now owned and operated by Zelos Thund, a large and kindly man of great strength and few words. More than once, he has been seen to lift crates that two horses usually drag around and heft them onto wagons. Local children love to chat with him and watch him whittle little wooden chains or finger boxes with hinged lids—which he promptly gives to them. He is a known friend to Randal Morn and to the Harpers and is thought to have come from his own family hold in the Dagger Hills, which is now occupied by hobgoblins.

Thund operates the warehouses as secure rental storage space for all. The space is available to citizens as well as visitors, and he offers small lockboxes and cubicles as well as larger, bulk cargo storage. He charges from 1 cp per day to 10 gp per day depending on how much space is used. A strongest or large wagonbed crate costs 1 gp per day, a "day" is counted from highsun to highsun, and one is charged for the full day even if only a portion of it is used. Renters can reach their stored goods at any hour.

Thund guards things in storage with the aid of a band of adventurers at least a dozen strong who are known to command some means of invisibility, a *rope of entanglement*, and magical flight. Certain of their number are half-elven, one, at least, is a lizard man fully as intelligent and articulate as any human, and members of other races that I did not spy may be represented in this company, as well. These nameless,



mysterious hired guards seem to enjoy their work and to be able to guard the warehouses against attacks from the sky above, the sewers below, and from within: Crated monsters bursting forth have twice been slain by these trusty guardians.

It should be noted that Thund asks all renters if they plan to store anything alive or undead in his houses and strictly forbids such to enter his premises. He also demands to be told of the presence and nature of all magic being stored in the houses. He shares such information only with his hired guards.

Metal-sheathed doors that can be chained in place and barred without and within offer access to each warehouse large enough that loaded wagons can be driven in. At least one wagon is in Thund's care now, its owner vanished and probably

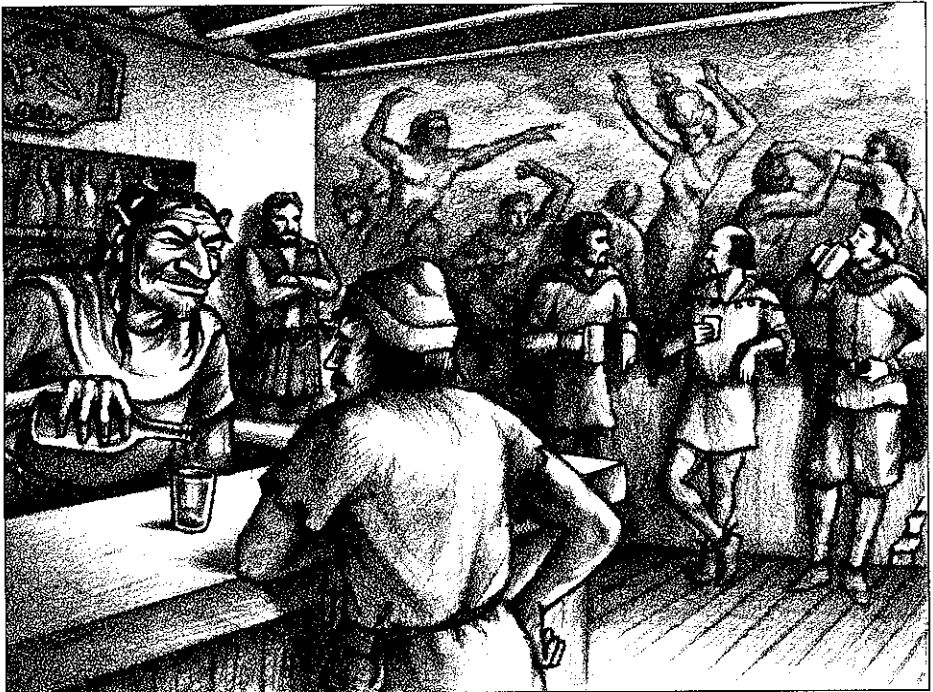
dead. He has not yet disturbed it or confiscated any of the goods in it in payment. The people in town are watching to see how long he will safe-store something for an absent owner before declaring scavenging rights.

Taverns

The Broken Dagger



No longer the brawling orc pit it was during the Zhent occupation, this scarred, stinking drinking hole is still not for the sensitive. The ground floor is a burnt-out shambles. Guests go down some well-worn cellar stairs into a dirt-floored room where a row of beer tuns face an elbows-up bar, which is the only furniture in the place. Guests should look for a lantern and the





signboard depicting the two halves of a broken weapon to show where the stairs are.

In the tavern, the hobgoblins wielding iron bars who used to clear drinkers away from the bar so that new arrivals could order and be served are gone, but patrons still take their drinks away and stand up around the walls to chat. And because of the new management, at least the patrons can now hear each other to converse and not have to constantly watch in all directions for furtive or hurled knives. This new management is a half-ogre, Dynter, and five burly human warriors who are the remnant of the Tesh Tusks, a raiding band grown tired of bloodshed and danger. They have installed a broad, sloped, quite comfortable leaning rail all around the walls to keep the dirty shoulders of patrons off the new mural they are so proud of: a vivid scene of dancing and wrestling (at least, I think they are wrestling) well-oiled, nearly naked humans of both genders that covers all three walls. The bar fills the fourth.

Patrons can also now rent a stool for 1 cp for as long as they want during one evening but are fined 2 sp if they throw the stool or break it. The only seating formerly available was to sit on or against one or more bodies of more unfortunate patrons from the stinking heap in the southwest corner or to "make your own seat" in a fatal fight. A second set of stairs used only for exiting the tavern has also been added. These supplemental stairs cut down on the bloody right-of-way disputes that used to break out almost constantly as the drunken met the thirsty on steps too narrow for easy passage.

The Dagger is still not a place for amenities or genteel relaxation, but if tak-

ing on drink in someplace the rain cannot reach is your only goal, the 1 cp per tankard prices cannot be bettered.

Prospectors and adventurers visiting town prefer this place to all others for its prices, swift service, and lack of prying interest about one's doings, name, motives, and occupation.

The Red Rock



Kessla,⁸ a half-elven retired minstrel, ran this ramshackle inn for many years, surviving both Zhent "inspections" and the occasional free-for-all fights that would erupt from time to time. Unfortunately, her luck ran out during the fight to save Dagger Falls and the Red Rock was burned down by a retreating army of orcs. The old inn caught fire and was consumed in just a short time, leaving only a stone foundation.

Randal Morn did not have the funds to rebuild the inn, but the adventurers that helped rescue him donated money to Kessla before leaving Dagger Falls in search of further adventure. It is from this new-found wealth that the current Red Rock has built its business.

The new Red Rock is a stone and wood structure two stories tall that has a down-to-earth atmosphere. Kessla makes sure that the wood is well maintained, and magical globes of light now illuminate the taproom, replacing the candles that illuminated the old Red Rock. By uttering a single word, Kessla can alter the degree of illumination in the room, changing it as her needs and desires dictate.

Kessla is still widely believed to be a Harper agent who reports directly to

⁸Kessla is a NG hef B6.



Storm Silverhand in Shadowdale, if such rumors are to be believed. Regardless of her affiliation, however, Kessla is a beautiful woman who truly has only the best interests of her guests in mind. She is aided in running the inn by her staff: a stable boy named Orthran and two maids named Larstiira and Jandyлгаe.

INN

The Teshford Arms



Since the disappearance of Zhent rule in Dagger Falls, business at the only true inn in town—a pretentious roadhouse on the Tethyamar Trail run by Olavia Tsardruyn, whose sole claim to fame is her mint wine—has fallen off. The basic fee for a stay at this cold, unwelcoming place was cut from 2 gp to 1 gp per night in response

since as half of it no longer had to be given to the constable—but business has remained scarce. One peddler of my acquaintance summed up a stay at the Arms as follows: “It’s only a little better than camping out under the stars. There’s fewer bugs and beasts and more ready water, but the cooking is no better than ye can do for yourself over a fire.” With rousing recommendations like this one, it is not all that surprising that the Arms is not full.

Another guest reported to me that the inn is improving. Decent furniture has been added, and baths are now available in the privacy of one’s own chambers rather than under the horse pump out back! Olavia has some long-term paying guests (warlike types), and perhaps the steady income they provide her will eventually turn the Arms into a decent roadhouse—and then again, perhaps not.







Deepingdale



Known to many as the Dale of Trees, the wooded land that lies around the Glaemril and its tributaries (the Deeping Stream and the Wineflow) is one of the most beautiful of all the Dales. It is hard not to sigh when one looks about in Deepingdale—in all except the season of snows, anyway. It is difficult to find a view that does not lift the heart, from stomp and stone fences awash with flowers and flitting birds to verdant green fields dappled with ever-present shade.

The trading center of pastoral Deepingdale—and all some folk ever see of it—is the walled town of Highmoon, which stands on the East Way caravan road where the Wineflow, the southern tributary of the Glaemril, passes very near. In the pleasant streets and shops of Highmoon, the timber, furs, and fresh-killed game (venison, grouse, and pheasant in particular) Deepingdale is famous for are sold, along with Dale produce. Here also the Deepingfolk buy silks, wool, other fabrics, and metal goods.

Deepingdale has been called “a forest garden.” Certainly much of it exhibits the fruit of a careful nurturing of the land so as to preserve as many trees and forest life as possible. Hedges and wild gardens grow everywhere to keep game plentiful, and woodcutting and hunting are undertaken with the same care for the land and the renewal of its resources as the planting of the hedges and gardens. Human and elven foresters work together to ensure plentiful game and rich woodland fiddlehead and berry harvests. Owlbears, stirges, and

other harmful predators are slain out of hand (and other predators are carefully harvested appropriate to their numbers), but everything else is left largely alone to grow untrammelled.

This approach has earned the Dale a reputation as the home of tree-loving, backward softheads in neighboring Archendale and in nearby Sembia. However, inhabitants of both those places are not slow to order lumber or furs branded with the distinctive Spreading Tree of Deepingdale. (The Spreading Tree is also depicted on the largest, centermost coin of the three coins used as the badge of the Dale.) Such goods are the finest and most plentiful to be had this side of the Border Forest or the deepest reaches of the Elven Court around perilous and ruined Myth Drannor.

Half of all Deepingfolk are elven or half-elven, for in Deepingdale the Fair Folk and humans have always dwelt in friendly harmony. Deepingdale was founded by Imryll Eluarshee, known as the Deeping Princess, and is named for her. Of the royal blood of Cormanthyr, she married a human and founded the Dale against elven opposition. Outliving her husband by centuries, Imryll looked after many mixed-race families to make sure that no prejudices developed in her growing Dale and also crafted many *ioun stones*. She is sometimes called the Mother of the Half-Elven in memory of her leadership and guidance. She is buried somewhere in the Dale that bears her name in a crypt whose location has been lost, but which (legend insists) is full of a sparkling cloud of hundreds of *ioun stones*, whirling endlessly around her coffin.



Deepingfolk who can do so take immense and almost fanatical pride in being able to trace their lineage back to the Deeping Princess or even to one of the children for whom she was an (honorary) aunt. Because of the Deepingfolk's near-holy regard for their founder, folk around the Dragon Reach are learning that to insult the memory of Imryll Eluarshee in the presence of one of the normally quiet, peaceful Deepingfolk is to call up immediate, white-hot rage. Arrogant Arkhenfolk, Sembians, and Zhents alike have died with some overly clever remark about the Laughing Princess on their lips.

The Countryside

Most of the Deepingfolk are hunters, farmers, and foresters. Here everyone dwells close to the land in a broad, verdant valley where ferns and pools are common. The Deeping Stream and the Wineflow rise and then disappear into sinkholes many times only to reappear nearby and run on for a short space before vanishing again. (This confusing tendency is the reason they appear on so few maps or are mistakenly recorded as the Glaemril, which is often also called the Deeping Stream since that stream flows most directly into it. Properly, only above the intersection with the Wineflow is the Glaemril the Deeping Stream.) The only dubious lands in the nearby region are monster-haunted Arch Wood, to the south, and Glaun Bog, to the east. Militia patrols keep an eye on both, and fully half the Deepingfolk are in the local militia.

Little livestock beyond rabbits and poultry is to be seen on Deeping farms. Instead, farmers busy themselves with crops that climb poles and crowd small fields. On the grassy roofs of dug-in bank

houses on the river one can even see rich herb gardens.

So damp a land is much given to mists. "Faerie time" in Deepingdale is when mist lies like a ghostly shroud low over the land. When the fog hangs so, a mounted rider can see over it, but she drops down into its concealing confines if she descends from her saddle.

The Deepingfolk

The people of Deepingdale are a quiet, peaceful lot. They live in harmony with the land and know what must be done to do so. They spend many energetic days in what city folk in Sembia would scornfully dismiss as "gardening in the dirt."

Most Deepingfolk police their own disputes through discussion and agreed-upon sentences, which range from humiliating public spankings of grown men and women to guilty people being ordered to aid or provide food and goods to their victims. Only serious disputes are taken to the lord of Highmoon, ruler of the Dale. Brigandage and armed violence are automatically serious matters, as are arson and unlawful treecutting. It costs the careless traveler who is after firewood 200 gp for felling a tree in Deepingdale that is not in a designated cutting area. Along the East Way, watch for trees blazed with an axe mark surmounted by the Spreading Tree and cut only between those trees and the road. Away from the East Way, do not cut *anything*, even along the Glaemrilside trails.

Deepingfolk are athletic, well-trained to arms, and know their land well. Militias muster at least thrice annually and answer a relay of horn calls very quickly from end to end of the Dale. Most Deepingfolk are good archers in even heavy woods and



have experience in fighting foes with sword and spear. Militia folk—male and female, elven, half-elven, and human—all have leather armor and have trained at least somewhat in fighting at night and creeping around in the woodlands as stealthily as possible.¹

Most Deepingfolk are very good at navigating in thick woods without getting lost; foraging for woodland berries, bark, edible fungi, and the like; and reading spoor and the lie of the land to readily find water, game, and trees of a particular sort. Their knowledge of this woodcraft applies all over the Dales, but it is of lesser effectiveness in the Border Forest, Hullack Forest, and more distant wooded areas.

Deepingfolk tend to be the most tolerant and quietly welcoming of all the Dragon Reach land peoples. They save their wary suspicion and hatreds for goblinkin and the truly evil denizens of other planes who sometimes wander away from Myth Drannor to hunt in the Elven Court woods.

The Twelve Dancing Wizards

One of the most interesting tales in Deeping lore is that of the Twelve from Thay who tried to seize this verdant land several centuries ago. They attacked without warning, slaying many with their magics,

but were challenged by the Deeping Princess and caught in a *dweomer* of her making. This rare and deadly magic entralls victims into an involuntary dance that strips them of all memories, leaving them feebleminded and giving the caster all of their spell mastery and salient knowledge.² Its casting backfires on most wizards, who go insane from the rush of incoming memories.

The Laughing Princess survived the spellcasting, and it was the 12 mages who perished, still dancing. They dance to this day, informed sages say, as invisible, spell-preserved skeletons hidden in a ring of a dozen invisible, extradimensional tomb chambers high above Highmoon and are still adorned with their rings, staves, and other accouterments.

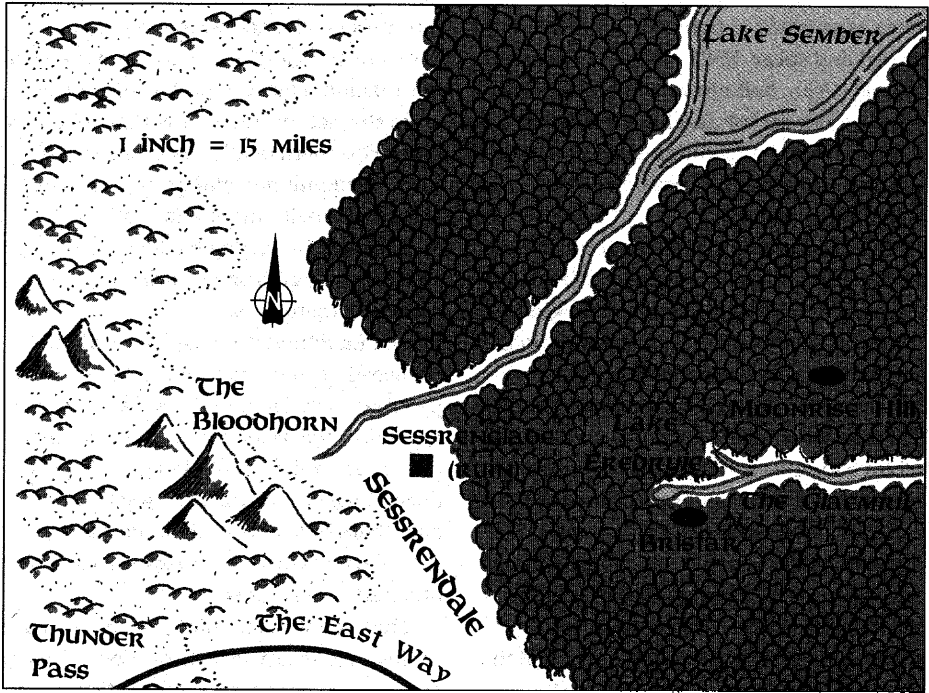
These tombs can only be found by blundering through their invisible doors, which float unseen above the roofs of Highmoon. (Rumor has it that these chambers and their inhabitants are the reason aerial steeds are banned in and around that town.) Use of magic inside a tomb has no effect, since the tomb absorbs all magic to further itself, and physical contact with a dancing skeleton harms living and undead beings alike.³ Deepingfolk sometimes utter the warning to magic-wielding miscreants: “Keep on like that, and you’ll end up like one of the Twelve.”

¹*Elminster*: From what I have seen of thy world, ye might well call Deepingdale a land of Robin Hoods.

²*Elminster*: One level of experience is drained per round that the victim of this spell is forced to dance. No further details of this disgusting spell are given here; more than enough evil has already been done to those who strive to master sorcery by it.

³Any touch of a skeleton or something it holds visits the effect of a *chill touch* and an *Otto's irresistible dance* on the toucher; saving throws to avoid these effects are at a -3 penalty.

Some of the Dancing Wizards are known to hold *staves of power*, and at least one has a rod of an unknown type. All of them wear rings and have wands at their belts. To wrest something away from a skeleton, the attacker must succeed at both an attack roll and a Strength ability check. If the attacker is affected by an *Otto's irresistible dance*, the attacker must also succeed at a saving throw vs. paralyzation every round she or he is so affected to maintain a grip on an item so seized. If this saving throw fails, the grip on the wrested item is lost, and it floats back to its location on the invisible skeleton within two rounds due to some magical side effect. Once removed from a tomb, stolen items escape this tendency to float away.



Bristar

This elven village is known as Velethuil to its inhabitants and Bristar (a compression from "Brightstar," I am told) to humans. Its moon elves consider themselves part of the Dale and comprise the stalwart archers of Oak Company of the Swords of Deepingdale (the name of the army). Those same deadly arrows defend Bristar against brigands, monsters—and unwanted intrusions.

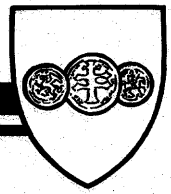
Travelers should note that non-Deeping humans are neither wanted nor welcomed here. As one grim elf put it to me, "You have the rest of Faerûn to walk about in—leave us this small stretch of woods and get you gone!"

That attitude is one good reason not to visit Bristar, and the complete lack of trade

is another. Unless a trader brings a cart of good ash spars for bows or straight yew wands for the making of arrows—which win a grudging welcome—the elves do not want to buy or sell anything. They make potent mint and berry wines and grow enough forest plants to feed themselves and to spare, but they want nothing to do with humans and run people off with arrows if they persist in nosing around.

There is good reason to go west of Bristar: the hauntingly beautiful Lake Ere-druie, source of the Glaemril (more of a small pool than a lake, actually). Bristar, on the southeastern shore, overlooks its dark, calm waters. The elves believe the lake can heal and that it is sacred to Labelas Enoreth: Elves who bathe in it can gain extra years on Faerûn—once.⁴

⁴Elminster: True. Once only, all elves can add 3d20 years to their life span from immersion in the lake. A flask of Lake Ereduie water acts as a *potion of healing* on elves and half-elves only, but it loses its potency if mixed with any other liquid or substance.



The Darkwatch



Deep in the forests north of the Glaemril is a region every traveler but the boldest adventurers should avoid—if they can. Those who have seen it and lived to tell the tale say that the Darkwatch⁵ is a long deep rift running roughly east to west where black oaks and thorn trees grow thickly, twisted and gnarled into blighted, ugly things.

The elves—and, if they have any wits, all other Deepingfolk—avoid this area. Andelmaus Logging of Highmoon lost an entire cutting crew here: The loggers simply vanished, leaving sledges and tools to be overgrown and swallowed by the forest. Local lore tells of times when weary elves agreed that fire⁶ should be used to cleanse the Elven Court of the Darkwatch. When crews set out, however, even veteran elven guides could not find the rift. Other tales tell of times when the trees seemed to shift about, drawing foresters who were trying to stay well away from the Darkwatch into its dark heart.

Shambling mounds, hangman trees, and giant sundews were always to be found around the Darkwatch. Foresters have recently also reported that all manner of monsters are roaming the shunned area of the woods, slaying each other and all other creatures they meet not just for food but for the wanton joy of killing. Rotting carcasses lie about in great numbers, and evil, twisted versions of normally placid or timid woodland creatures have been seen and fought by fearful folk who simply stopped to

glance at what they first thought a peaceful sylvan scene. Whatever evil lurks in the Darkwatch is on the rise, and the tainted area of the forest is spreading.

Old tales in Deepingdale whisper that the elves of Cormanthyr imprisoned a great evil in the rift even before the Mythral was raised in Myth Drannor—an evil that is slowly awakening as passing centuries weaken the bindings upon it. Your humble⁷ servant was so bold as to question Rhauntides of Highmoon, Sage of Deepingdale, about the nature of what lies in the Darkwatch. His sage counsel follows.

Exactly what is now on the move in the Darkwatch is not certain, but the rift does connect with the Underdark. The rot and decay bound into it so long ago were a greater part of the powers of Moander, hurled by that dark god as a weapon against a fair elven city—and so made vulnerable to its inhabitants influence in return. The city of Tsornyl was blighted and corrupted beyond redemption and many of its inhabitants twisted into dark, monstrous races. (Deepspawn are said to be one of these.) However, the creeping evil Moander threw off to do this deed was severed from the god forever by a divine mighty countermagic that cost many bright elves their lives—and the lessened, tortured god was thus able to be cast out of Faerûn—or so the tale goes.

The bound divine evil could not be expunged, but only imprisoned. It has gnawed at its spell bonds down through the ages until it is now breaking free at last. Its powers are to rot, corrupt, and mutate; it causes life to change in form and nature to bloodlust-governed evil if its vitality is

⁵The location of the Darkwatch is shown on first map in the section on Highmoon later in this chapter.

⁶Elves agreeing to use fire on trees in a wood shows the wise how dire this place is.

⁷*Elminster*: Humble? Hah! Volo's definition of humility obviously differs from the one that the rest of us are using, even on more than one world!



too strong to be slain by rotting. Thus this creeping evil spawns hitherto-unknown creatures of destruction.

The weakening of the spell bonds is in part due to age and in another part caused by the decline of the Fair Folk—but it should not have rightfully befallen for an age or more yet. It is Rhauntides' suspicion that the freeing of evil has been hastened by a force working from below—perhaps the phae-rimm or the draw—and a force of the surface world. Rhauntides speculates that the surface forces are probably servants of Cyric, acting under the Mad God's orders, for "the new god is ever unsubtle, overly hasty, and imperfect in his understanding of what he wields and what he tries to work upon."

The Sage of Deepingdale forewarns that what is stirring in the Darkwatch now may be the next great evil that heroes, adventurers, priests, and archmages of Faerûn alike

must all strive against in times to come lest the Realms be swept away. Yet humans are always slow to see coming danger and slower still to realize that they must do something about it and not leave the work to the next person, who has probably already left it for them.

Rhauntides advises all travelers to stay out of the Deepingdale woods unless invited there by Deepingfolk for a good reason, but he also reports that adventuring bands have reached the rift and even fought evil monsters in the crumbling towers and chambers of Tsornyl itself and escaped to tell the tale. He added a cautionary note to all who have brought riches out of that ruin: Have such things cleansed by the most powerful and holy magic available, for the creeping rot of Moander lurks in all it touches, corrupting folk to madness if it cannot destroy them with disease.



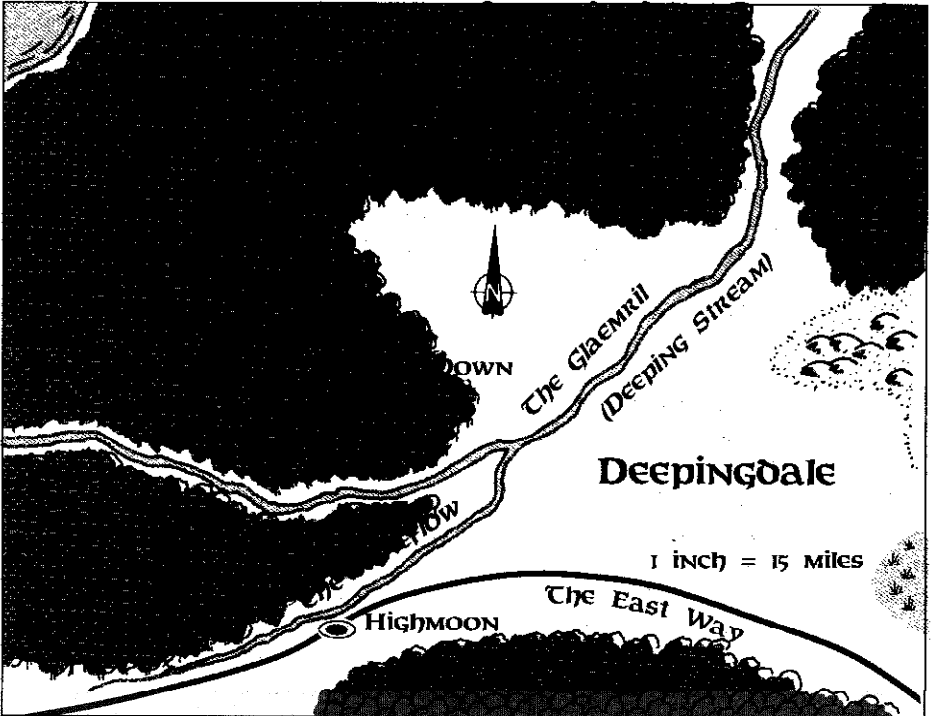
Highmoon

The town of Highmoon is the only settlement of any size in Deepingdale, and it is growing fast. Easygoing friendliness and tolerance is the daily tone of Highmoon. Most travelers who find trouble here go looking for it—or make their own. Travelers on the East Way find Highmoon a pleasant stop, and if they require mercenary guards or provisioning before or after a trip through Thunder Pass, Highmoon's supplies may well prove vital.

Highmoon's name comes from Highmoon Hill, the nearly forgotten name of the ridge on which the Tower of the Rising Moon was built by the half-elven hero Aglauntaras in the Year of the Wandering Wyvern (1022 DR). Always important as a

stronghold from which Thunder Pass and the nearby ford of the Glaemril could be controlled, the Tower attracted settlers to the safety of its shadow, particularly after the militant Alantar and Soryn elven families took up arms against all Fair Folk who were content to dwell in peace with humans. The Deeping Princess took over the Tower upon the death of Aglauntaras, ruling as coregent of Deepingdale with his daughter Alanshara.

From that day to this, elves, half-elves, and humans have dwelt together around Highmoon Hill in a community of trees, winding lanes, small cottages, and splendid gardens. Such features are today being pushed to the lands around the town as the walls of Highmoon have been completed and buildings have





begun to appear that rise three floors above the street. Already some of Highmoon's inhabitants talk of expanding the walls—and visitors are warned that this topic is one that arouses strong feelings. It is best to keep silent and voice no opinion if one is asked about it. Though monster raids from the mountains and forays by Lashan's troops have both come within sight of the Tower, no army has assaulted Highmoon in centuries, so the protection of the walls may be more symbolic than vitally necessary. However, many folk in Deepingdale believe that their completion is the only thing that has kept Archendale from raising arms to annex its rich neighbor. Arkhenfolk, it should be noted, receive a rather cool reception in Deepingdale.

Farms still nestle in closely around the walls of Highmoon, and visitors can still see more trees and flowers within its walls than in any other town in the Dales. Cobbles are being laid in the streets for the first time, covering the last mud and corduroy (log-paved) stretches. Well over a thousand folk dwell here, plus the Swords of Deepingdale (Oak Company and Spear Company, both fielding 70 mounted elven archers), the 30-strong Tower Guard, and as many folk of the Tower household.

Places of Interest in Highmoon

Unique Sites

Caravan Campground

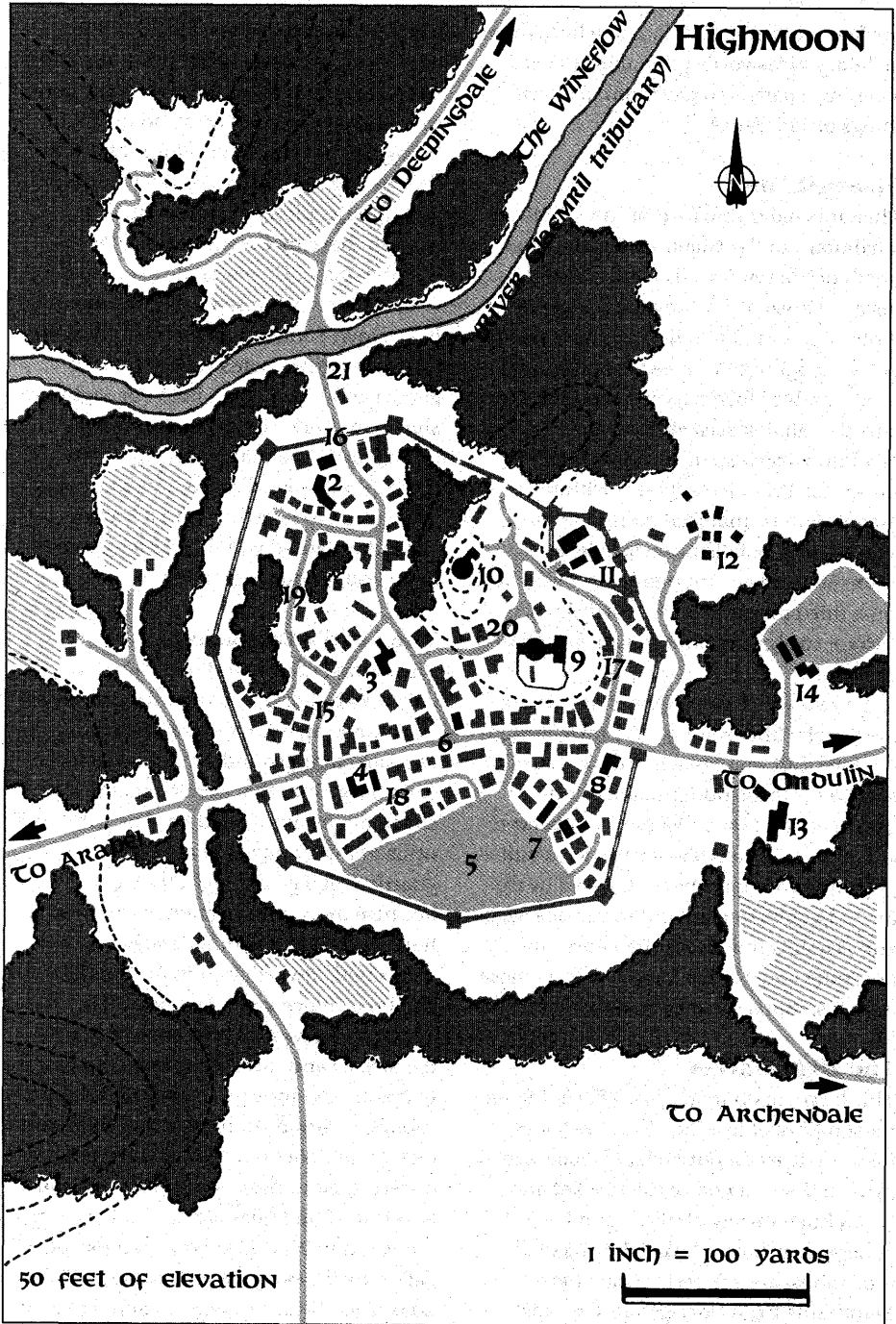
Formerly a camp for hired workers constructing the town walls, this muddy chaos of buildings is now the center of an ongoing horse market and caravan camping area. It has all the untidiness so happily missing from the High Market, but it

Highmoon Map Key

1. Rhauntides's Tower (mage's residence)
2. The Rising Moon (inn)
3. Silverhand House (manor house, merchant coster headquarters, and mercenary training grounds)
4. Royal High House (caravan goods shop)
5. The High Market
6. The Oak and Spear (tavern)
7. Andelmaus Logging (offices of Andelmaus and timber shop)
8. Hanseld's Emporium (spice, curio, and furniture shop)
9. Leaves of Learning (temple to Oghma)
10. The Tower of the Rising Moon (lord's residence and stronghold)
11. The Lord's Barracks
12. Caravan campground
13. The Silver Shield (inn)
14. Darian Stables (tack and harness shop, horse trainer, breeder, and seller)
15. Bunstable Street
16. The Deeping Run (street)
17. Stallion Lane
18. Acorn Lane
19. Torlar's Street
20. White Arrow Way
21. Glaemril Ford (ford of the Wineflow, tributary of the Glaemril)

also boasts frequent and heavy watch patrols to keep things far quieter and more law-abiding than in most such caravan grounds.

This campground is where to go to see caged monsters from far lands, jugglers, contortionists, and freaks of nature (usually these last are subtly shapechanging doppelgangers or simply races normally unknown in the Dales region). This area is where the shadier business deals in Deep-





ingdale are made. This is also where most ordinary hireswords pitch their tents, awaiting a patron to pay them to guard things or kill things.

Glaemril Ford

This unremarkable ford of the Wineflow, a tributary of the Glaemril, located just north of the town walls is mentioned here because of a strange magical power it possesses that is said to be the blessing of the Laughing Princess: From time to time, random folk crossing the ford are cured of all diseases and hurts—and a random wizard spell comes into their minds for them to cast later without incantation or material components! This usually befalls nonwizards, and some of them are momentarily beset by yet a third property of the ford: They *levitate* straight up into the air for a few breaths!

Several priests and mages, including the nearby Rhauntides, have investigated the ford, but they have found no cause or source for these odd but consistent occurrences. Some folk of the Dale even talk of forming a club—or worse, a cult—of people who have been “blessed by the ford.” Despite queries put to various sages and Danali’s Index (see the Leaves of Learning entry below), the origin of these manifestations remains mysterious.

The High Market

This large, open market is different from most others of its kind in that vendors have the use of a public bathhouse and privy at the east end of the market and that a huge variety of herbs and herbal concoctions (from flavored drinks to medicines) are offered for sale here. Merchants from Cormyr are the most

frequent shoppers here in all but the coldest months; many fast caravans bring the wares of Marsember and Suzail here in exchange for good furs and herbs. Tressym, the winged cats found thick as thieves in Eveningstar, are very popular with the Deepingfolk, and many are brought here by Cormyrean traders—and the folk of Deepingdale also seem to have a taste for the sharper cheeses made in Cormyr. Sembian merchants compete for Deepingdale coins with elaborate games and blown glass items brought by ship from hotter lands, and minstrels often play in the market for the coins tossed their way. All in all, this market is a great place to browse—and it is even carefully planted with hard mosses so as to be less muddy than most.

The Lord’s Barracks

This walled compound of armory and barracks buildings has its own gate in the town walls opening directly into the caravan campground so that army forces can charge into that ever-changing tent city in an instant if need be. The gates and walls of this compound are alertly guarded all day and night through because more fine weapons are stored here than in all the other Dales combined. (Swordpoint in Archendale can boast *more* arms, but not better arms.) The town watchmen, who patrol the streets and market, operate out of the barracks and the Swords are based here, though at any given time half of them are out in the Dale on patrol. Visitors are not encouraged to nose about here, but the admirer of fine horseflesh is in for a treat when a mounted East Way road patrol sallies forth: Many Swords soldiers like to coax their horses to rear up and dance,



flinging their hooves out in fighting strikes, as they emerge through the gates!

Silverhand House

This imposing stone manor is the headquarters of the Silverhand House coster founded by the retired elven adventurer Gaelin Silverhand 60-odd years ago (no relation to the Seven Sisters of that name). The tail, proud elves and half-elves of this organization run swift, well-guarded caravans east to Ordulin and west to Arabel from here, taking rare woods, resin, amber, and the finest beaver and marten pelts to long-standing buyers in those places.

Here the Silverhand House coster recruits mercenaries its members have seen and liked in action to begin the long and rigorous moral testing and training process that ends in discharge, full staff status, or actual partnership in the House. Here is also where its members buy good specimens of the wares they deal in from passersby, such as adventurers who have ventured deep into the Elven Court woods beyond Lake Sember.

This coster pays well and is open and fair in its dealings. If one in turn deals honestly with its members, they try to maintain an ongoing, lifetime trading relationship. This forthright, loyal behavior makes the coster members very bad to have as enemies and wonderful as allies; Silverhand House maintains a loosely affiliated adventuring company it uses to take covert action to avenge itself on any who cheat its members. Around the Dragon Reach Silverhand House has won a reputation for reliability second to none. "Stay small and stay good" is Gaelin's motto, and his coster follows it.

Residences **Rhauntides' Tower**

This small, 60-foot-tall hexagonal stone tower is ornately carved with swirling meteors and random stars. It and its accompanying stable barn overlook Highmoon from atop the Hill of Spells, where its builder, Rhauntides, has a small horse farm.

Rhauntides lives quietly, seldom leaving his tower. Known as the Sage of Deepingdale, he is a kindly, quiet man who tries to answer any lore questions for the folk of Deepingdale for a nominal fee of 2 gp per query. Visitors find his expertise much more pricey. For them he typically charges 50 gp and more for simple queries, quickly escalating to 200 gp and up for any questions that concern magic.

Rhauntides buys spellbooks if they contain spells new to him that he deems of value (be warned that such magics have grown few down through the years), but he does not train strangers in magic, cast spells for them, or go adventuring—no matter what titanic piles of coins and gems are offered! The reader is further warned that this former adventurer has destroyed no less (and probably more than 16 wizards and adventuring bands that have come to his tower to try to steal or seize magic from him, including one Zulkir of Thay, an alhoon (mind flayer lich), a dragon, and an eye tyrant who attacked behind a shield of three undead servitor beholders! (Such attacks have lessened somewhat since Shaunil Tharm, Rhauntides' lady and sole pupil, has let it be known that the Sage of Deepingdale can instantly call on Elminster of Shadowdale for aid if the need arises.)



The Tower of the Rising Moon

This black-walled stronghold actually boasts three towers, each topped with a double-ended or “horned” snow awning that scoops cooling breezes down into the interior when the trapdoors are open in summer. Inside, it is a miracle of hanging plants, magical radiances, and cleverly piped water. I have never been in a castle that seemed so much like a cave in the middle of a garden and not a dank, dark fortress.

The Tower of the Rising Moon is the abode of the lord of Highmoon, a half-elven warrior named Theremen Ulath who is thankfully easygoing and informal. At the Tower, visitors of note are entertained or even housed. Even if you are not likely to require housing or entertaining, ask to see the central Starfall Chamber, where a magnificent and thoroughly detailed map of the Dales has been carved into the top of a huge circular table. At night, starlight is projected down onto the table by means of slanted mirrors, and the effect is awesomely beautiful!

The kitchens here turn out superb food—subtle sauces are the key—and the wood-paneled rooms are as grand as any to be found in the retreats of rich Sembians or Cormyrean nobles’ castles. The place is a fortress, though, and every guest has an escort and every room its standing guard of vigilant Tower guards.

Captains of the Guard serve as judges in the absence of the lord, though they do not put anyone to death without calling in Rhauntides, any visiting Harpers or war wizards of Cormyr, or the captains of the Swords first to

consult. Miscreants usually find themselves in the dungeons, awaiting a full and formal trial. The trial is preceded by a magical mind-reading by Rhauntides to learn the truth. Only the guilty or those unable to be effectively read go to trial. Those proven innocent by Rhauntides’s magic are apologized to, rewarded for their troubles with gifts from the Dale, and become honored guests lodged in the best rooms in the Tower rather than occupants of its dungeons.

Popular legend around Deepingdale asserts⁸ that the unused lowest level of dungeons in the heart of Highmoon Hill is roamed by will-o’-wisps and features deep wells and powerful magic (both spellbooks and items of power) walled away since the days of Princess Imryll. These items are supposedly hidden behind sliding stone panels that open only to those who can find them and who sing the right song of opening. Both words and tune must be correct, but key and performance can vary. It is my pleasure to set forth here for the first time the words to one such charm—though I know not to which door nor tune these words are linked:

*In the lands under the wave,
Where the merfolk daily save
Sailors who have gone astray,
Sounds a bell for me today.
Sing away, come away—
Yea, sing away, come away,
And open now for me I pray.*

Temples

It is rumored that a temple to Corellon Larethian stands in the woods near

⁸Elminster: Correctly.



Highmoon, but I was unable to find it or find anyone willing to guide me to it or even confirm its existence. I suspect it does exist and lies northwest of town beyond the Hill of Spells, but I stress that this is conjecture. Such places of worship are usually breathtakingly beautiful forest glades watched over by elven guardians, so bear this in mind should you walk the many hundreds of winding forest trails in this direction. Though a series of small road shrines dot the East Way west of the Dale and a rentable shrine of all faiths (sacred to none) exists in the caravan campgrounds, the only official temple in Highmoon and the only place of worship within its walls is the splendid temple to Oghma, the Leaves of Learning.

Leaves of Learning

The slim-spired temple of Oghma the Binder, the largest and most impressive structure in Highmoon, stands at one end of Highmoon Hill above its walled, forested garden, where cascades of endlessly pumped water babble past many small bowers and contemplation nooks. One of the finest libraries east of Candlekeep resides in stout stone chambers inside, hushed under the weight of many interwoven antifire spells that do not let even *fireball* spells ignite, let alone torches or sparks!

Wisely, the clergy members here have let it be widely known that they have not a word about magic within their walls; they leave ail that to Rhauntides. This policy has probably saved them from many thefts over the years and allowed the temple to concentrate on its two major aims: collecting new written records of life in the region and copying

out books and tracts for those who desire them and can afford to pay for their scribing. The written life records include diaries, war histories, and even campfire accounts from everywhere in the Dragon Reach. Priests are kept busy from day to day reading and buying books brought to the temple and going out to ask old folk specific questions and take down the answers. Only seven priests labor at both the record collecting and the copying, protected by a Tower Guard detachment. Although many of them are viewed as dotty old creatures by Deepingfolk—they *are* apt to be absent-minded, mumbling, hunched, and bespectacled—they are dearly loved. The town is very proud of the reputation for sophistication that these priests' work has given Highmoon.

In just a decade or so, Highmoon has gone from being unknown or viewed as a deliberately backward bumpkin town to being a growing, bustling center of culture because of the mage Rhauntides and because of Learned Father Higher Atlar Hasicor Danali, the tall, grave high priest of Oghma who runs this temple. His severe, balding head and flapping black Robes of Many Sigils are seen only seldom in the streets, because he spends most of his time deep in the temple's innermost chambers working on his dream: the Index.

No one would ever accuse Danali of being dotty or forgetful, but his early clerical life assisting a librarian whose wits were failing drove home to him just how much finding things in any library rode on the possibly addled wits and all-too-mortal heart of whoever shelved and read its contents. If precise and detailed knowledge of where to



find specific things was ever to outlive people, an ever-growing written record of where to find things must be compiled. In response to this concern, Danali has been creating his Index to the contents of the library of the temple for some 40 years. (He is 56.) Oghma so approved of this quiet back-room work that the Binder appeared in visions to high members of the church of Oghma's hierarchy repeatedly to order the priests to elevate Danali over the years and ultimately to select him as leader of the Leaves of Learning. There is no question of any trickery or misinterpretation about these visions, and news of them has spread through the priesthood of Oghma throughout Faerûn like wildfire and resulted in many delegations from other temples (including much older and larger ones) to see Danali's work.

The key to Danali's Index is to have a separate sheet of vellum for each entry so that alphabetical order need never be lost. Each tome in the library's collection is then numbered so that they can be positively identified in the Index, and detailed notations are made upon its subject matter and internal topics of interest or details of note with the books collection number given at the end of an entry. For example: "Barrels, making of, using cherry wood: Askran of Selgaunt, brief descrip. set down in 1320 DR; see *Sembian Days and Ways* (#10351)."

Books in the library can be examined by outsiders upon payment of a fee of 15 gp per tome. Examination can last up to a full day; longer requires another payment of the fee. The book must be studied in the room where it is shelved and two lay clergy members always supervise such

perusals. Reading and even discussion of a work are allowed, but not its copying. Priests can make copies of selected pages on a successive day for a fee of 5 gp per page or 10 gp if a page contains maps, diagrams, symbols, or illustrations that the patron wishes to have reproduced exactly. Prices for copying lengthy tracts or entire works are negotiable.

Shops

Andelmaus Logging

Timber and Cut Wood



In this aromatic shop on the edge of the market, Andelmaus Logging sells odd-sized cuts of wood and special orders and buys timber from anyone who brings it in. This company specializes in supplying fine and rare woods to the cities of Sembia, and to get huge shadowtop spars or wagonloads of duskwood it has more than once cut more trees in the Dale than the foresters allow. (The owner paid the fines and charged them to her customers as "special fees.")

The owner—a purring, catlike, totally unscrupulous coin-clutcher named Kessia, who is obviously at home in the most cutthroat Sembian merchant circles, is unrepentant but does not want to get run out of town. She buys timber here without asking questions as to its origin and runs heavily armed woodcutting wagon trains into former Sessrendale to cut trees along the western edge of the Elven Court woods. These teams cut down everything and trample what is left, and they take a lot, pushing the forest back year by year.

Consequently, the local elves do not like Kessia at all. Her guards and her



purchased magical items keep her personally safe, but the elves made sure that Arkhen woodcutters were alerted when she tried to sneak a cutting team into the Arch Wood. Not a hireling, adz, ox, or wagon of that team ever returned to Highmoon.

Kessia is currently rumored to be hiring adventurers to explore for new places to cut wood. Locals hint darkly that what she is after is a private strike force so that she can arrange “accidents” to befall elves that stand in her way (physically or metaphorically) in the woods and other foes who decry her business practices.

Darian Stables

Tack and Harness, Horsebreeder, Trainer, and Seller



An always-calm, patient former warrior from far Impiltur, Alamus Darian breeds, trains, and sells horses here and at a much larger ranch well down the Glaemril. He is considered an expert trainer and a fair judge of diseases and injuries, but he never buys horses. He sells tack and harness, trained riding mounts, and draft animals for average prices. He charges 1 sp per horse examined for consultations about equine health, but he does not travel to look at any beast further away than as far along the East Way as one can get while still keeping the Tower of the Rising Moon in sight. He gave me the impression he ran away from something in Impiltur, but he will not talk about his past at all; however, he is a good fellow who definitely knows his horses.

Hanseld's Emporium

Spices, Exotic Goods, Curios, and Furniture



The whimsical half-elf who runs this shop is apt to be seen dancing along the roof ridge or playing a longhorn⁹ atop a pile of crates out back when a more, er, normal shopkeeper would be inside selling things—or at least watching to see that patrons do not just help themselves. But Hanseld is, well, Hanseld, and people, especially children, love him just the way he is—the local source of free entertainment. Hanseld can outplay or outsing a minstrel when he is of a mind to, but he is usually too busy closeted in a back room seeing to the personal needs of clients who have traveled a long way to reach his shop.

Most folk think that people come to the shop from so far because Hanseld's Emporium is the only place they can get the rare and exotic spices and curios from Impiltur, Chessenta, the Tashalar, and Calimshan that he sells—to say nothing of the finely crafted lamps, tables, and lounges from Marsember and Selgaunt. But in truth all of those things can be had in Suzail, Westgate, and Sembia, and a lot of those clients he spends time behind closed doors with come from those very same well-supplied places.

Your diligent servant made some covert inquiries and can now reveal to all what was only suspected before: Likable, humorous Hanseld is an expert smuggler and fence of stolen goods, with shady shipping contacts all over Sembia and in Marsember, too! If your business interests require your acquaintance with a smug-

⁹Elminster: Flute to ye.



gler or a fence or if your tastes in furniture run to, say, life-sized bronze mermaid statues with moving chests and lips who gasp out incense smoke or tables made from the coiled, severed tails of giant jungle lizards, then by all means pay Hanseld a call. He is a brilliant—longhorn player.

Royal High House

Caravan Goods



This pair of crammed, barnlike shops on the East Way are together known as Royal High House, the home of Royal Provisioners of Highmoon. The “Royal” in the place’s name comes from the fact that the Deeping Princess started this business as a service to the humans she was enticing to her new settlement. Today, these shops cater to the caravan trade. They sell tack, tents, tarpaulins, tools, harness, and even new, ready-to-roll wagons! They claim the finest and most varied selection of traveling rations anywhere—and as far as my mouth could tell,¹⁰ it seems they have called upon the herb gardeners of the Dale to season their dried food so that it just might be the finest anywhere!

Wineskins—items rarely plentiful enough in any outfitting shop—are to be had in profusion here, as are ready-dried kindling, horse liniment, slow candles, and a host of other usually unobtainable things. If something is necessary for camping, it is to be found here somewhere. The Royal High House’s on-the-street convenience costs you about 10% more than the average prices—but if you are in a hurry, it is more than worth it.

Tavern

The Oak and Spear



The signboard of this inn shows a spear buried in the trunk of an old oak. The shaft of the spear passes through both an orc skull and a harp. The skull recalls a great local victory over an orc horde that poured through the Thunder Pass almost 200 winters ago, and the harp symbolizes good cheer, which is what this dimly lit, cozy drinking spot is widely known for now.

A mug of draft beer costs 8 cp or a good song; most minstrels and bards who pass through town make a point of stopping here. If you want quiet seclusion for your drinking, come during the day when harpists play gentle, washing-the-strings background music. The rest of the time this place is apt to be cheerfully noisy because each entertainer always tries to outdo the others.

A full range of ales, lagers and stouts can be had here as well as zzar, a few sherries, a brandy, and some wines, but most patrons do not bother. The draft brewed on the premises, Highmoon Dark, is justly famous across the Dragon Reach. It is a dark, smoky beer with a rich, nutty, almost baconlike aftertaste. The Oak and Spear is the only place one can get it, so patrons drink it in copious quantities.

Inn

Since the rise to prominence of Shandril Shessair, the lady wielder of spellfire, the Rising Moon has become Deepingdale’s

¹⁰Elminster: Some people’s taste is only in their mouths.



most famous inn and deservedly receives its own separate entry in this guidebook. This leaves me here to describe only:

The Silver Shield



The mirror-bright hanging shield of this wayhouse is the first thing travelers approaching Highmoon from the east see. It heralds a house of quality—pretentious quality, I fear. The Starnar elven family, who run this inn, mean well. They go for spotless cleanliness and expensive furnishings that scream luxury and money. However, the service is so haughty and slow and the rooms so cold that the disappointing final effect is one of being unwelcome, (The stiffness of the staff members seems to vanish, by the

way, when they are dealing with elven guests.)

The 13 sp per night per head fee does not help, either, when everything—from a tallglass of chilled mintwater to stabling—is extra. A careless traveler can easily run up a bill of 15 gp or so for an overnight stay with a bath, evenfeast meal, drinks, and the like.

Still, for snobs or folk with so much money that they want to be rid of its irksome weight, this is surely the cleanest and most exclusive lodging in town. The careful traveler who dines, drinks, and stables a mount elsewhere than the Silver Shield will enjoy a stay of average cost at an inn that is a very clean and pleasant but otherwise average—and pretends to be much, much more.



The Rising Moon

Inn



This popular inn is cheap, warm, and cozy. It feels like guests are being made welcome in someone's home by casual hosts who do not care if people put their feet up on the tables, so long as they enjoy being there and do not pick fights with other guests.

The Place

The half-timbered inn has a fieldstone ground floor and chimney and a roof of cedar shakes. A post out front, the wall above the serving window of the bar (where the proprietor's axe hangs), and the stained glass of the inn's front door all display the sign of the inn: the silver crescent moon. The upper floor has 11 sleeping rooms that vary widely in size. One room can accommodate a party of six in separate beds. For larger parties, renting more than one room is the norm, although the inn does have an attic where the staff members sleep.

The trot down to Deeping Stream that Shandril Shessair used to make is blocked by a city wall now. Traffic through the gate usually makes a water bucket run, even with a shoulder yoke, impractical, so piping has been run up from the river. A treadle pump installed in a small summerhouse just behind the kitchen door moves the water up through the pipes. For 1 cp per bucket, passersby are allowed the use of the pump to fill their own buckets.

The cellars beneath the Rising Moon are extensive. The owner, Gorstag, is thinking

of relocating the staff sleeping quarters into them and putting another floor of rooms in by opening up the attic with dormers.

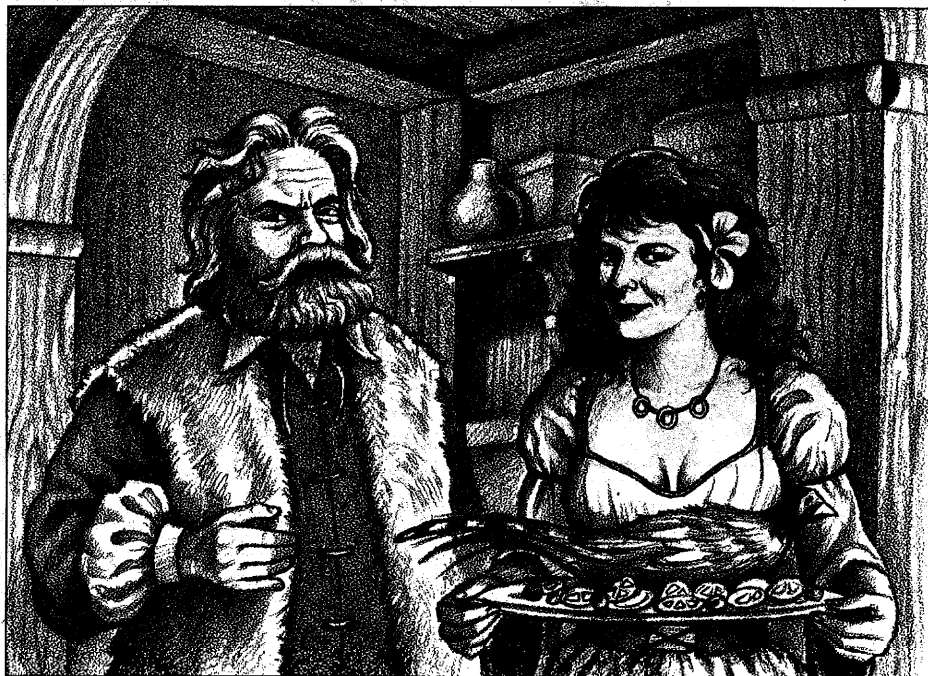
The Prospect

Gorstag's thoughts of expansion are due to the Moon's burgeoning popularity. Always the best no-troubles lodging in Highmoon, this inn has become famous as the early home of the only known wielder of spellfire in all the Realms, Shandril Shessair. Many folk, from powerful wizards seeking the secrets of spellfire to the merely curious, have come to Highmoon to question Gorstag closely about Shandril's life in hopes of learning just what awakened spellfire within her.

Gorstag retired from adventuring to reopen his father's old inn here some 30 years ago. To protect the gruff old warrior and his wife, Lureene, Harpers have taken to staying at the Moon when they are in town. And though he knows it not, the cook Gorstag hired to replace the treacherous Korvan—a fat, mute half-elven lady named Rhiia Duskmantle—is a Harper agent.

Success has not spoiled the folk of the Moon. They are still the same friendly, easygoing, cheerfully earthy hosts they have always been. Staying at the Moon is like temporarily being taken in to a large, fun-loving, forgiving family. This feeling of belonging is one of the reasons crowding is now a regular problem at the Moon—and the others are Lureene's butter tarts and Rhiia's hearty poultry dishes. (Ah! Lureene has the gift of the gods in cooking, but not even my silver tongue could charm the butter tart recipe out of her!¹¹)

¹¹Elminster: Not for lack of trying, Volo me lad. Next time, take thy tongue out of her ear and Gorstag will not have to threaten ye with his axe!



Gorstag and Lurene of the Rising Moon

Some local folk come to the Moon for dinner, and when the place is full to bursting, others ask if they can sleep in the stables just to feel they have stayed at the Moon! Gorstag always tries to accommodate them, but if it is a quiet visit to a private, nearly deserted inn you are after, come here only in the howling heart of winter. In the cold season, a visitors still find the main room crowded at mealtimes, but the rest of the day guests are few. It is also in winter that Gorstag taps his excellent and very strong cider and serves it hot by the fire with buttered biscuits!

The Provender

Though Lurene's tarts easily take the prize for the best wants to be had at the Moon, Rhiia's soups, pork pies, and fowl dishes are what fill most folk up and keep

them coming back for more. On the next page is the fowl recipe that has helped to make the Moon famous—or rather, two recipes, the one being a variant of the other. The name of the first recipe, I am told, comes from its origins: It hails from a back-country Harper adventuress dwelling near what is now Everlund.

The Prices

Folk who come here just for meals pay 1 gp for all they can eat and drink on the premises (carrying away is not allowed) or 5 sp for all they can eat and drinks costing extra. Guests pay 6 sp a night for a bed, but a whopping 4 gp if they want a room all to themselves due to the inn's normal crowding. Guests receive their meals at a reduced price of 2 sp per person per meal for as many servings as they can down,



Old Tower Fowl



Divers pieces of chicken or turkey meat from birds that have been plucked, their innards turned out, and heads and feet removed — enough to fill a greatpot

- 1 handful of ground black pepper
- 2 handfuls of salt
- 3 handfuls truffles or black wrinkle Dale mushrooms
- 1 pint dry cider
- 1 pour thickest cream

Melt a little over half the butter in the greatpot over a goodly fire, then add the pieces of fowl and fry them gently until golden all over. Sprinkle them with salt and pepper to taste and then cover them and cook them over light flames whilst ye take a frying pan with a lid and melt the rest of the butter in it over goodly flames. Scorch not the butter!

To this melted butter add the mushrooms and stir gently until their juices run out into the butter. Then pour off all the butter and mushroom juices into the greatpot, taking the pan of cooked 'shrooms away from the heat.

Pour now the cider into the greatpot and add more salt and pepper to taste, then cover and simmer over gentle flames for a goodly while. Run ye a longfork into the fowl from tyme to tyme to see when it be done through.

When 'tis cooked, take the fowl from the flames and fork out the pieces into a pile atop the mushrooms. Let the mixture stand whilst ye stir the cream into the greatpot. Return it to gentle flames and simmer until thick, stirring constantly!

When the sauce is thick, lift it from the flames just long enough to put the fowl and 'shrooms back into the greatpot. Simmer and stir until the fowl and mushroom mixture is reheated, tasting and seasoning with more salt and pepper if desired.

When the taste is right, serve immediately. Reminders can readily be added to clear soups to hearten them up.

Ladies' Fowl

This recipe is made the same way as Old Tower fowl save that one fries six small peeled field onions in the greatpot with the butter until they are browned, then ladies them out, leaving all juices behind. When the fowl is fried golden, add the onions back along with two crushed and peeled cloves of garlic and any stock from earlier cooking of fowl that one may have. Season with salt and pepper to taste, then cook as with Old Tower fowl whilst ye chop chicken livers and parsley fyne and seed and skin two fists of ripe green grapes.

When done, add all these to the greatpot and boil hard until thickened. Taste, add salt and pepper if desired, then pour into a warmed serving dish and take to table.

but drinks are extra. Stabling is an extra 1 sp per night per beast.

All folk paying for drinks—that is, all overnight guests and those visiting just to

dine, who elect to pay just for all they can eat—face prices of 4 cp per talltankard for beer and 3 cp per tallglass for wine. Gorstag serves Shadowdark Ale, Purple



Dragon Ale, and Dragon's Breath Beer, and stocks a dubious selection of rather plummy red wines and dry, thin whites made locally by old ladies along the Glaemril who cannot resist experimentally adding herbs and berries to each vintage. The quality of their wine varies wildly from bottle to bottle, and I would not recommend it for anyone not willing to lose the worth of their coin in the taste experiment.

Gorstag himself loves night snacks. While he is up preparing things, he feels he might as well serve other night eaters who come to the front door and blow through a tube to make a distinctive low humming sound that does not wake guests above but brings Gorstag to open up. These snacks consist of beer, hot buttered bread, and cheese. Strong cheeses are Gorstag's passion; he offers Arabellan Cheddar, Elturian Gray, Pepper Cheese—and even Damarite Red and the rarely seen Green Calishite!¹² A mug and a platter sets snackers back the grand sum of 1 cp and is the best deal by far in town if one can wait until the wee hours to dine! I've seen hungry adventurers come in and devour a dozen such servings, one after another.

Travelers' Lore

The Rising Moon is an old, historied inn. Gorstag can tell many tales of the early days of Highmoon and of his own adventuring career. Despite what he says, however, he is *not* old enough to ever have known the Deeping Princess.

Most folk think of the Moon just as the home of spellfire. Those expecting fireworks, strange magic, or even a commemorative plaque will be disappointed. Gorstag and Lureene are, however, very

proud of "their little girl" Shandrill and will talk freely of her early days at the inn.

Gorstag understands the restlessness that drove Shandrill to seek adventure, but believes he did the right thing in giving her a normal childhood and keeping her hidden from prying eyes for so long. He and Lureene studiously avoid answering questions as to Shandrill's present whereabouts. Instead, they talk to the pryingly curious about the exciting growth of Highmoon and what it will mean to the treasured pastoral feel of the Dale and the sylvan-loving elves.

One of the rumored locations of the tomb of the Deeping Princess is beneath the cellars of the Rising Moon. Although Gorstag denies that there is any truth to the rumor, a secret shaft was recently discovered in one side of the hearth chimney opening out of its side into the kitchens. The shaft proved to descend past the present cellars into a low, arch-roofed cellar about 70 feet long whose far end was blocked by a rock fall. Gorstag believes this was more likely a smugglers' cellar than an elven tomb, and its construction would seem to support his contention. It is rumored in town that a certain patron has paid Gorstag a very handsome sum of money for the private and exclusive use of this storage space. Just who the renter is and what the cellar is being used for are things Gorstag refuses to discuss; even the most avid gossips do not seem to know.

History buffs should not miss the battered Stag Shield above the kitchen door. Its barely legible arms are those of Rauthren Halawk, one of the first human settlers to answer the call of the Deeping Princess to dwell here by the Glaemril and found Deepingdale.

¹²The interested diner can find out more about all of these cheeses—and beers—in *Aurora's Whole Realms Catalogue*.



Hunters' Down

Named for a long-ago battle in which human hunters died in a last stand atop the hill against a bugbear host, the long, tree-girt hill of Hunter's Down¹³ is a landmark used by many to navigate the winding forest lanes north of the Glaemril and by Deepingfolk and outlanders alike as a meeting place. This hill has seen many confrontations between elves waiting for other elves and woodcutters waiting for their fellows—and between members of rival bands of adventurers.

Hunters' Down is a tranquil ridge cloaked in soaring shadowtop trees. A deep pool rests midway along it, reputed by legend to have magical powers. Many folk camp on the hill, especially near the pool, and the eerie beauty of the place has inspired many lovelorn ballads. In truth, the hill is an ancient elven barrow tomb of the dead from a great battle in the Searing, the first bitter war between rival elven races in the region. The Searing weakened the Fair Folk so much that they could not hurl back the humans who later invaded the Dragon Reach lands.

The dead of both sides, the Hlarr and the Yhendorn, lie buried here together, watched over by a dozen baelnorn¹⁴ (undead elven mages) who sit unsleeping in the dark passages arguing over what the elves should have done. These undying ones are desperate for news of what has befallen since the Searing. They often freely give minor magical items to folk who find a way into the heart of the hill and try to answer their questions or

recount events in Toril without offering any violence. They can also provide healing for the diseased and wounded and recharge most magical items. (This last is their preferred payment for information.)

Everyone who has met the baelnorn has reached them by diving into the depths of the pool. A great hole in its limestone walls that swimmers can readily find opens into the tomb. A magical barrier holds back the waters from flooding the tomb passages, but living things can freely pass through in both directions.

The baelnorn can use their spells and the magical items stored in the tomb. The tomb contains many magical staves and rods, some of which unleash powers normally found in rings and wands in today's magic. The spell the baelnorn most often employ is cast whenever nonelves dig, burn, or use magic to scry or penetrate into the hill. It is a specialized summoning that instantly brings a crimson death mist¹⁵ from the nearby Glaun Bog to Hunters' Down to attack the offenders.

The baelnorn can also enact a curse on all who defeat the mist and persist in disturbing the Down: a year-long *ironguard* effect that cannot be dispelled.¹⁶ (Recipients cannot touch any metal; it simply falls harmlessly through them!) Like the curse placed on those who disturb Grave Hollow in Archenbridge, the elves use this magic to keep their dead unmolested. Few adventurers dare risk a year of the inability to wear armor or use most tools or weapons—and fewer still can carry away metallic riches from a tomb if they cannot touch metal.

¹³The location of Hunter's Down is shown on the first map in the section on Highmoon earlier in this chapter.

¹⁴Statistics for baelnorn are found in the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Annual, Volume One*.

¹⁵Statistics for crimson death mists are found in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome.

¹⁶*Elminster*: Not so. Three *remove curses* do the trick.



Moonrise Hill

This moon elven village is known as Srenshen¹⁷ to the Fair Folk. Like Bristar it is part of Deepingdale and the source of many skilled elven archers in the army of the Dale. Spear Company of the Swords of Deepingdale is drawn from the young hunters of Srenshen.

Moonrise Hill has a tradition of truly awesome archery—such as hitting the eye of a bird in flight a mile away—so warnings to non-Deeping humans to stay away should be heeded. A silent reinforcement of the “Please Keep Clear/Elven Lands” notices posted beyond its perimeter is provided by permanent illusions of nonelven skeletons riddled with elven arrows that stand above the trails leading to the community. (By all rights the arrows ought to fall out, having nothing to bite into on the skeletons, if these were not illusions.)

Even if precocious travelers ignore the warnings and plunge ahead to Moonrise Crag looking for the settlement they know to be located in its shadow, Moonrise Hill can be hard to find: It is all tree homes and earthen storage cellars hidden behind artfully arranged clumps of growing foliage. Only the Bonepile—burnt ground where the bones of a hobgoblin raiding band lie in heaps adorned with the remains of later nuisances, such as owlbears and ettins—gives any sign of the settlement if the elves remain hidden.

Moonrise Crag is a great bald knob of rock traditionally crowned by wyvern lairs. It is now used by wolves as a howling place since elven arrows swept it clear of its more dangerous inhabitants. On the west, it rises from the trees as a ferny meadow that gives way to lichen and broken rocks, and thence to a

bare, windswept rock shoulder that sweeps to a jagged face pointing east. Below this hooked rock face is the old, thickly grown stand of ash, duskwood, and oak trees where the elves dwell. They do not welcome visitors and attack anyone climbing on the crag or trying to mine its flanks.

The reason Moonrise Hill appears in these pages is the “driftgems” that blow from the crag’s crumbling eastern face. Moonrise Crag’s rock is very porous, and on the exposed, broken east face it has dried out almost to powder. When strong winds blow, the rock crumbles away and blows east into the forest as a gray powder. Sometimes small, but very high-quality rubies hitherto trapped in the rock are blown with it. Driftgems blow most thickly during and after lightning storms and have included rubies as large as the first joint of a human woman’s thumb. Walkers in the woods can literally have a fortune in gems blow into their hands!

As word of such astonishing windfalls¹⁸ spread over the years, adventurers traveled here to snatch at riches blowing past them. They attacked the elves—who they erroneously thought must, of course, be simply staggering around under the weight of already gathered rubies—and also took to ambushing each other, as they still do today. This behavior led the elves to become wary, then reclusive, then actively hostile to strangers. In current times, the Bonepile—the only open ground in the path of the driftgems—can be a deadly place when the wind is blowing. Most of the elves do not care about the gems, but also do not like outsiders lurking about, slaying game, setting poorly tended campfires, and threatening them—so they fire arrows at anyone unfamiliar they see.

¹⁷The location of Moonrise Hill is shown on the first map in the section on Highmoon earlier in this chapter and on the map in the section on Bristar earlier in this chapter.

¹⁸Argh. Yet another Voloish pun.





Featherdale



Among the most famous of arrogant Sembian sayings about the back-country bumpkins who dwell to the north of them is the one that “More than one Dale just isn’t there.” Most folk today take this saying to mean that a Sembian cannot even see a settlement when passing through the poor, rustic Dales or think it a boastful reference to the fact that the richest Dale of all, Moon-dale, was swallowed by Sembia. Others see it as an allusion to vanished Dales such as Sessrendale and Tarkhaldale. The truth is, however, that the phrase is a snide comment about Featherdale.

Unlike most of the other Dales, Featherdale is not a distinct valley. Rather, the Dale is formed from the basin of the lower Ashaba between Blackfeather Bridge—which carries Rauthauvyr’s Road across the river—and Feather Falls. The Dale does not have a ruler, a standing army, capital, or any towns. Yet this prosperous farming territory has a character all its own and has twice successfully avoided annexation by Scardale, once similarly rebuffed Battledale, and to astonish all the gods, even denied Sembia’s grasping hand thrice.

The Countryside

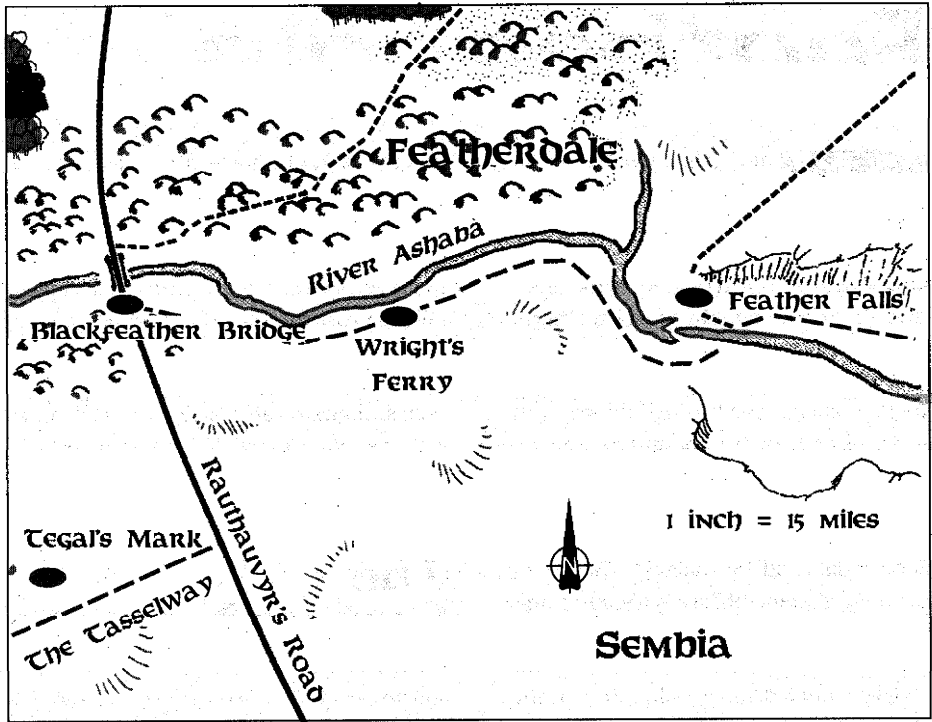
The lowlands of the Ashaba are a patchwork of gently rolling farms with waist-high fieldstone walls and rather haphazard lines of evergreen-planted levees built along the river originally to guard against flooding. (However, since

images and more powerful clergy came to dwell in the Dale, their magic has served to largely prevent the spring floods from exceeding the riverbanks.) Wood lots dot the land here and there, and small ridges of hills cross the Dale on a northeast to southwest axis. Lanes wander up and down the gentle slopes, but visitors will search them in vain for any town or large settlement. Featherdale is truly the pastoral farming country many Sembians imagine most of the Dales are.

The Featherdarrans

Featherdarrans (or “Featherdalesmen,” if you are an ignorant Sembian) are a self-sufficient folk. Every farm and village looks after its own business and its own justice. The feuds that folk of larger, richer lands would expect to erupt are surprisingly few here because folk tend to be easygoing, concerned with the land more than anything else, and gifted by the gods with large shares of common sense. When Scardale poured through Featherdale in Lashan’s time, the folk here simply hid their vulnerable children, opened their doors and stables, fed and horsed the invading warriors, and laid low. They knew they could not possibly stop this army, but also that it could not last long without being overwhelmed by a host of hireswords raised by a fearful Sembia, even if the other Dales were defeated in the field against Lashan.

“Stout” and “sturdy” are words often applied to the independent farmers of Featherdale. The unwary visitor who



thinks this is a good place to show off or throw his brawn about will rapidly discover that the Dale is home to a good many not-all-that-retired adventurers, too!

Violent visitors and occasional feuding families aside, Featherdarrans are a tolerant folk. Only setting crops afire or other willful damage to farms unerringly enrages them. They tend to just let folk play pranks, steal a few apples or carrots in passing, and make jokes about thick-skulled hog farmers (there are a *lot* of pigs in Featherdale) because that is the way people are thanks to the gods, and one may as well accept it and waste the least time on upset and dark mutterings. Better to chuckle instead, draw yourself another tankard, and enjoy how well the fields are growing this year.

Folk have always traveled through Featherdale in great numbers. Either merchants

or pilgrims traveling about on business or armies rushing to battle somewhere else (with refugees fleeing before them) seem to be always passing through. Featherdarrans are used to a lot of traffic and finding strangers asleep in their haystacks or under their hedges in the mornings.

Harpers and the good folk of other Dales and civilized lands understand that keeping dry in someone's barn and eating a few of his or her hens' eggs should be worth a coin or two in return. Many a Featherdarran farmer going out to the barn at dawn finds that night visitors have shifted some hay or firewood and left a few coppers or a silver piece tucked into the door latch to be found—but the folk of this Dale have also learned when to turn a blind eye and deaf ear to what visitors are up to.



Blackfeather Bridge

Blackfeather Bridge's name comes from the black-painted bridge thrown up across the Ashaba long ago to replace one built under Rauthauvyr's orders. This settlement began as a caravan stopover pavilion on the Sembian side of the bridge and has become much more than a resting place on the roadside. In fact, Blackfeather Bridge is now a rapidly growing village of some 70 residents, where formerly it was just an ironshod bridge where 16 haughty Sembian road guards and 16 defiant Lord's Men of Battledale faced each other across the Ashaba. (The two sets of guards were there ostensibly as customs/border watchers. In reality, they were present because Sembia wanted to gently flow north and take over the farming Dales unimpeded, and the folk of all the Dales wanted Sembia to know that they were watching for such a move, and would prevent it.)

Marking both the western end of Featherdale and the busiest bottleneck in the Dragon Reach lands, Blackfeather Bridge is a place many, many folk have passed through on their way to somewhere else. Although it does not yet boast 20 buildings, the Bridge is worth more of a traveler's time than a quick stretch of the legs while the bridge guards argue with a merchant up ahead in the waiting line—but not yet *much* more than that. This village is a place to buy land and watch it soar in value as the next bustling market town in the region bursts onto the scene, though—a moneychanger/goods swapper with secure warehouses here could make a killing right now.

Places of Interest in Blackfeather Bridge Shops

Jherald's General Store
General Store and Trading Post



This trio of ramshackle warehouses serves as a general store and trading post to the caravan trade. Although Jherald can sell you anything from purple candles to a wagon with a fringe on top, you pay stiff prices here—half again as much as you would down the road in Ordulin if you had remembered to buy whatever it was there before you left. Jherald makes no friends, but if you need something badly enough, he is sure to have it—and probably in the precise color and style you are after, too. Just sigh, empty out your purse, and depart poorer, wondering—as many have before you—how Jherald manages to keep his head on his shoulders from year to year given the effrontery of his prices. Not all brigands lurk in the bushes.

The Market
Farm Market



Local wits call this the "Black Market" knowing the term will draw a lot of eager Sembians who will be furious when all they see for sale here is produce. However, a farm market is what this is: a covered pavilion where Featherdarran farmers can rent their hefty offspring out as guards and wagonloaders and sell their farm goods—from chickens and spare horses to vegetables fresh-plucked from the fields. Many caravan masters pick up poultry ready to fire roast, pickles, jams, jellies, sauces, and home-brewed ale and cider for the journey



here. Some even take such stuff on to Hillsfar or the cities of Sembia and peddle it at a horrendous markup.

The wealthiest merchant of the lot at the market is the one who comes north from Ordulin every tenday to sell jars with glass lids and sealing wax to the farmers. He is a prudent man who guards his wares against stone-throwers by threatening to release a bottle spirit.

Tavern

The Blackwater Stout



This tavern just opened this past season, and is still looking for its proper role. It has a dozen upstairs rooms for rent, but only the deaf could sleep there when the taproom below is doing its usual roaring trade—and I do mean roaring!

The Stout serves a home-brewed ale called, naturally enough, Blackwater Stout that I found curiously sweet and wry in taste—as if someone had taken a strong stout and mixed in melted licorice (perhaps that is just what happened). Travelers can enjoy a huge selection of wines, beers, and stronger drink here, equal to the picking at any Sembian roadhouse—including the horrible watered-down and sugared wines called “coolthroat sips” that are now sweeping that realm. Urrghh!

To liven one’s drinking, the Stout has laid in the usual salted nuts and roasted almonds plus chilled shrimp and—for a last twist—cream puffs! The puffs are one good way to entice Featherdarran farmers in the door—and the Stout has not missed the other way, either: dancers.

Exotic troupes from Chessenta and Unther alternate with Sembian talent at the Stout. Some of the outrageously

dressed folk just dance and pose to minstrelry from below; others play instruments as they prance and are quite good! The dancers parade along an elevated catwalk covered in black velvet and flanked by hanging candlelamps. Ostensibly they are modeling high-fashion Sembian evening wear in their displays, but I have never seen one of the garments they wear bought.

Inn

The Riverman



This old and very popular inn sprawls along the northern bank of the Ashaba from the edge of the bridge eastward for nigh on a quarter of a mile. It looks more like a cluster of unrelated buildings that just happen to run into each other than a single structure. Its present form is the result of haphazard growth over the years to meet the ever-increasing demands of folk who want to stay here to enjoy the quiet, rustic comfort of a place that serves good soup and warms the beds in winter, stuffs all guests with great food year-round, and lets everyone lie around beside fires or in moonlit window corners until all hours without ceremony. (Try the buttered toast with mushrooms and oysters or the baked bean-and-geese pies—ahhh!)

As the place has grown, the staff has taken trouble to preserve the treasured atmosphere by purchasing carefully placed sound-deadening and fire-prevention spells and by housing guests as far apart from each other as possible. As a result, strict notices warning guests to please refrain from unleashing *any* magic on the premises are posted prominently, and the owners quietly make veiled comments



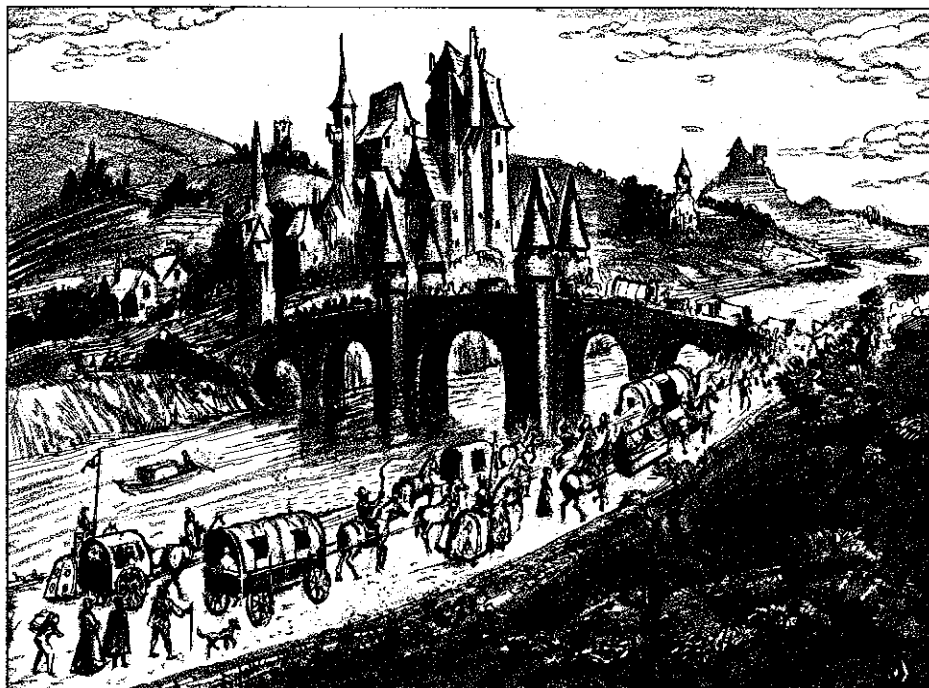
about unwanted spell interactions if pressed for information about the signs.

This silence and discouragement of spellcasting would make the place a thieves' paradise were it not for the resident "skulk." This apparition is really a watchghost named Albrent, a Harper in life, who guards the inn against arson and other crimes. On several occasions, he has saved the place from brigand raids and blazes both deliberately and accidentally ignited. He also serves many lonely travelers as a source of reassuring companionship and advice and is the reason so many lovelorn, run-away maids have stayed on here as staff—until they fall in love with the right guest and are wed. Sigh.

The Riverman is the sort of place that happy ballads have one believe every inn is like—and so few really are. The rooms are

furnished with the leavings of old estate sales and are themselves worth a day's wandering about. Where else can one find the solemn portrait of a Dale lordling (Orstan of Moondale) who posed for posterity wearing a ridiculous high-fashion summer outfit consisting of little more than a haughty sneer and a pair of gauntlets? Or a truckle bed carved by elven crafters into the shape of a gigantic doe, curled up around where an infant would sleep within? Or a plaque bearing witty Dale sayings with even more hilarious spellings and asides?

Do not miss this old landmark; its quiet fame is well justified. A bed here is only 7 sp a night (9 sp if a private room is desired), and meals are only 2 cp extra, however much you eat. Drinks are 5 cp per serving, whatever your fancy, but the wine list is wretched—stick to the home-brewed ale.





Feather Falls

Oldest and largest (80 folk live here) of the villages in Featherdale, Feather Falls is the traditional site of the Dale's infrequent Dalemeets. Called to settle disputes that individual folk cannot decide for all, these are four- or five-day free-for-all debates about what the Dale will collectively do. Common agreement is rare, the results are not binding on anyone, and more often than not most time is spent meeting old friends, hitting the noses of old enemies, and talking about the good old days over lots of ale.

The last Dalemeet did decide on something, and as it happens, the decision concerned the only other activity of note that takes place here: All boats and barges

traveling the Ashaba must be unloaded and portaged past the Falls on log rollers to be relaunched and reloaded at the wharves on the other side of the Falls or kept loaded and hauled or braked by lots of strong people using large and strong ropes. Attempts to arrange locks or water chutes have all met with disaster; the Ashaba just assumes these represent its new course, and its waters roar down them until they collapse into the main riverbed and widen it a little.

For years the portage was neglected because a local wizard, Cholandrothipe, made a good living diminishing boats—with cargo and all nonliving gear—and carrying them past the Falls in his pockets, moving to *dispel* his *diminish* enchantment when the craft was safely



Feather Falls



back in the water. A team of ambitious magelings sent by a Red Wizard of Thay overwhelmed and murdered the kindly old wizard in spell battle, and river travelers suddenly discovered that they needed the old overgrown portage again.

As the main sources of news and small-item commerce in the Dale are the dozens of small keelboats that ply the Ashaba crewed by rivermen (some of them, despite the title, being women) famous for their gambling and sly ways, this lack of portage was not a matter of indifference to the Featherdarrans. So, by some miracle, the Dalemeet agreed that every Dale landowner should contribute a single gold piece toward the cost of laying in a lot of new logs and of straightening and lengthening the portage to make its slope more gentle. This was done forthwith, refurbishing the portage to the state it is in today.

Places of Interest in Feather Falls

Feather Falls does have a surprising collection of landmarks, beyond the Falls themselves, which have given their name to the village and to the Dale—though I could not discover how the word *feather* came to be associated with the tumbling waters in the first place. The village has no watch, no wells (water is dipped from the river), about a dozen trees, lots of mud, and 20-odd buildings, including a smithy, a wagon repair works, and a market hall where farmers can come to sell their grain, corn, cheese, vegetables, salted meat, and home-brewed ale to any interested buyers (usually merchants from Cormyr, Sembia, and Hillsfar). Only one shop here is worthy of note, and an inn or tavern is *not* among its buildings!

Unique Sites Cholandrothipe's Tower



The ruined, fire-blackened stone needle that was once the abode of the wizard Cholandrothipe is still the most striking building in town. The wizard's slayers hoped to find a lot of gold and a lot of magic in the Tower. (Cholandrothipe never charged less than 2 gp for the transport of any craft around the Falls, and he usually asked a lot more; average prices were in the 25 to 50 gp range.) However, the very walls of the Tower attacked them as they aroused xorn and golem guardians and set off traps that fired *wands of withering* and various *polymorphing* items. The last straw was the unintentional freeing of several hungry oozes from treasure chests. After that, the Thayan magelings fled.

Several adventuring bands have made forays into the Tower since and report finding more deadly traps and guardians, including a watchghost and some *gates* that take intruders to extradimensional rooms where deadly monsters are penned. One can only leave these rooms through different *gates* that deposit one near the ceilings of tall rooms with inescapable, punishing falls awaiting the unprepared.

The Tower is configured as a slender cylinder with a single porchlike entry wing and looks quite small from the outside, but some adventurers say that it has extensive cellars that descend under the Ashaba and rise again on the other side! Some of these subterranean chambers look very old and may well connect to other now-buried structures or to the Deep Realms below. Some



explorers of the Tower have said that they found invisible doors by feel on the spiral stair that ascends through the heart of the wizard's home. Others speak of doors opening through the outer walls high off the ground into other-dimensional treasure vaults whose contents were behind spell webs that could only be passed by someone using the right spell—magics they lacked or could not identify before the mounting death toll robbed their fellows of all enthusiasm for proceeding.

Many folk have died trying to learn the secrets of the Tower and find some of the gold and magic reputed to be there. So far, no magic and only about 30 coins have been brought out. And all the coins were from the pocket of a single robe hanging on a peg in the entry hall. At least one living wall has been encountered in the easily accessible rooms of the Tower, and folk have begun to suspect that kindly old Cholandrothipe may not have been quite so good in nature as they thought he was!

Temples

The House of Morning

The only active temple in Featherdale is this long, low, solid stone edifice sacred to Lathander sited at the foot of the Feather Falls. Here Morninglord Jallian Horgontivar—a tall, patrician man who's only about half as cultured and important as he thinks he is—leads a legion of lesser priests and acolytes in the doing of Lathander's work.

In this temple, Lathander's work is viewed as renting out bare stone rooms at 1 gp per head per night to all travelers who want one. Each boasts a chamberpot and a door, and that is *all*. The temple's

secondary work is seen to be encouraging new business ventures by loaning out money at 2% interest per tenday to anyone who asks.

I can well believe that Horgontivar will retire from his "selfless" service to the god very much enriched if one of the 16 or so other grasping clergy members under him does not do away with him first in their haste to ascend to his polished marble high seat. I find it hard, though, to credit that the work this temple does is as pleasing to Lathander as the work done in his temples elsewhere. The place has nice gardens, though.

Mistfall House



This formerly splendid temple to Leira, the Lady of the Mists, now stands empty and abandoned at the head of Feather Falls. Its lower rooms are always damp thanks to the river rushing past, and its cellars are still roamed by monsters despite several attempts to clean the place out. One of the adventurers who explored them said that his band found six subterranean storage levels, the lowest opening into a vast cavern in the Underdark. He turned back at that point while his companions went on; they were never seen again.

This link to the Underdark might well explain the wealth that the veiled priests of this temple always had to spend and also account for some of the mysterious cargo bound for Scardale that appeared as if by magic out of the temple. But just who — or *what* — the Leirans traded with and for what remains a mystery.

Whatever they traded with seems to have allowed this venue to become inac-



tive; no dark caravans have emerged since the Time of Troubles. Yet monsters still come up from the depths from time to time, sending local boys who are fishing through the long-broken oval windows of the riverside temple rooms diving and shrieking for their lives. If one sets a watch against such annoyances, the empty but formerly sumptuous upper ruins of this place are a better place to stay than the House of the Morning.

The Temple Beneath the Falls

Behind the cascading waters of the Falls, almost under Mistfall House, are several natural caves and niches where local children have been wont to play, smugglers who do not mind getting drenched have always hidden things (or themselves), and darker things have been done—from kidnappings and slave-trading to the worshiping of fell gods. Just over a hundred summers ago, local farmers took up arms against cultists gathering in one of the caves behind the Falls; however, it is not known if the temple they fought through that day, which was reached by descending a long passage from the back of one of the caves behind the Falls, still exists. Even what deity the cultists venerated has been forgotten, with some tales stating it was Moander, but others insisting it was Juiblex, Ghaunadaur, or Ilseensine.

No word has come down in these tales of gem-encrusted idols or any temple riches at all, but the Falls themselves are said to shroud substantial treasure: the sum of all the coinage, cargo crates, and trade bars lost over the years from tumbling or shattered barges that strayed over the Falls. The Falls are also rumored to

hide various stolen items deliberately placed in crevices behind the cascade or washed down from upriver off of people slain in battle.

The folk of the Falls laughed when I asked them if people still went under the water to worship, and they said I was not the first traveler to ask about such things. The rivermen even tell tales of chanting that can be heard near the Falls on moonless nights—but then, rivermen will say anything, especially to get a rise out of strangers.

Shop Darwinn's Trading Post General Store



This large, well-stocked general store is the cultural center of Feather Falls. Almost all the villagers drop by daily to buy the fresh milk, bread, and cheese that Darwinn's sons bring in from nearby farms every dawn on a creaking wagon that must awaken many folk. Prices here tend to be 10% above the average found in larger centers where such a thing as competition exists, but what is asked is not unreasonable. The friendly, chatty proprietor, Ulwyn Darwinn, certainly tries to stock everything one might need, from hose-stretchers for travelers who get wet in the river to boats and barges for those who lose their vessels!

Darwinn even sells parchment, inks, some quite nice ready-made gowns from shops in Sembia—and *potions of frying* and of *healing*. The potions cost 300 gp each. He sells no more than one of each kind to a traveler, and no amount of bribery or threats can make him stop smiling and reveal his source!



Wright's Ferry

This hamlet is home to about 30 folk and is named for a heavily used horse ferry. Visitors to the spot find the ferry, a lot of orchards, three aromatic pig farms with capacious mud wallows, a river pump and horse pond, and Featherdale's only tavern here. Perhaps fittingly, the tavern is called the Ferryman's Folly. No shops of note exist in town, but the ferrymen seem to have a lot of old belongings that they can sell to anyone who expresses a need for something—belongings "carelessly left behind" by folk they punched into the river, no doubt. Something a little more unusual is also found in Wright's Ferry: a ring of stones known as the Chessmen of Valsprendar, linked (as all such sites seem to be) to many tales of magic.

Unique Sites

Albottle Ferry



At this busy crossing, travelers are conveyed across the Ashaba (which is usually placid at this locale) by huge draft horses on either bank. The horses tow a barge back and forth by means of long ropes stretched through tall timber guide frames. The guide frames also serve to winch the ropes aloft to allow boats going up and down the Ashaba to pass by unencumbered. The frames are visible for some distance along the river.

The ferry costs 7 sp per head to cross. The price includes a single mount, but one must pay 3 sp more for each additional pack animal or per cart. Full trade wagons are 2 gp each.

The ferry is run by a pair of mighty-thewed brothers, Dregon and Flender

Albottle, who can call on a truly gigantic cousin, Auglaer, if anyone disputes a fare. Auglaer looks like he has ogre blood in him. (I once saw an unruly passenger knocked out cold by one brother and dumped off his horse into the water to drown or be revived by the Ashaba as the gods willed—the ferrymen ignored his drifting form thereafter.) There is no sign of anyone named Wright. Perhaps the name refers to a now-dead wainwright or wheelwright.

The Chessmen of Valsprendar



This circle of man-high standing stones is located just south of the ferry in a field of barley carefully cultivated around it. I asked the field's farmer why he went to so much trouble to avoid the stones (Since the stones clearly hover a finger's width off the ground and are not buried in it, moving them might not be so great a chore.) He shook his head and told me he had no wish to anger the "ghost of Valsprendar."

Valsprendar, it seems, was the now-dead mage who enspelled these "chessman" stones and was later buried in the circle. (No, I did not dig in the circle, though I have heard about others that have and not enjoyed the result.) If a chessman is moved entirely off the bare patch its shadow causes, a shimmering portal appears in its place and a monster erupts out of this to attack everyone near, marauding until slain. The push of a finger will move a chessman if a living being is attached to that finger, though the strongest weapon blows and gale winds have no similar effect. Replacing the stone has no effect on dismissing the



monster, though this does close the portal.

Eleven stones float here, and moving each has the same effect every time, though the monsters vary. All the summoned creatures seem to be of sorts that can live aboveground and on dry land, it seems. Where they are drawn from and why Valsprendar crafted this whole thing remains a mystery, even to Rhauntides (I asked).¹

If all 11 stones are moved and all 11 monsters fought and killed between the same dawn and dusk, a *gate* opens that leads into a many-roomed refuge that Valsprendar made, dwelt in, or discovered. Certain wizardly lorebooks record that a piece of the *Shattered Sword* can be found in this refuge, but it is so well guarded that no one has yet managed to carry it away. Just what guardians protect it or what else is to be found in this refuge, I know not.

The lorebooks *do* speak of the *Shattered Sword*. It was an enchanted blade wielded by the Laughing Princess of Deepingdale against the Twelve Dancing Wizards, who struck it out of her hand with blasting spells before they met their doom. The blade remained spell-linked to her, however. As her *dweomerdance* drained the sorcery from the Thayans, the spell magic coursed through the blade, which broke under the strain into nine pieces. All of the resulting nine shards now possess strange magical powers—and all of them, legend whispers, lie

hidden in the Dales. More about this fascinating weapon I cannot say—but more than a dozen adventuring bands have battled monsters in the barley field in the last year for the chance to acquire one piece of it. Perhaps a mightier mage than I could reveal more.²

Tavern

The Ferryman's Folly



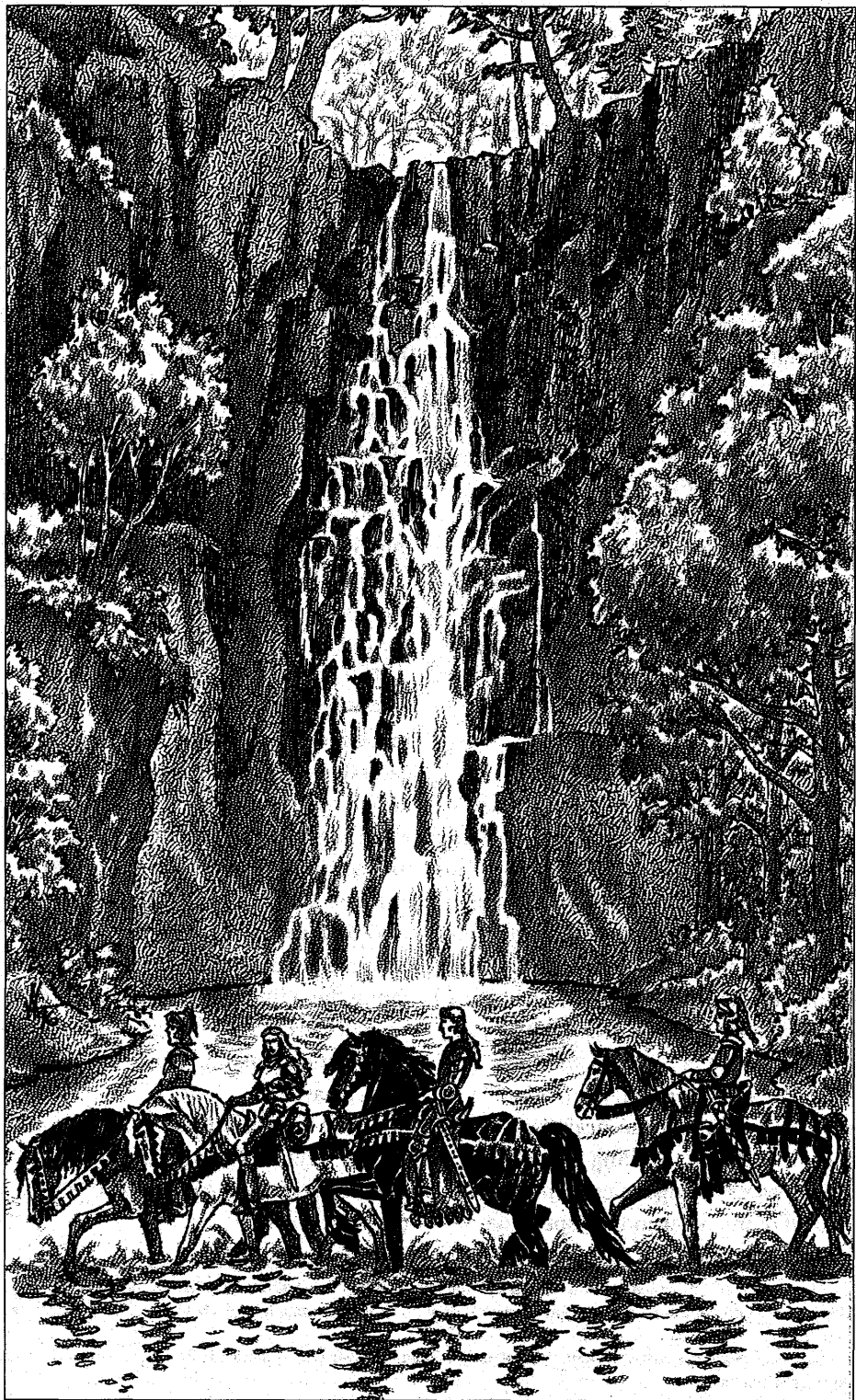
This ramshackle, rotting place is plagued by river damp. The damp even seems somehow to have gotten itself into the beer. Certainly mine was watery enough and tasted of mildew—but maybe the tinge of mold came from the mug.

The Folly is a sorry place when compared to the splendid alehouses that Cormyr, Sembia, and better Dales can offer—but it is cheap, cheerful, and visited by just about every farmer and riverman who can reach it. Of course, for the rivermen, that is every last one of them. The rivermen do a lot of brawling here when they have had too much to drink. Kindly farmers usually dump them into a nearby hay mow to flounder around snarling incoherent curses and insults at each other until they fall asleep.

For all this rustic buffoonery, the place has a certain charm. Before they get too full of ale, rivermen can tell great tall tales. . . .

¹*Elminster*: Let it be noted that Volo also asked *me* and so learned just about all of the details he recounts so glibly here. Ye do not think he fought any monsters, do ye?). He unaccountably neglects to mention our interview here. Hmm.

²*Elminster*: Sigh. Aye, aye—all right. Seek ye out the *Shattered Sword* in Appendix II. Tomb robbers and magic devourers, the lot of ye. . . .



Maiden's Tear Falls, Halifax Trail, Harrowdale



Harrowdale



The oldest surviving Dale is Harrowdale, an often-overlooked land of farmers and foresters that is the quiet neighbor of brash, lively, ambitious Scardale. The inhabitants of Harrowdale (“Harrans” to each other) are viewed by Sembians and even some other Dalesfolk as the original and complete country bumpkins. This is, however, the worst sort of sneering ignorance. In what way are a people backward when they think that warfare and strife are a waste of time and dull, placid peace most benefits all?

This philosophy has not stopped Harrans from taking advantage of the recent trading boom that has come their way thanks to the chaos Lashan left in Scardale. Their efforts and the confusion have made Harrowdale town (perhaps temporarily) the most important port in the Dales. The Dale has suddenly become a trading crossroads, and folk all over the Inner Sea are beginning to take notice of this quiet country of hedgerows, copses, leaping deer, old abandoned steadings, and sleepy sages.

Once this land was called Velarsdale after its founder, and Harrowdale town was Velar. The Dale became Halvan’s Dale briefly and forcefully when the ruthless lord Halvan the Dark, who tried to cut a way through the Elven Court woods only to perish with the notorious Halfaxe Trail only extending halfway to his goal, was in power. The Dale’s farmers, justly proud of their multiple-prowed plows (a Dale invention), quickly corrupted that name into the present Harrowdale after Halvan’s fall.

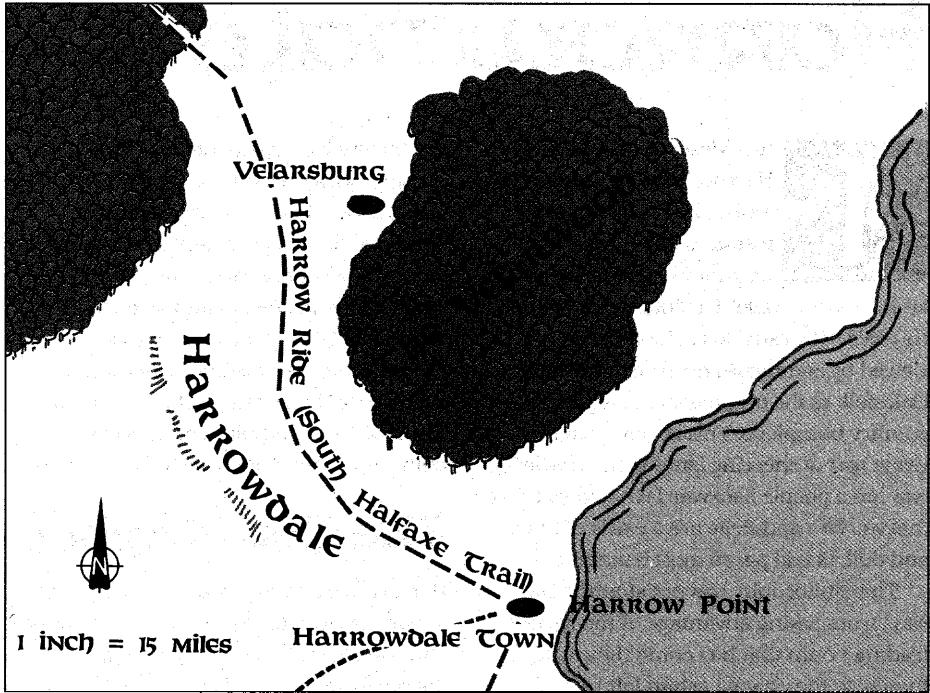
Harrowdale settled into comfortable prosperity over a century ago. Today it produces a lot of beef, mutton, wool, and cheese, some respectable ale, and small amounts of superior fruit, furs, and lumber. It has always needed to import metal ores, refined metal, and metal goods such as tools and weapons, but the Dale’s increasing sophistication has also led to a recent steady demand for paper, silk, lace, glassware, and both spices and crafted art from far shores.

The Countryside

Harrowdale consists of an old, shallow valley whose river, the Velar, dried up long ago and some gently rolling wooded uplands to the north and east of Harrow Vale that are wrapped around the old, deep forest known as the Velarwood. The land in Harrowdale shows its age. Roads cut through hills in deep, time-worn ditches. The traces of earlier habitation—crumbling stone walls, bridges that lead to nowhere, and old millstones—are everywhere. Hedgerows mark field edges, and copses of duskwood, maple, and pine have been left on most hilltops to keep the winds away. Extensive and old apple, pear, and grus-grus orchards grow throughout the Dale, and the folk of the Dale have learned to love the land and work with it, replenishing and not despoiling the forest just as the folk of Deepingdale do.

The Harrans

Harrans are a quiet, confident people. After all, why should they try to impress anyone with their wealth and power as



the fops of Sembia do, when their farms have stood twice as long as that realm has been around? They know they are rightfully part of Faerûn and important for what they are, not how many coins they can swiftly make by sharp dealing. Local folk see to local justice and have a clear grasp of and full support for the laws and edicts proclaimed by the Council of the Seven Burghers, the rulers of Harrowdale and its wealthiest citizens.

The watch, the constables in Harrowdale town, is the Dale's only police force. Save for the occasional fence of stolen goods or drunk and disorderly person, its members deal almost exclusively with the antics of outlanders, not native Harrans. If, as a visitor, you feel watch officers are doing what they are named for—watching you continuously—you are right: Outlanders are their business and the folk to which they pay dili-

gent attention. This vigilance, plus a fine grasp of just when to look the other way makes the watch one of the best police forces anywhere and keeps Harrowdale town relatively safe for all. Though the watch may tolerate a little extra roughhousing around the Fall of Stars adventurers' club or near dockside dives when drunken sailors punch each other, due to the efforts of its members one can see young lasses walking the streets home by night alone and unafraid because following each of them at a discreet distance are watch officers, and the women know it. Elsewhere in the Dale, the veteran mounted rangers known as Gray Riders, who normally watch for monsters and bandits in the nearby woods, can come riding up to aid citizens in dispensing local justice at any time (though they cannot arrest anyone) just like the numerous retired adventurers do in Deepingdale and Eeatherdale.



Harrowdale Town

Harrowdale town is probably the one Dales settlement that has kept more of its old buildings than any other. The town is a small and pleasant place rising from an old fishing harbor to encircling arms of forest, and its harbor is currently enjoying unheard-of popularity thanks to the chaos reigning in Scardale. In large part due to the professional diligence of the watch, the town is perhaps the quietest and safest capital of such size in all the Dales. Other nice features of Harrowdale town include the presence of hand pumps and drinking cups at several major corners, and the prevalence of old, charmingly gnarled shade trees.

The watch's proud, no-nonsense captain, a female elven fighter and mage named Ellarian Dawnhorn, has little time for adventurers. The presence of the Fall of Stars in her duty area is a constant irritant to her, and some of its mightier patrons delight in humiliating her. I would advise going carefully if you ride into Harrowdale town in adventuring garb, for Ellarian's eye will be constantly on you, awaiting transgressions she can punish.

One positive effect of Ellarian's enthusiasm for law and order is that merchants can leave doors open and goods unguarded at all hours, secure in the knowledge that the watch never sleeps. Thieves whose fingers start to itch at reading these words are warned that the watch and the Seven Burghers can call on certain senior members of the Fall of Stars to hunt lawless elements—and that the last six master

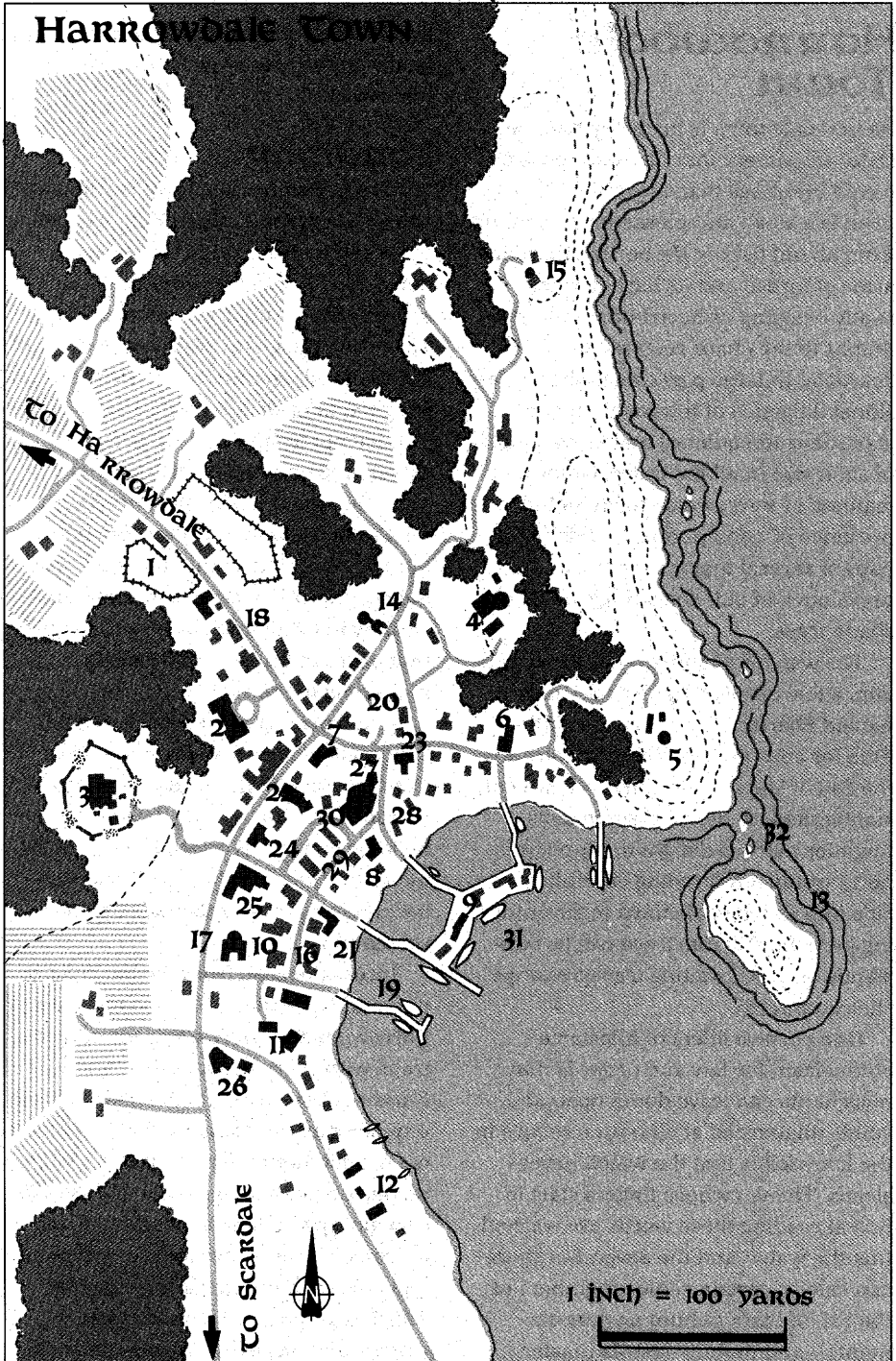
thieves to operate in town were all fatally apprehended while engaged in their work.

Landmarks

Visitors to Harrowdale town readily recognize the grand Council Hall, where the seven wealthiest Harrans meet to make their ruling decisions and have apartments for their use when in town. The Seven Burghers are respected, if not always loved, and hold their seats until resignation or death. When a seat on the Council opens up, local heralds are called in to conduct a survey to determine the wealthiest Harran not yet on the Council—who, if willing, assumes the vacant seat. It should be noted that the Burghers' decisions generally aid the wealthy in becoming richer and the present order of things in the Dale to remaining the same.

At the meeting of Melurk Street and Lancegallop Lane, just down the street from the Council Hall, stands the watch barracks—an impressive, defensible building that sports catapults on its battlements to defend the harbor. The watch barracks also houses the Dale's courtrooms and jail.

Across the road from the barracks is the muddy, bustling, fish-scented yard of Harrow Market. Here everyone comes to trade with everyone, and the Seven Burghers have wisely kept vendor fees to 4 sp per stall or cart per day. The holders of such miniature shops merely take on one or two side-partners who peddle a single type of item, such as throwing knives, cheeses, slowcandles, or thread and charge them the daily fee as rent. This keeps the place crowded and vibrant and has led to the opening of at





Harrowdale Town Map Key

1. Goldenleaf Stables (horsebreeding stables)
2. Council Hall (meeting hall of the Seven Burghers)
3. Halvan's Keep (ruin)
4. The House of the Singing Harp (temple of Oghma)
5. Harrow Point Light (lighthouse)
6. Gunderman Brewery (brewery)
7. Watch barracks
8. Treskeden House (merchant coster headquarters)
9. The Fouled Line (tavern)
10. The Lady of Good Fortune (temple of Tymora)
11. Shaleel Warehouses (Harrowcoaster coster warehouses)
12. Fishermens' huts
13. Two Rocks (island)
14. The House of Mystra (temple of Mystra)
15. Erethun's Tower (residence of Erethun Rivenstave)
16. Cart Street
17. Melurk Street
18. Lancegallop Lane
19. The Harrow Plow pier
20. Harrow Market
21. Harrowcoaster House (merchant coster headquarters)
22. Velarstown Silver and Jewelry (jewelry, goldsmith's, and silver-smith's shop)
23. Willowman Trading Post (general store)
24. Toss Your Tankard (tavern)
25. The Anchorage (inn)
26. The Redmark (inn)
27. The Fall of Stars (adventurers' club)
28. Dendever Street
26. Moonside Lane
30. Stink Alley
31. The Heart of the Harbor (pier)
32. The Shoulder (small islands)

least three local shops as stall-holders made good. The cramped conditions also ensure that no market vendor is able to provide serious competition for a shopkeeper in town.

From the market, Dendever Street runs past the Fall of Stars club, which warrants its own entry in this book. The road continues straight down to the harbor, where a rickety wharf on pilings, known as the Heart of the Harbor or just "the Heart," supports the roaring Fouled Line tavern and several net huts.

The harbor shelters in the lee of the rocky, windswept islet of Two Rocks, which is popularly believed to be the location where such famous Dragon Reach pirates as Urthag the Knife and the Masked Marquis buried their treasure—though not a coin of these fabled hoards has ever been found. The Council is debating building a sea tower bristling with catapults here to make Harrowdale Harbor more secure against privateer night raids, of which there were many during the Time of Troubles and one or two per season since. Everyone seems to agree that this would be a good idea except the newest Burgher, the wizard Erethun Rivenstave, who balks at the cost of the fortalice and the proposed bridge linking it to the shore along the existing line of seagull-haunted rocks known as the Shoulder.

Legitimate shipping is guided to the harbor—or, if boats are sailing past the Dale, kept clear of the ripper rocks just offshore here—by the Harrow Point Light. Hesketh Aldunn, the lighthouse keeper, is full of old yarns, the tangled genealogies of Harrans, town gossip, and old local legends and is quite willing to impart these all night to anyone who



brings him free food and drink. He sleeps by day, and his sense of duty does not let him leave the lighthouse by night to dine.

South of the Heart is the deepest part of the harbor where visiting merchant ships run in. They tie up at the stout old pier known to sailors up and down the Reach as the Harrow Plow because of the shape of its splayed seaward end. Though some locals dismiss the folk tale as “errant piffle,” the Harrow Plow is said to have been built by merfolk at the behest of the long-dead wizard Ardalet the Aspirant Magister – so-called because he challenged three different Magisters for the title, losing each time but somehow surviving.

South of the Harrow Plow pier, the harbor trails away into a pebble beach that in turn gives away to rocks. The pebbled shore is home to the hardy fisherfolk of Harrowdale, who dwell in huts amid a confused litter of nets, jetsam, drying racks, and boats. These tireless harvesters of the sea pull out at dawn each day and then run back home with a day’s fish at sunset.

A recent Sembian fashion rage is to have a wall painting of these rustic, silver-weathered huts and boats hanging from one’s sitting room wall. The picture always has a glorious sunset in the background – and astonished fishermen turning a beautiful mermaid out of their nets as its focal point. The demand for such works is so strong that a half-dozen or more painters can always be seen at work capturing the romance of the fisherfolk’s huts on large wooden boards. The boards are used because with paintings of this great a size they are the only material that survives the rugged roads

or damp sea voyages south to the great cities of Sembia.

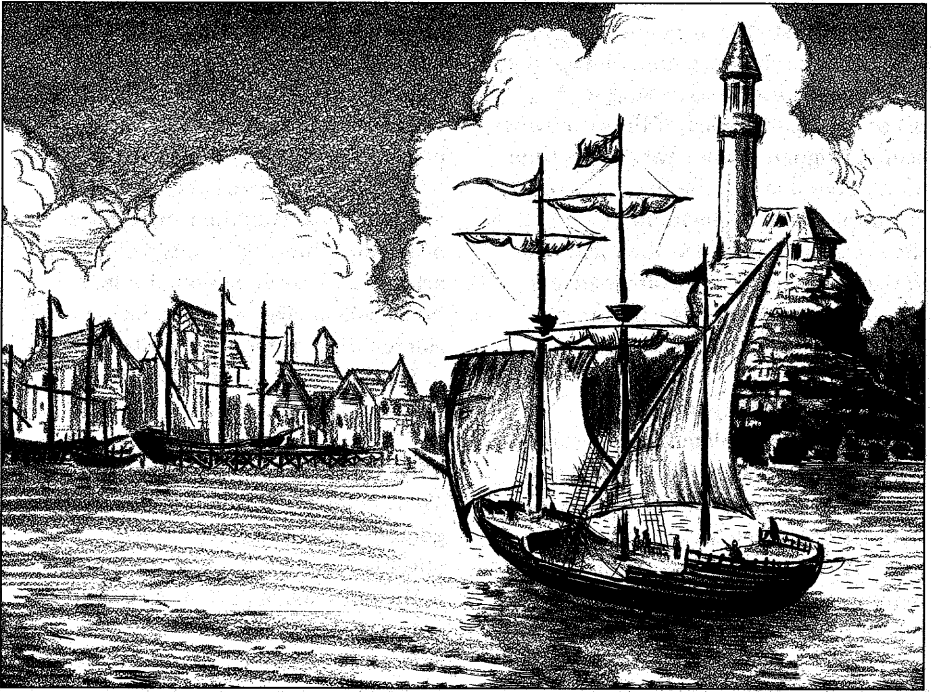
The visitor who strolls along the shore sees only one other landmark of interest: an isolated tower with a gatehouse and stable atop a hill that marks the northern edge of the town. This is the abode of the mysterious mage Erethun Rivenstave, newest of the Seven Burgthers. He has served for less than a decade and is widely mistrusted by the locals, who do not know where he came from or where he got his fabulous wealth. (Frankly, they suspect that the truth about both queries would not be to their liking.) Guests are not welcome at Erethun’s Tower and are kept away both by trained dogs and by unseen – possibly undead – guardians.

A larger and more famous tower stands in Harrowdale town. It is the ruined home of Halvan the Dark, the infamous founder of Halfaxe Trail. Like the Fall of Stars, Halvan’s Keep has its own entry in this guidebook. Other local features of interest follow directly.

Places of Interest in Harrowdale Temples

The House of the Singing Harp

This grand, turreted old stone house stands atop a pleasant grassy hill overlooking Harrow Market and is dedicated to the service of Oghma. Visiting songsters and bards are lodged here for free if they agree to participate in the worship services to Oghma at dawn, highsun, and dusk. Here the accent is not on libraries but on minstrelry and in going out and collecting oral tales, news, rumors, legends, and the like. The two dozen



priests who dwell here are building a solid and thorough collection of local lore in their minds.

Learned Father Wise Anticipator Teredic Alton (respectfully addressed, as are many senior priests of Oghma, as "learned father") is high priest of the House of the Singing Harp. He is a fiery-tempered man born and raised in Harrowdale. He lends his temple's aid to adventurers in need of lore or healing in return for services to the town. Usually he requires those he aids to clear out some recent group of brigands plaguing the Dale, but sometimes he asks them to go on a monster-fighting foray along the newly reopened Halfaxe Trail.

Visitors to the temple should not miss traveling to the High Holy Place in the top room of the temple's turret where a sacred, enchanted harp plays by itself.

Aside from its self-playing abilities and the capacity to levitate off its table from time to time and change hue just as spontaneously, the magical powers of the harp are unknown. It is guarded at all times by two priests who listen to its tunes. (The priests will not discuss the harp's origin or precise powers.) The Singing Harp, as it is known, is said to impart messages from Oghma and answers to prayer queries directed to him. It does this by means of the songs it chooses; the name of the tune it chooses to play or the lyrics in a song that match a played musical phrase bear on a matter under consideration by the priests of the House.

All guests may view the *Singing Harp*, but are asked to leave all personal magic, weapons, or musical instruments outside the room. It is an



offense punishable by death to try to take or harm the harp and a lesser one to try to play the harp or sing in its presence—particularly if these activities seem designed to alter the harp's tune at the time. Playing the harp or singing are punishable by payment of a fine *and* the doing of penance in the form of a dangerous service. The alternative to the fine and penance is a period of spell-enforced temple servitude.

The House of Mystra

This recently completed temple stands hard by the Market, and its priest and priestesses perform minor magics to impress onlookers and in return for fees.¹ This unusual lapse of magely dignity is due in part to desperation: The folk of Harrowdale have largely ignored the faith of Mystra—and now this temple—throughout the years and continue to do so.

Wizards—from the mages led by Halvan the Dark to the present Burgher Erethun Rivenstave—just are not liked and trusted in Harrowdale, and Spell-Priestess Llewán Aspenwold has labored in vain to build popular support for the Lady of Mysteries here in Harrowdale. She has only three clergy members dwelling with her, and normally only visiting wizards join them in devotions to Mystra. Night services often involve the casting of spells with spectacular aerial displays straight upward to awe local citizens, but such practices have backfired once or twice, making the clergy members even less trusted.

Llewán has taken to aiding visiting adventurers in order to gain friends and

make local folk respect the temple. This has had the benefit of bringing her regular business from the Fall of Stars, whose members always want to buy a copy of this or that spell, or to purchase or sell rare spell components (booty brought back from their own ventures) or acquire tutoring in the spellcasting arts. It remains to be seen if this holy house will survive in peace-loving, stodgy Harrowdale or if it will have to relocate to Scardale or some other more cosmopolitan locale.

The Lady of Good Fortune.

This center of reverence to Tymora, goddess of luck and patroness of adventurers, is a grand-looking building in the old seaside part of town. Travelers entering Harrowdale town are often astonished—and delighted—to see the six beautiful human and half-elven lady priestesses of the temple dancing and performing other aerial acrobatics on high wires stretched over Melurk Street from the temple or between the two wings of the holy place. These spectacles lure unbelievers but are primarily a daily testing of the faith. Anyone who does not perform feats of daring cannot truly worship Tymora, the Reverend Sister Seresha Auric, half-elven high priestess of this temple, believes.

This sun-bronzed adventuress seeks to convert worshipers of Waukeen, especially those disheartened by their goddess's disappearance and unimpressed with the church of Lliira (most often visiting Sembian merchants) to embrace the way of Lady Luck. She is always hiring adventurers to undertake

¹*Elminster*: Daily magic shows to impress small children of all ages! Hmmph! They'll be playing nobles' birthday parties next!



missions to enrich the temple and enhance its reputation.

A typical such hiring involves a joint expedition to Myth Drannor or another known danger spot and a split of any treasure gained between the temple and the adventurers. The priestesses furnish the adventurers with *potions of healing*, *potions of extra-healing*, and helpful scrolls beforehand and send one of their number along to accompany the adventuring band. The adventurers are charged to bring the priestess's remains back if she falls in battle. More than one adventuring band now shies away from these ready arrangements—even though food, board, and healing at the temple are guaranteed both before and after the expedition—because the priestesses have been known to behave very recklessly during the forays.

Shops **Goldenleaf Stables**

Horsebreeding Stables



This large, tastefully well-kept complex on the northwestern edge of town along both sides of Lancegallop Lane is far and away the best breeding stables in the Dalelands. Fine riding mounts and ladies' palfreys are the order of the day here, not draft horses or war horses. The training, bloodlines, and care here are so good that wealthy buyers flood up even from Cormyr and Sembia—two lands who can boast their own exceptional and famous horsebreeders—to carry away Goldenleaf stock.

The owner, Sheera Goldenleaf, is one of the Seven Burghers. She is an outgoing, friendly elven woman of breathtaking





beauty who seems liked by all—and returns the favor. A mage-thief only recently retired from adventuring, Sheera is very wealthy and can well afford her kind sponsorship of the local needy and various Harran organizations and concerns. She heads a staff of skilled horsefolk; notable among them are seven skilled elven archers armed with “elfshot” shafts who defend the stable compound.²

Expect to pay no less than 125 gp for a mount here. Sheera prefers to match horse to rider in long-term training and that can easily cost another 50 gp.

Gunderman Brewery

Brewery



This deliberately ramshackle, rustic old barn of a place is owned by a half-elf (Gunderman Brewmaster, whose nickname is, inexplicably, “Horca”) and run by several gruff human ex-adventurers and a bevy of gnomes and dwarves who seem to constantly be digging out new storage cellars down below or installing new pumps to keep sea water seepage out of the cellars they have already dug. The aromatic main vat room is all most visitors see of the inner workings of Gunderman’s pride and joy, but he hands out sample mugs of his main product, Old Smoke ale, there.

Old Smoke is a mellow, smoky-tasting, golden-hued ale beloved of connoisseurs throughout the Inner Sea lands. A keg of it can bring 80 gp in Mulmaster or Telflamm or 70 gp in Sembia or Cormyr, where supplies are more plentiful.

Gunderman has three strong sons, clever giants who never seem quite aware of their own strength. Their mighty brawn provides much local entertainment, as they are always casually lifting up small horses to retrieve copper pieces they have dropped or unintentionally tearing doors, lids, and shutters they are trying to open off their hinges.

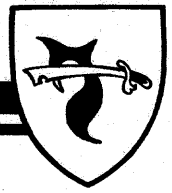
Harrowcoaster House

Caravan Shipping, Spices, and Textiles



This office and packing shop of the Harrowcoaster coster is where fine glassware, textiles (especially cloth-of-gold and silk woven with designs), and spices (notably nutmeg and saffron) are brought from the pier under guard, unpacked, and repacked in smaller horse crates or wagon boxes for shipment inland to Cormyr and the interior Dales. This coster is run by Captain Durana Shaleel, one of the Seven Burghers and a seafarer who spends a lot of time talking to sailors down on the docks. They revere her as “the Light of Harrowdale,” and some of them seek her out and touch her hand or hair when they end a voyage to win luck for their next one. This coster formerly bought produce throughout the Dales to ship back across the Inner Sea on the ships that had imported the fine wares they sell, but there was some trouble between them and the Treskeden coster. Harrowcoaster coster now exports only Old Smoke ale from the local Gunderman Brewery instead.

²These “elfshot” shafts are enchanted *arrows of paralysis* +3 that vanish when they strike a target. They inflict no physical damage, but cause their victims to make a saving throw vs. paralysis at a -3 penalty or be paralyzed for 4d6 rounds. The Goldenleaf archers are mainly 10th-level fighters specialized in the use of the long bow with THACOs of 11 (10 including their elven bow bonus). Two are 9th-level fighters/10th-level mages with THACOs of 12 (11 including their elven bow bonus). They tend to patrol in pegasi-mounted patrols of 1d4+2 archers.



Shaleel Warehouses

Harrowcoaster Coster Warehouses



These three well-guarded buildings are where the repacked goods imported by the Harrowcoaster staff are stored until the coster agents bring in orders for their sale. Harrowcoaster's agents travel the Dales regularly and can readily be recognized by the coster's badge on their wagons and tabards. This badge, a circle of gold coins around a ship (a "coaster," of course) under sail, is painted much larger on these all-stone warehouses and on nearby Harrowcoaster House.

By importing goods that have not been preordered by clients, the Harrowcoasters take larger business risks, but can often fill an order in days rather than months, an ability that has delighted many clients. After all, it might be the work of a tenday to get a particular type of genuine Calishite dancer's costume made of silk veils brought to, say, Mistedale. It would usually, however, be the work of several months to import six or more identical genuine Calishite costumes in various specific sizes — unless one calls on the Harrowcoaster coster.

Treskeden House

Caravan Shipping and Produce



Owned and run by Helena Treskeden, another of the Seven Burghers and a shrewd, dignified matron, this old, well-established coster brings the goodness of the Dales to the mouths of all Faerûn by means of a network of tireless caravans that creak around the Dales

buying up produce and bringing it to Harrowdale for shipment all over the Inner Sea lands. Although the coster is well-liked and trusted by Dale farmers, who readily welcome in folk wearing the coster's badge of a hand cupping an apple, dark rumors hint that the Treskedens recently discouraged the Harrowcoasters from competing with them by less than scrupulous means — involving magical blackmail, sabotage of wagons and threats of worse, and a few knifings.

Rumor also whispers that, before Helena's time, the fortunes of the house were initially built around the use of a magical *gate* that could whisk goods to and from the notorious Skullport under the city of Waterdeep, half a world away, in a single breath. The price of using this *gate* was apparently sentients who were sacrificed to the monsters who controlled its western end. These monsters ultimately devoured Tondar Treskeden, Helena's grandsire, when he courageously destroyed the *gate* after the monsters had taken to using it for nightly prowls through Harrowdale, devouring all who caught their fancy. It is certain that there are walled-off areas in Treskeden House to which none are admitted, but coster officials insist that these are family crypts.

Treskeden House's wealth is built on fast transport, so that goods are not spoiled when they arrive at distant markets, and the careful tending of cargo. Great trouble is taken to avoid bruising the produce, and rooted plants are transported in travel casks in soil, where appropriate, and watered along the way. Treskeden coster always needs new guards and scouts for its caravans.



Velarstown Silver and Jewelry

*Jewelry, Precious Knickknacks,
Engraving, Goldsmithing,
and Silversmithing*



Alosius Grimwarrow grumbles and stumps through life. He is locally famous for his biting sarcasm and eccentricities, such as always wearing a turbanlike hat of knotted rags when going out in the sun, for example, and talking to his hands as if they were mute, slow-witted, naughty servants. Behind this manner Alosius is a clear-thinking, shrewd merchant blessed with much foresight and a thorough knowledge of human nature—gifts that have made this business so profitable that he was able to retire from his dangerous career as a silver merchant running caravans from mines to markets, which involved fighting brigands on almost every trip. However that adventuring career won him the guardians who now patrol his crowded shop: two mated pairs of two brilliantly hued winged serpents from far Zakhara.

Grimwarrow can also call on his small family for help. He has two daughters known locally for their monkeylike agility who spent their wild youthful days climbing around the roofs and trees of Harrowdale town, playing pranks on citizens and befriending visiting merchants. They wield slings and fire sleep-venommed darts from their hand crossbows like veteran warriors—and are skilled gem-cutters to boot.

In this shop, the Grimwarrows import silverware, goldwork, small gems, and pewter and pewterwork for sale in the Dales interior. They are quite competent at remounting gems and at melting down precious metals and crafting them into new shapes. They regularly (as their sign proclaims) do chasing engraving and adornment. I suspect they

quite often do this to stolen goods to disguise them for resale with a little less boldness than is implied in their advertisement

Willowman Trading Post

General Store



This crammed, dusty, old general store is a gloomy place crowded with more odd implements and items than I could identify in an exploration that lasted most of a day. Not only is this place the very gift of the gods for someone trying to find a rare hardware item—a triple hinge, say, or a left-handed double-ended scythe—but everything is a bargain. This is a shop not to be missed.

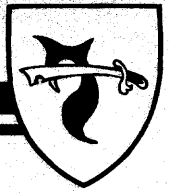
TAVERNS

The Fouled Line



The Line is a rough establishment that stinks of fish, sweat, dead floating things, and salt. The decor consists of old, rotten nets slung along the walls and ceiling that are festooned with dried giant squids, shark jaws, narwhal tusks, and other grisly relics of the deeps.

Sailors enjoy the strong ale served here, and they can also get garlic butter drizzled over biscuits or butter tarts served burning hot for 2 sp per plate. The sailors do not like sharing the place with landlubbers. They delight in dunking rude or arrogant folk into the bay at a cost of 4 sp, paid to the tavernmaster (if you pay, you get to haul on the lever yourself if you want), by tricking them into standing over a trapdoor operated by a lever under the bar that dumps them straight into the bay not all that far from where the tavern privies empty out. I am well acquainted with the trapdoor's



outlet through personal experience, and do not recommend this place because of its churlish clientele.

Toss Your Tankard



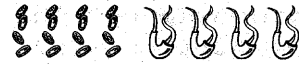
This whimsically named alehouse recalls a brawl in which the air filled with newly purchased pewter tankards as rival mercenary bands sought to punish each other over the heads of their Sembian Paymasters, who were seated between them. It should be noted that such behavior is not welcome here now, as the tavern signboard shows: It depicts a drinker risen from his seat to hurl his tankard—and the barkeeper, apron flapping, running full-tilt at the drinker's backside with a pike thrust forward to make a—telling point.

Colorful tales aside, most visitors find the Tankard to be a clean, well-lit establishment.

Light meals of buns filled with sliced cheeses and meats can be had, as can brandies and cordials. The tables and booths are far enough apart to allow lounging and, more importantly, a measure of discreet privacy for patrons discussing business matters—which is what this place always seems to be full of, no matter what the hour. The house seems to cater to merchants who stay at their seats for hours, using the place as an on-the-road business office.

Inns

The Anchorage



I found the Anchorage to be a good inn, with soundproof rooms thanks to thick stone walls hung with tapestries. Its sleeping chambers each feature a fire grate and sufficient furnishings to make them feel like home and not a sleeping stable for humans.



A room costs 14 sp per head per night, including meals, and stabling for one beast. Drinks beyond milk or mintwater cost extra. Wagon stowage and shelter and care for additional horses are also extra.

The staff consists of four families, so there are plenty of children about to fetch and carry. These younglings are thankfully quiet and well-behaved; they are of the shy sort, rather than being little loudmouthed self-anointed heroes. Overall, this is a safe, pleasant place to stay

The Redmark



This recently opened inn on the southern edge of town caters to the rich Sembian visitor, which seems odd given its location hard by the fishy smells and litter of the fisherfolk's huts. It has been welcomed by travelers and the folk of the Anchorage alike for its relief of overcrowding at the older inn due to the recent increase in shipping into and out of Harrowdale Harbor.

Everything at the Redmark is big and new. It features bathtub-fitted suites, rental meeting rooms, and a dining hall that specializes in serving patrons with fresh seafood—and, it seems, suffocating them under a veritable jungle of hanging plants. Nothing on the menu or in the service here can really be criticized, but the place has the lack of soul that all new hostelrys necessarily suffer from. The staff maintains a distant professional manner enviable in the overcrowded inns of Sembia, but seldom met with in the friendlier Dales. (The candor and common-sense consideration of Dalesfolk becomes something that even the haughtiest traveler comes to value and rely on.)

There is a mystery associated with the Redmark. Named for Orlyn's Redmark, a

now-defunct mercenary band its builders Gathgand Wyrlder and Bergun Zeltyl were part of, it was put up with their payout shares. These two proud owners have now disappeared, and various rough-looking folk have shown up as guests and carefully dismantled their rented rooms, obviously looking for something—probably coins. Local rumor 'concludes that the inn builders used money that did not belong to them, and their former companions-at-arms are looking to regain whatever is left. No one has tried to assume ownership of the inn in the meantime, and the staff are now running it as a collective.

Wyrlder and Zeltyl are thought to be dead or on the run (probably the former). The most persistent former Redmark guest-searchers are known to be Othna Barada, a priestess of Tempus who wears spiked gauntlets and lashes out at anyone who asks her questions; Talgos Twilight, a thief who recently acquired a hot reputation in Impiltur; and the mage Skeldor of the Serpents, known for his habit of traveling with a variety of pet snakes coiled about his person and belongings. No caches of money have yet been found around or under the inn, which has several large, modern storage cellars.

In the past, these ex-Redmark guests tried several times to seize bags of coins legitimately made by the inn during its daily operations when staff members took the coins to Treskeden House to order future shipments of vegetables or to Velarstown Silver and Jewelry for exchange into gems and trade bars. The leader of the inn staff, Stablemaster Alark Phlamtryn, has hired the Stormblades adventuring band (out of Tsurlagol) to guard the inn staff against searcher harassment. Dzanthea Erosko, the middle-aged chief chambermaid of the staff, is said locally to have recently purchased a live monster to guard the inn strongroom.



The Fall of Stars

Adventurers' Club, Rooming House, Restaurant, and Tavern



This famous adventurers' club serves its members as rooming house, restaurant, and tavern. (Rooms are 2 cp per night and can sleep up to four in comfort; all meals are 5 sp and all drinks 3 cp.) It is known for having an atmosphere of rowdy good fun. Pranks involving weapons and monsters are now banned after several regretably fatal accidents, but the Fall is still not a relaxing place to visit unless a member uses the Mercy Door into the Rest Wing intended for the use of wounded and exhausted members. Membership in the Stellar Fellowship of Gentle Adventurers costs 50 gp annually, and late fees are an additional 5 gp per month. Members who let their payments lapse for more than two seasons must pay in full or be stricken off the rolls and never allowed to join again; the old trick of paying just 50 gp for a "new membership" again is no longer tolerated.

Each member may bring two guests at a time into the club so long as the member is also present. Proof of membership is determined by a secret symbol devised by the member upon joining. If there is any doubt at the doors about a being's membership (doppelgangers and mage impersonators have been a problem in the past), she or he is asked by the wardens to draw the symbol again. The drawing is then compared to the symbol drawn on the rolls by the member at his or her time of joining. The door wardens are two half-ogre guards assisted by thieves who carry a

caged magebane³ and hand crossbows whose bolts are sleep-poison venom.

The Place

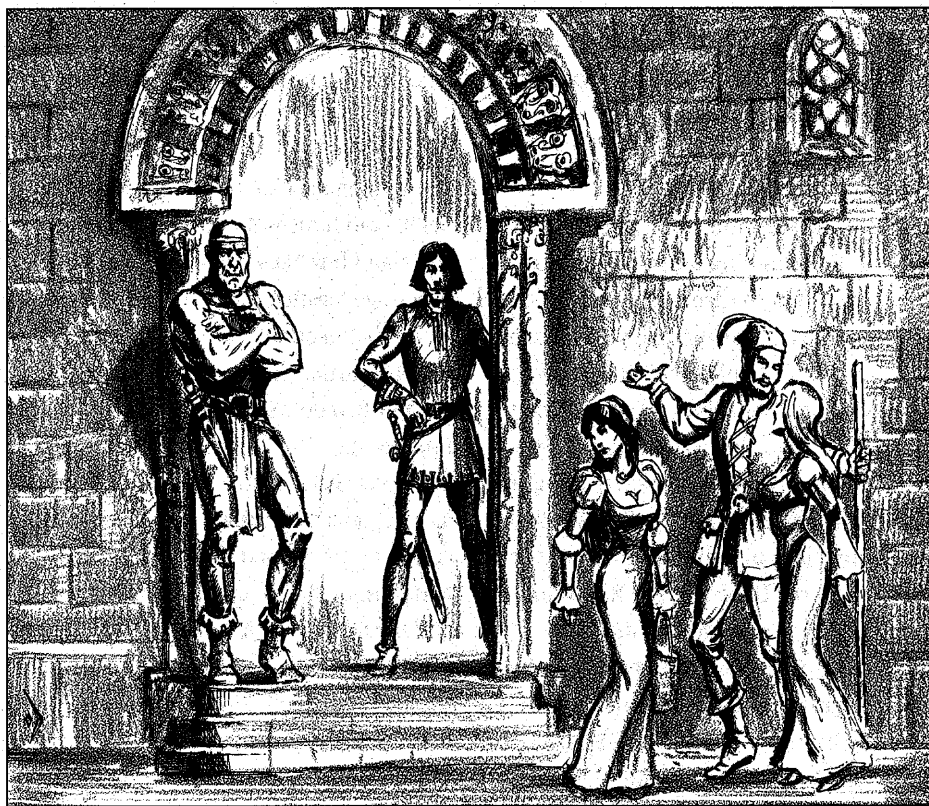
The club looks like the row of quietly luxurious old houses it once was. The houses still stand but have been joined together by a huge feasting hall that occupies the space that used to be their stables, coach houses, yards, and alleys.

Only two doors of this row of manor houses—both end ones on the west side of Denderver Street—are customarily used and left open. The others are locked but can freely be opened from inside. These two primary doors are the Grand Door and the Slink Door (named for their usual uses) of the club. The other entrances are the Coach Gate off Stink Alley, which is used by those employing closed coaches to arrive or leave in anonymity and by tradesmen and servants, and the Mercy Door on Moonside Lane, where hurt members are brought in.

The Prospect

Wounded adventurers who have had the forethought to join the Stellar Fellowship may find this club to be a timely gods-send and a shrewd investment: The Fellowship's stock of potions, antidotes, and medicines is dispensed freely to injured members in need, as are the services of Yhalandara Briiostan, a priestess of Tymora affiliated with the Lady of Good Fortune temple, when she is present. (Yhalandara enjoys an ample retainer from the club, so she is often present.) She is an expert at identifying afflictions by their symptoms, and has seen many adventures of her own. The fearful can even purchase *potions of heal-*

³Magebane statistics are found in the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Annual, Volume One*.



ing and *elixirs of health* at a bargain price of, respectively, 150 gp or 300 gp each, or 10% off from that if four or more of a kind are bought at once. (This offer open to members only.)

Guests not in such dire need can enjoy the famed social opportunities of the club: meeting fellow adventurers, talking business, the hearing the latest rumors, and exploring hiring possibilities. (Many wealthy patrons are brought to the club as the guest of a member to recruit other members for a job.) Members also can enjoy the nightly feasts, partake of light meals available at all hours, participate in well-lubricated tall-tale sessions and sing-alongs, take classes in the use of exotic weapons and in battling rare beasts, and revel in the general fun-loving atmosphere of the club. Gray-haired old warriors dancing about in ridiculous

costumes while singing bawdy songs and the almost-nightly dagger toss at the overhead candlewheel candles are both featured events.

Guests who truly need to sleep or recuperate are strongly advised to retire to the Rest Wing. The club staff—notably the beautiful half-elven Lady Lassitress, a petite and graceful sorceress of no small accomplishments and her weretiger assistant Thorthin—take a very dim view of revelry and goings-on in that part of their establishment and enforce the peace there by instant physical means. This forceful stance has proved critically necessary on more than one occasion: Adventurers tend to be folk with strong egos and long memories who nurse feuds and rivalries, and the club's festivities have provided cover for several sick-minded murderers.



Most members, however, are retired or semiretired. To them, the club is a pleasant place to drink and chat and enjoy the free entertainment provided by younger, more energetic members charging in with their exciting tales of what is happening out in the world right now. The senior members can then join in if asked, sponsor younglings if they have the coins and the inclination, tutor the precocious in magic and weapons play, and generally feel as if they are still in the thick of things. Besides, the Fall is probably the only place in Harrowdale where one can get real dragonsblood whiskey.

The Provender

It has been said one can get anything pourable at the Fall, and that is probably true. Elverquist, dragonsblood whiskey, and other exotic beverages may be the things most consumed here, but the place serves hearty meals no matter what the hour. These meals are of the whole-roast-boar or still-kicking-stag variety and are enlivened by as much exotic stuff as club members who are hunters can bring in. (The notation on the menu "Snow troll livers—they grow in you!" is *probably* a joke, however.) The club staff members pay well for wyvern tails and other exotic culinary prizes if they are brought in while still not too ripe for heavy sauce to hide.

Among the exotic stuff served up by the kitchens is the food most members really value: rib-sticking, hearty pot meals⁴ like the one of which they dream of getting while on the trail, and rarely—of any quality, at least—do. Most nights one recipe many members believe for is Boar and Chestnut Deep Pot (the

recipe for which was covertly acquired by the persuasive charms of your diligent servant! and is recorded on the next page.)

The Prices

Folk who are not members and show up at the door are not allowed into the club proper but directed to the House Around the Corner, a hostelry on Moonside Lane run by the club as a service to guests brought by a member who number in excess of the two allowed in (a common problem when members join large adventuring bands). The House offers rooms for 14 sp per head, including all the food one can eat but no drinks beyond mintwater. (The food comes from the Fall's kitchen, though that is a fact seldom made known.) Stabling is an extra 1 sp per night per beast.

I have already noted the bargain prices members enjoy. Two additional club services they can take advantage of are errand-running (small items or messages) around town or to Ordulin, Blackfeather Bridge, Feather Falls, Scardale town, or Essembra for 5 gp per trip and forays by a doppelganger club staffer impersonating the member in a desired journey or act. This last service costs 25 gp per night or action and can only be requested by the member to be impersonated to keep pranks and fraud to a minimum. (The doppelganger cannot be hired to assassinate, abduct, or seduce anyone nor place itself in a situation of likely or sure mortal danger, such as a duel.) These fees are cumulative, so 30 gp buys a member an impostor who will make a trip to one of the five locales listed above in their likeness and do something small but specific there (posting a notice or deliv-

⁴Elminster: Ye would say casseroles.

⁵Elminster: Gods! Don't cooks even have any standards left? *Seduction by Volo?* 'Tis enough to turn my stomach. (Sigh.)



Boar and Chestnut Deep Pot

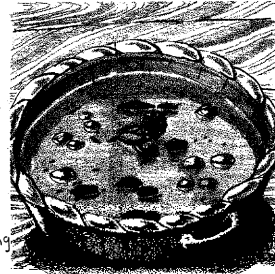
divers pieces of boar
meat, enough to fill a
greatpot (they may be
well past prime)
1 handful of ground black
pepper
1 handful of salt
1 pour mushroom juice
(crush or boil field
mushrooms to gain this
if ye have it not on
hand)

1 onion
1 clove garlic
1 handful flour
1 pour Thurann's oil⁶
4 pours dry cider
4 pours beef stock
1 handful parsley
Herbs to taste
2 handfuls chestnuts

Slice the onion fyne, crush the garlic, peel the chestnuts, and cut the boar into cubes (all separately). In a greatpot over a goodly flame, heat the Thurann's oil, and when it begin to smell hot, put in the boar, a little at a tyme, and stir about, frying until browned all over.

Ladle out the boar and set it aside, tossing in thy onion and garlic instead, and set the greatpot to the edge of the fire

where the heat
be lower. fry
gently until
these hot
greens be soft
but not
changed in
hue, and then
add the boar
back in, stirring
in the flour
straightaway.



Cook, stirring constantly, for the space of a short song before pouring in the cider, the the mushroom juice, and then the stock, stirring all the while. Bring all slowly to a boil, then add the herbs, salt, and pepper, seasoning to taste.

Cover the greatpot and set it well over the fire to cook for two hours or until the boar be tender. Just before ye judge 'tis done, toss in the chestnuts, and stir. When the boar be truly done, season more to taste if needed, sprinkle with parsley, and ladle into bowls for serving.

ering a message, say). Such requests, when prepaid, have been honored posthumously. In this way, stricken or dead adventurers have appeared to friends or neighbors after death or when known to lie near death and so acquired an awesome reputation.

Travelers' Lore

The Fall of Stars was founded in Harrowdale by the notorious Lady of the Lash, the adventuress Ambreeauta Nenthyn (a worshiper of Loviatar), upon her retirement home to die. Stricken by a wasting disease, Ambreeauta clung to life for two decades and saw her dream of a club where shunned adventurers could

stay in comfort, respected and waited upon, become reality. In undeath, Arbreeauta still directs the policy and investments of the Fall. (She deftly handled recent and ticklish negotiations with the Burghers and the watch.) She exists now as a floating, talking skull and keeps to inner rooms of the club, a secret to all but a few senior members⁸ and the present Mistress of Stars (club director), her beautiful daughter Breeandra.

Lady Breeandra Nenthyn is also a follower of Loviatar and is said to have a private sacred chamber hidden under the club. She is often seen wearing barbed gowns with whips at her belt, yet her

⁶Elminster: In the Dales, Thurann's oil is a clear vegetable oil derived by a boiling process invented in Deeping-dale long ago invented by a merchant named—surprise—Thurann.

⁷Elminster: To ye, this colloquial measure means one or two minutes.

⁸Elminster: Not any more, ye dolt! (Sigh again.)



eneration of pain does not extend to mistreating members. To them she is a regal, caring, sisterly helpmate and friend, offering advice and support whenever asked and ensuring that wounds and problems members do not want to reveal are discreetly brought out and dealt with.

Breeandra shares her mother's dream of a home for adventurers and has augmented it with a vision of her own: a large, beautiful country estate linked to the club by tunnels or a gate for old adventurers to retire to, when they are too old to go on. This estate would be a place where kindly staff would indulge the retirees wild tales and feeble attempts at weapons practice and danger-seeking and give them attention as well as needed care.

Breeandra greets most arriving members with proffered drinks and

backrubs, not merely kind words and is often on her feet from dusk to dusk. Under her tireless care, the Fall of Stars has grown to some 800 active (that is, paid up and still believed to be alive) members, including minotaurs, orcs, mongrelmen, an individual who seems to be a werebeholder(!), and a drow priestess who has embraced the Way of the Whip and often visits with Breeandra to commiserate.

The fame of the Fall has spread to such distant lands as Nimbral, Lantan, Icewind Dale, and the Tashalar—and adventurers have begun to make pilgrimages there to see the place for themselves, and thereby (in many cases) gain a refuge in their perilous, lonely lives. To them, the Fall and its staff provide a place where they feel they belong and people who care





about them. To reinforce and preserve this sense of belonging, many members have prepaid their memberships for decades and brought in monster trophies to adorn the walls of the club. These trophies show all who come to the club that, say, Harandil Thundersword is a member and slew this black dragon at that locale on a certain day, or that Selazzar Bloodhawk flourishes still and with his spells destroyed the nameless creature that tore apart prey in the crumbling halls of Myth Drannor with these talons. Such relics are everywhere around the Fall of Stars—and not a few of them hide keys or graven passwords or even bear enchantments allowing members to *teleport* to them in times of need or when *contingency* spells function,

These hidden items, transport enchantments, and other perils attendant to having adventurers as members have led Breeandra to hire some quite powerful wizards and priests, who for various reasons want to withdraw from the world (often in disguise), as staff members. They mingle with members and guests with combat and defensive spells always at the ready. The undead Ambreeauta keeps constant watch throughout the club by means of an array of scrying magical items, so staff members always arrive on the run without having to be summoned whenever someone—or something—gates in or is released from an item.

Shielding and fire-prevention magics lie layers deep in most corners of the club, so

detection spells tend to be useless within its walls. This side-effect has undoubtedly concealed some things from the overly inquisitive, and the roster of still-missing items is rumored to include not only the bodies of several missing members but some rich treasures, such as a palm-sized glass globe filled with various *pearls of power* and the Tears of the Weeping Maiden,⁹ which were stolen from the vaults of the gem merchant family of Irrii some 20 winters ago. Members who attempt to pry, dig, or cut into the walls, floors, or ceilings are politely told by staff members that folk who persist in such activity will suffer the same fate that befell the few brave men sent by Lashan who managed to penetrate the club's (unspecified) defenses: Everything they set weapon or tool to spat *magic missile* spells at them. How Ambreeauta achieved this magical field of peril remains a mystery. Some say she hired the Simbul to cast it as a custom one-time defense, and others insist the spell field came from ruined Myth Drannor in a grimoire and can be reset or even resets itself!

Mention must be made of the famous Challenge of Orytar to all Stellar Fellowship members: bring to the Fall of Stars an eye of Aurgloroasa, a dragon lairing the Thunder Peaks. Aurgloroasa is gigantic female elder wyrm shadow dragon, who is rumored to have mastered magic enough to defeat many an archmage. Orytar died on his fifth attempt to accomplish this feat, and his challenge has since caused the deaths of many members.

⁹The *Tears of the Weeping Maiden* is the masterwork of the Irrii. (pronounced "EAR-ah-ee") family; it has been added to by each master jeweler of the family down the generations. It is an elaborate pectoral necklace of a great many (accounts of the number of stones vary) diamonds strung together with precious wire. The low front fringe of the necklace consists of a raked array of teardrop-shaped, brilliant-cut diamonds of unusually large size. These unique stones (one is at least as long as a tall man's middle finger) may be worth 75,000 gp or more apiece. The entire assembly, if intact, may be worth as much as 2,400,000 gp.



Halvan's Keep



Halvan the Dark is infamous among the Fair Folk as the man who sought to carve a road—Halfaxe Trail—through the heart of the oldest, deepest shadowdark stands in all the Elven Court woods and was prepared to bring about the deaths of elves and humans in plenty to do it. He found his own death in his efforts, and when word of this came at last to Harrowdale town, Halvan's servants fled his keep only a few running paces ahead of Halvan's foes, who rose from their shops and houses to go to the Keep and despoil it.

Halvan's abrasive ways had made him many foes and also made him very rich (or so folk in town believed, anyway), since he seized the assets of debtors he had lent funds to who could not repay him. A lot of folk came looking for the gold coins that were said to fill entire rooms of his Keep, as well as looking for gem-encrusted suits of armor and other riches. (Halvan had a weakness for ornate armors; he had several suits made for himself as the years wound on and he grew fatter and his tastes more opulent.)

The looters did do a lot of damage to various expensive pieces of furniture and emptied Halvan's kitchens, pantries, library, and grand rooms of just about everything useful and portable. Treasure was not, however, found anywhere, even after certain of the more enthusiastic searchers took to breaking into walls. As the anger of the townsfolk grew, the destruction grew with it until several stout local merchants were killed when a wall they were busily chipping away at

fell on them. The local watch, the only vestige of authority remaining in Harrowdale, then ordered all exploration and vandalism of the Keep—which is an old, rambling, largely neglected manor house enclosed within a newer and more impressive set of fortified walls—be ceased forthwith.

When the Council of Seven Burghers came to power, it upheld that decree and set fines (of 50 gp per head) to be levied against all persons seen entering or departing from the Keep. The fines, which still stand, instantly dampened the enthusiasm of fat local merchants for tearing down walls, but did little to deter bold outlander adventurers.

It is thought that some 30 summers ago one of those adventurers set free some sort of fell guardian creature that Halvan had set to watch over his treasury and perished in the battle that ensued. A struggle ensued, it is surmised from the odd noises heard by people out that night, and the struggle started a fire that raged through the Keep, leaving it a blackened, roofless ruin. In the face of talk of lumps of half-melted gold larger than street carts being uncovered, the watch was sent in when the smoke had cleared to see if the fire had revealed anything of value. They found only several empty hitherto-secret chambers and many bones—of brigands who had slain each other, outlaws who had hidden in the Keep over the years, and the like.

The flames did reveal a new way down into the dungeons, but forays found only wraiths within it, bolstering local legends that Halvan's ghost guarded his Keep. (The wraiths were probably the undead remains of victims Halvan had chained



up in his cells and forgotten.) Halvan's treasury, if it does still exist, has never been found.

New rumors about the haunted Keep still surface in Harrowdale. Honest citizens avoid the burnt-out shell in their midst, but more than one shady organization has used the shunned Keep as a base over the years, from followers of Loviatar to a smuggling cabal. The vigilance of the watch has uncovered all such uses after a time, and adventurers were then hired to clean the place out.

It seems likely that a call to interested folk of action will soon go out again, as monsters are appearing in the streets of Harrowdale by night—monsters coming, witnesses swear, from the Keep. Those creatures spotted are known to have included minotaurs, feyrs, mimics, lurkers above, kobolds, mongrelmen, trolls,

giant centipedes, and even displacer beasts. Wise locals fear that evil interests have imported a deepspawn (or created a *gate* or other source of deadly creatures) in the heart of the ruins for their own fell purposes—but what those purposes are, and who is responsible, remains a mystery at this time.

Interested travelers are advised that the Company of the Werebat, working out of Melvaunt, recently fled Harrowdale after seven of their number (out of 11) perished in Halvan's Keep. Their grim report, tendered so the Council would allow them to keep the deposit paid to them, recorded a few unsprung traps and at least one still-unexplored network of hidden passages in the Keep's gutted upper levels, but said the cellars were literally crawling with beasts, including at least one beholder!



Velarsburg

Standing on the western edge of the Velarwood between two arms of that old and thickly grown forest, Velarsburg is the market town for the farmers of northern Harrowdale and the center of the busy Harran logging and carpentry trades. Velarsburg began as a cluster of farmers and foresters' huts around the Velar Mill, a horse-powered sawmill run by Haemar the Old. The mill still stands, but it is now just a lumber warehouse. When Haemar died a few winters ago after almost 80 summers as miller, more than 20,000 gold coins were discovered sewn into grain sacks in the attic of the mill. The origins of this treasure are still a matter of much colorful local speculation, but Haemar is known to have been an adventurer in his youth.

The Velarwood has always been a fell place in Harran legend, home to cloaklers, trolls, stirges, and bonebats. A community of moon-worshipping lycanthropes was said to dwell in caves at the heart of the wood where the Howling Hill rises out of the trees. They may still do so; few woodcutters dare go far into the forest.

Drow and a few half-elves are known to gather in a glade at the north end of the Velarwood from time to time to venerate Eilistraee the Dark Maiden. Harran fire-side tales speak not only of their beautiful, mysterious, half-seen dancing—but of the enchanted silver swords they make and use to slay bears, deer, boars, and other woodland creatures. Harran legends say these swords and their kills are buried together as part of each ritual of worship, but the legend-layered telling of such tales is difficult to judge the truth of.

Folk in Velarsburg are almost proud to know that such wild, fey things go on

around them. The Harrans here live close, to the land and feel themselves part of an ancient cycle that is splendid and savage and which will outlive such momentary human things as the rise and fall of Lashan, the wealth of Sembia, or the terrors of Zhentil Keep. This is rich territory for the faiths of Malar, Chauntea, and the woodland gods. Roughly 250 folk dwell in Velarsburg and another 300 or so come to its market every tenday or venture into it more often on business. Despite its small size, it is considered a town by the locals—and a visitor would do well not to contest them on the subject.

Landmarks

Velarsburg is small and rustic, with orchards providing shade around cottages that nestle amid wildflower gardens. Around the edges of the settlement sit the various logging compounds with their mounds of sawdust and stacked spars, noisy cutting shops, and isolated warehouses. To cut down on the risk of fire, such storage places must be surrounded by earthen walls higher than they are to catch sparks. Only vines or flowers can be planted on these mounds, so melons are grown in profusion in Velarsburg.

At the heart of town is the huge, muddy market ground with its many wells and horse troughs. Harrow Ride, the road that ultimately becomes Halfaxe Trail, comes in from Harrowdale town and splits into a huge ring to enclose the market. At one of these intersections stands the local temple of Chauntea and at the other is Velarsburg's only inn. The other important local businesses plus the rooming houses that provide homes for the loggers who dwell here in summer and fall cluster around the ring. A traveler can walk from end to



end of Velarsburg in a very short time, but to enjoy the flowers, the views, and the stunted old trees climbed all over by local children takes much longer.

Places of Interest in Velarsburg

Temple

The Temple of the Harvest Moon

This square, impressive building is entered through a massive round stone tower, which is the remains of a baronial keep from before there were Dales. (Some say it was the home of King Flymder, but others say it was the hold of Hantras Wolthead, a pirate who dealt stolen goods to the elves and so was allowed to dwell here when the Fair Folk kept other humans away.) Known as the Moon Tower, this keep's walls end in jagged spurs where the top floor was torn away long ago by an angry dragon (or so local lore attests). In the center of the circle formed by of these spurs temple clergy members have set up a gigantic copper moon treated with *everbright* magics and amber *continual faerie fire* radiances. At night, this moon is a beacon visible miles off.

Beyond the tower, the temple forms a hollow square that encloses a courtyard given over to cultivation—or, as some not of the faith wryly put it, providing space for “stacking up all the coins that come in.” While this is a cynical view of the temple's intent, this holy house is undeniably a rich and important temple of Chauntea. Its high priestess, High Mother Harvestmistress Yvonna Oakenstave, a cleric of long service and impressive accomplishments, leads 20-odd priests and priestesses, who are guarded by the same number of temple warriors.

This temple has a hushed, peaceful atmosphere, and even the guards speak

softly. The clergy members spend little time in prayer. If they are not gardening in the temple, its courtyard, or temple-owned fields, they are out assisting farmers and needy folk up and down the Dale, avoiding only the wild seashore and Harrowdale town itself. Many lost travelers have been fed and guided for free by helpful priests of the Earthmother. Even pilgrims of other faiths are served in this way.

The hard work of the clergy members on repairing farm fences and irrigating, planting, and clearing farm fields of weeds is reflected in the love Harran farmers have for them. Many heartfelt, substantial donations are made to the temple, and thus far at least, the high mother has diligently used the moneys to rebuild roads and bridges, to improve irrigation, and to work with foresters, farmers, and forest elves alike to keep everyone dwelling in harmony and the land eternally renewed rather than damaged through deforestation or overplanting.

Visitors to the temple are healed, fed, and guarded without charge or obligation. All save the sick sleep on the ground under the sky in reverence to Chauntea (including the priests), though tents and such are used in inclement weather and everyone sleeps inside in crowded shelter from the first snows until the spring comes. Those who stay for more than a night are expected to help with the gardening in and around the holy house.

Shops

Black Stars Logging

Sawmill and Lumber Yard



Black Stars is the collective logging mill and yard owned by every woodcutter in



town who is not a Torsyld. Each logger and carver here works with only a few sorts of wood that they specialize in learning the tricks of harvesting, cutting, and seasoning the timber of. The yard also works with affiliated furnituremakers who work from home shops and display their wares here or request Black Stars wood to be shipped to them. Many a fine table, chest, or chair can be found throughout the Dragon Reach lands with the burned-in brand of the arc of three black stars on it to show that its lumber once came from this bustling yard.

Torsyld Logging

Lumber Yard



This large, prosperous compound is devoted entirely to shadowtop wood. The Torsyld family, like all the loggers of Velarsburg, specializes in what type of wood it deals in. Family members bring in only the best wood for stripping, polishing, and the insertion of splines of other woods to keep the spars flexible for use as masts. In my opinion, the Torsylds run a well-kept yard and business.

Trader Fine Furs

Furrier



One of the largest furriers in the Dales, this old family firm is having to specialize in the exotic to compete with smaller local firms in Cormyr and Sembia. It is now a place that hires many adventuring bands to slay specific monsters in the depths of the Elven Court woods in ways—such as with *lightning bolt* spells—that keep the pelts as undamaged as possible.

Tavern

The Pushy Pixie



This ridiculously named place is where farmers and foresters go to drink and be entertained by crude pranks, ruder dancing, thigh-slapping lowbrow jokes, and rough-and-tumble fights every few breaths. It is a good thing the town's industry is furnituremaking: More stools and tables get broken in here every night than a rough Sembian tavern might go through in a year! The tavern opens a few hours after highsun, and two priests from the Harvest Moon are stationed here every evening to repair the worst of the wounded.

Happily, visitors are welcomed rather than ridiculed or picked on by drunks looking to start a brawl. The dancers cannot really dance, and once a month when the Flametresses, a traveling band of priestesses of Sune who *can* dance, come through town, the Pixie is packed full of locals there to enjoy the show. The prices are low, the ale is good, and the Pixie does not pretend to be refined or special—a nice rustic alehouse.

Inn

The Old Stump



The Old Stump is expensive—after all, few folk come to town to stay the night except outlanders buying furniture—but surprisingly *very* good. I wonder how it stays in business, since most local farmers traveling through just lie down atop their coins and sleep in their wagons. However, I recommend the Stump if you like an atmosphere like home with good cooking and warm, caring comforts.





The High Dale

Unless this high, cold farming backland lies along one's route of travel, wayfarers have little reason to come to the High Dale. Set apart from the other Dales by the Thunder Peaks that wall it in, the High Dale is really just a high but earthen-floored mountain pass offering a route between Cormyr and Sembia along the Thunder Way (a wagon track which passes from Saerb at one end to Thunderstone in Cormyr at the other). One of the oldest Dales, this tiny holding is insular and likes it that way. The cosmopolitan airs, intrigue, and strife of other places are not for Highdalesmen. They enjoy quiet, simple, hardy lives as shepherds, with a few of them pursuing weaving and stone-cutting. They also make a few coins off the wagons that choose this way through the mountains rather than the main road that runs through Daerlun to the south or the East Way that cuts through Thunder Pass to the north.

The Countryside

The road up into the High Dale climbs swiftly at either end, although it always traverses earth and not rock unlike Thunder Pass. Mountains wall in the Dale to the north and south. They are scaled by dangerous-looking tracks that ascend to terraces and high pastures carved out by the Highdalesmen over the seven centuries or so that men have dwelt here; blasting magic has obviously been used to make or improve them in several places.

Many small streams plunge down from the sheer rock faces around the Dale. They drain away in either direction from the head of the pass at the town of Highcastle, seat of the six-strong Dale council and home to 350 Highdalesmen. Approximately a thousand folk live in all the rest of the High Dale, from the guardpost of Westkeep on the Cormyrean end of the pass to the guardpost of Eastkeep on the Sembian side.

The casual traveler may miss the most famous site in the High Dale: the Dancing Place, said to be where many gods met to form alliances and make agreements when the world was young (see the Dancing Place entry, hereafter). It is easy to miss because it is in a hidden side-valley just east of Highcastle on the north side of the Dale. Aside from the one that cradles the Dancing Place, two other such valleys nestle in the mountains. They are small clefts between mountain spurs that open into the main pass but swiftly hook around to parallel it until they narrow to a close less than a mile from their mouths.

Both of the other two hidden valleys are on the south side of the pass. One, just east of Westkeep, is called Copper Gulp. Many copper delves, both working and abandoned, riddle its walls. The presence of this metal has made the water in the small lake in this vale look a truly beautiful blue-green. But beware: It is also poisonous to drink.

The other hidden vale is called, well, Hidden Vale and lies just to the south of Twoswords Bridge where the Thunder Way crosses Baerast's Stream, the rivulet



that empties eastward out of the pass. Hidden Vale is home to several gnome and halfling farms. They guard their domain against prospectors and more casual intruders by means of a few trained giant spiders—horrible hairy things that are about the size of a small cottage! Highdalesmen ignore the things and just stroll in to visit their friends, but the arachnids scare a lot of peddlers and would-be thieves away.

Many rare herbs and flowers whose petals and juices are valuable as ingredients in medicines and magical inks and preparations grow in all three side-valleys, though the main Dale has been largely picked clear. This Dale is one place where children who are not afraid of heights or perilous rock-scrambles can make a lot of money picking things others cannot reach. Alchemists from Sembia come up here on an almost monthly basis during the growing season and sometimes in winter (to gain the rare moonflower, which grows only atop deep snow) to purchase plants that the locals have painstakingly sought out and collected.

Terrain that allows wagons to pass through mountains is always of strategic importance, and the High Dale is no exception. On several occasions both Cormyr and Sembia have attempted to take over the High Dale—and Archendale even sent an army to stake *its* claim to it once—but no external power has ever been able to hold it for more than a few months. (The Zhentarim held it for the longest period of any invader during the Time of Troubles, attacking from Daggerdale by means of a magical *gate*.) On a recent occasion, the wizard Yandrin Thorl, a resident of the High Dale, warned Archendale, Cormyr, and Sembia to abandon all

thoughts of taking over the Dale unless they wanted large settled areas in their respective lands destroyed by fire. He claimed he had developed a means of combining the effects of *meteor swarm* spells so that they could be cast at various times but would not take effect until later when a single word of activation was uttered—then they would all ignite in a spot of his choosing. Various mages scoffed at Yandrin's warning, so he demonstrated his power by reducing an island in the Sea of Fallen Stars to blackened ruin. Everyone has been content to leave the High Dale alone since then.

The Highdalesmen

The folk of the High Dale, whatever their gender, are known as Highdalesmen. They are a hardy, good-humored lot who are used to baking heat reflected off the mountainsides during summer and icy gales in winter. They have little use for ceremony or grand airs, and as a result their rulers are the most likely of all Dale rulers to do as most folk wish, rather than scheming on their own behalf or thinking that they know better than their people.

The High Dale is ruled by six elected councilors who each serve for six years with one seat elected each year. These six in turn select a seventh, the high constable of the Dale, who serves as the council chairperson. The current High Constable is the tremendously popular ranger and ex-adventurer Irreph Mulmar. Officially, he votes to break ties in council and trains and leads six constables who in turn muster the militia, but in truth he runs the Dale.



The Dancing Place

This sacred site is a round, bare hilltop of vibrant, soft, green moss surrounded by a ring of duskwood trees and a brook that plunges down the mountainsides to nearly encircle the duskwood stand before running into a small, placid lake. The entire hushed, hidden valley that holds the Dancing Place¹ is stunningly beautiful and has a feeling of deep, patient peacefulness.

The Dancing Place is named for its onetime use by a long-vanished korred community. It is famous for a divine assembly that befell in the Year of the Dawn Rose (720 DR), when—four days before Midsummer—the elves called the clergies of many sylvan faiths to gather at a grove sacred to Silvanus on this hilltop for a parley. Elminster proposed the founding of the Harpers to that assembly—and when some of the clergy rejected the idea, their deities manifested to speak through them in support of the idea. That meeting gave the Harpers and the Dancing Place certain special powers and led to the human settlement of the High Dale. The “High Harp” badge of the High Dale recalls this gathering.

Pilgrims of those faiths who met here on that day long ago come here to this day to be touched by the same awe as those present at the assembly felt. The faiths who hold the Dancing Place important are those of: Deneir, Eldath, Lliira, Mielikki, Milil, Mystra, Oghma, Selúne, Silvanus, and Tymora of the humans and Corellon Larethian, Sehanine Moonbow, Fenmarel Mestarine, Hanali Celanil, Labelas Enoreth, and Solonor Thelandira of the elves. The folk of the High Dale have

set aside special wooded encampments along the northern side of the Dale around the trail that leads to the Dancing Place for the use of the “Gentle Ones” (pilgrims of the above faiths) coming to visit the holy valley.

The location of an elven holy site in the High Dale means that Highdalesmen are very likely to encounter elves rather more frequently than some people of the Dragon Reach lands. The Highdalesmen hold elves in awe and respect them, regarding them as superior folk who should be left alone as much as possible but greeted with gentle friendship when meetings occur. One Dale hunter told me that he estimates 6,000 or more elven folk and twice that number of half-elves steal into the High Dale every year to visit the holy valley and just as quietly steal away again. (None of the High Dale hunters slay anything in the valley of the Dancing Place, by the way—nor should any visitor.)

Today, the Dancing Place is tended as a gigantic, hallowed garden by priests and priestesses of Oghma, Mystra, Mielikki, Silvanus, and Selúne. They work together and submit to the orders of one Watcher chosen from among their ranks. Since the death of Oram Tree-Father of the faith of Silvanus, the holy folk of the Dancing Place have been led by Learned Father Loremaster High Crandan Ethander, chief of the Oghmanyte clergy members here. The priests not only maintain and defend the valley, but also aid all heroes of good heart in their activities as well as providing free spells, healing, and shelter to all druids, bards, and rangers. The Harpers run messages between the holy folk here and their fellow clergy in the world outside—and can rouse the militia in Highcastle and

¹The location of the Dancing Place is shown on the first map in the section on Highcastle later in this chapter.



have them here inside an hour if swords are needed to quell any trouble or fires must be fought.

Violent trouble and catastrophes do happen from time to time: Goblinkin boil down out of the mountain caverns from time to time or deliberately start avalanches, and adventurers sometimes come hoping to wrest some of the fabled magic of the place away from the priests, since many tales speak not of the holiness of the valley, but of magic locked in items and books that are physically guarded by the priests of Silvanus. I was firmly told that such tales are false. The magic of the Dancing Place resides in the spells of those who come there and in powers granted by the gathered gods to the place itself, not in tomes or items.

These powers manifest as follows: A night of slumber on the ground in the open on the moss of the Dancing Place, can heal a being of all wounds, sickness, and madness, and ends all curses (such as lycanthropy) and *geas* spells or other wit-binding enchantments. The magic of the site holds good for all woodland creatures from pixies to owlbears and extends to faithful worshipers of the deities I listed earlier. However, this divine boon always carries a price: The aided being awakens with a clear mission or task, set by the gods, in his or her mind and is unable to ignore or neglect the task for long. (It will gradually become an obsession that rules the being if ignored.)

Clergy of the deities listed above who sleep anywhere in the valley often receive guidance in the form of dream visions and sometimes are sent answers to specific questions. Those who bear a magical item

of unknown or partially known powers and sleep holding or wearing it usually find upon awakening that every detail of its workings has been set in their minds, akin to the action of an exhaustive *identify* spell without its draining effects, without any conscious action on their part.

All clergy of the above-listed faiths who are within the valley can once a day cast a *call lightning* and a *flame strike* at will without having to pray for it. (This ability is sort of an extra spell granted by the gods.) As misusing such a boon would be sinful, this power is rarely called upon save when the Dancing Place is under direct attack. In the most recent instance of this ability's use, the followers of Talos had sent a band of ruffians into the High Dale with orders to torch the site; they were slain to a man by the holy defenders.

I'm told that the Dancing Place has other holy powers, too, but I was unable to get anyone to tell me what these were. Instead, I was told it would be best if no mention of the holy site was made in this or any other travelers' guidebook—a suggestion I was duty-bound to ignore, of course!²

By treaty, the Harpers watch over the High Dale but base no agents there, instead maintaining hidden caches of food, equipment, *potions of healing*, and other magic in the mountains around the Dale for the use of their members when passing through. Most such Harpers camp on the high ledges or visit with farmers who are personal friends rather than showing themselves in Highcastle. Cynics believe the treaty exists solely because the mountain pass is of strategic importance, but the truth is, it was signed because of the Dancing Place.

²*Elminster*: Of course. Sigh.



The same treaty obligates Cormyr to set a war wizard on constant watch over the High Dale—something that the security of that fair realm, given Sembia's wealth and endless appetite for expansion, would demand today anyway. Cormyr is also obligated to defend the High Dale in time of war. During the Time of Troubles, Cormyr had already sent agents—who were slaughtered by the Zhents—to investigate reports that a cruel new lord had risen to rule the High Dale before Elminster, Sharantyr of the Knights of Myth Drannor, and the Harpers together defeated the Zhents.³

Some time ago, a Highdalesman by the name of Dorn Talattar, a silversmith who dwells near Eastkeep, discovered a rich vein of silver in Manymists Mountain, the peak that encloses the hidden

valley of the Dancing Place on its east side. He mined the vein in secret for years, digging along its narrow deposit alone and creating a narrow, man-high tunnel in the process—a tunnel that recently broke through into the vale that holds the Dancing Place!

Dorn wants to explore the far side of the valley in hopes he can find the silver vein continuing on, but he is opposed by the priests, who say that "Dorn's Way" has already endangered the sanctity of the valley by offering another easy way into it from the High Dale. Who knows what disasters might be unleashed if Dorn's mining breaks through into Underdark caverns or an underground river? At present, Dorn is forbidden to enter the valley, but this matter is not settled and strong feelings persist on both sides.

³As told in the novel *Shadows of Doom* by Ed Greenwood (TSR, Inc., 1995).



Highcastle

The only town in the High Dale is this settlement of 350 or so folk at the summit of the pass. Its stout stone buildings with roofs of slate, steeply pitched to shed winter snows, cluster along the few streets. From the mountain terraces one can readily see a spiderweb of lanes converging through the farms to form a central, shield-shaped ring surrounded by the landmarks of the Dale.

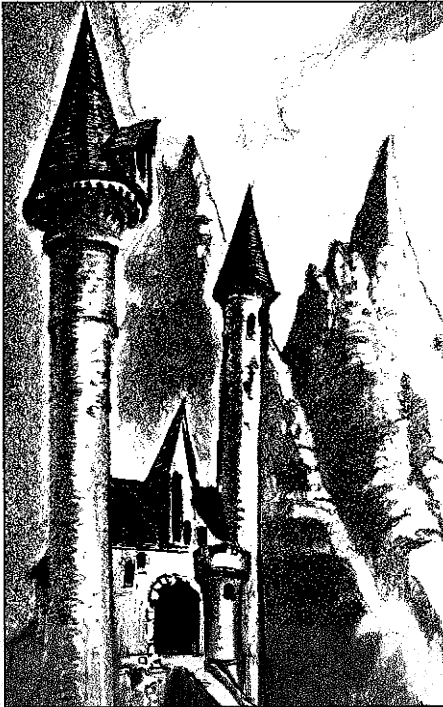
The Dale's prominent features have changed quite a bit from what existed before the Time of Troubles. The High Castle has been allowed to fall into ruin, and the houses that clustered about it have been pulled down. The town has receded away from the hill crowned by the castle. The Zhent barracks were also

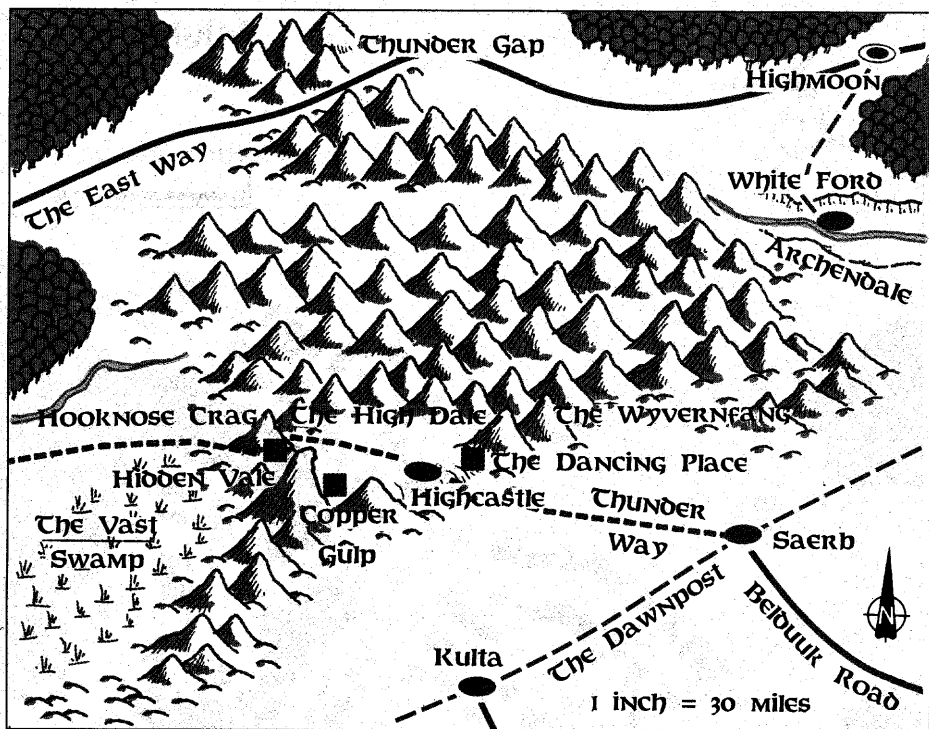
demolished after the Zhents were defeated, and their gate is no more. Farms have reclaimed both areas.

Landmarks

The High Castle was once an ancient robber baron's keep. Baron Hurst Amadin, who died over 700 winters ago fighting off orcs, was a fat brigand known—behind his back—as “the Boar” for his manner and brawn. He charged a 6-gp-per-wagon toll plus whatever his strongest warrior could carry out of the wagon in both hands in one trip for passage through High Pass (the present-day High Dale). The High Castle has been used by many masters since, including several “lords” of the Dale, but now lies in ruins again. The council has banded about plans, however, to fix parts of it up again to house the Dale army, the stables for the constables, and quarters for the militia and indeed all Dale citizens in times of trouble such as the frequent winter wolf raids, which occur when the mountain snows are at their worst.

A small but quite adequate fortress whose ballistae and catapults can crush any large armed force trying to move through the pass, the High Castle has always suffered from its proximity to the mountains: An enemy who scales Helmturtle Peak to its south can rake the battlements with arrows at will or roll boulders down (catapults are not even needed) into the heart of the fortress. The Zhentarim found and carried off some treasure caches walled up in the Castle, but local lore maintains that far more gold yet remains to be found, along with an entire wagonload of gems! Local tales also whisper that the cellars of the





castle hold agate to somewhere far away in the Sword Coast lands.⁴

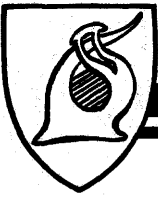
A much newer stronghold on the rising ground just northeast of town faces the castle across the pass. Arrowpoint is the home base of the Pegasus Archery Company, a mercenary band that the Highdalesmen accepted into their lands only after every last warrior among them agreed to allow a spell to be placed on them by Yandrin Thorl that turns any Pegasus woman or man who takes up arms against the Dale or tries to rule in the High Dale to stone.

Arrowpoint consists of a semicircular earthen rampart with wooden watchtowers at its either end. This rampart encloses stables and barracks. Hire-

swords who come to Arrowpoint seeking employment can expect to earn 4 cp per day plus a blanket, a bunk, and two plain meals of bread or biscuits and cold, cooked fowl or cheese, but these wages can rise to 5 sp per day for those with useful talents. The Pegasus folk are often away from the Dale on assignments for wealthy interests who have hired them to explore and tame the dangerous regions surrounding the Dales so that they can be developed.

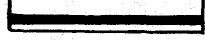
Between these two strongholds lies Highcastle, a small town where travelers can readily find all places of interest merely by looking around at each place where two roads meet. Not so easily found is the Dale Councilchamber, which is hidden away

⁴Elminster: Actually it connects to Spellgard on the western edge of Anauroch. For how to find it, ye will have to read the novel *Shadows of Doom*. Now that Saharel's gone, I don't suppose ye can do much harm.



Highcastle

1 inch = 100 yards





Highcastle Map Key

1. The High Castle (ruin)
2. The Swordsmith's House (inn)
3. The Shield and Keep (tavern)
4. The Dale Councilchamber
5. Ironhand's Arms (weaponsmith)
6. Frogfoot's Provisions (caravan and mountaineering goods shop)
7. The Eagles' Eyrie (inn)
8. Arrowpoint (home base of Pegasus Archery Company)

down a lane of its own behind trees to the northwest of the built-up area. Around the Councilchamber wraps a pretty little park of old trees, climbing roses, and close-trimmed grass (a luxury in this mountain country). The grand stone pile of Councilchamber Hall faces the visitor in the center of things. The building is a former adventurers' mansion that now houses the Dale offices, granaries, jail, armory, and meeting rooms. Councilchamber Hall is flanked by the watch barracks to the south, and the high constable's manor—a much smaller mansion—to the north. At least half a dozen militiamen are always on guard in this area.

The open space in front of the High Castle was the Dale's market, but carts now usually pull in behind Frogfoot's Provisions in the interior of the roughly shield-shaped ring of roads in the heart of town. Dale farmers sell their potatoes, turnips, hay, wool, mutton, and goats' milk here.

Townfolk include a few blacksmiths and leatherworkers, a wheelwright and cooper, and several carpenters. No buildings of distinct architectural interest exist in Highcastle, and the town has no temples save a tiny chapel (Battle Chapel) to Tempus.

Places of Interest in Highcastle Shops

Frogfoot's Provisions

*Caravan and Mountaineering Goods
(Adventuring Supplies)*



This rambling structure looks like just what it is: three old warehouses that are on the verge of falling down but in the meantime have been joined together to sell things to people out of. Here visitors can find a good array of rations, bottles, hooks, ropes, metal spikes, mallets, tarpaulins, and leather goods—from distinctly unstylish boots to nicely tooled, stout belts that even possess a certain flair. These wares are especially suited for the needs of a caravan merchant or mountain prospector.

The family that owns this business, the Hurlstones, uses a large webbed frog's foot on their signboard so that you can easily find them. The oldest Hurlstone, Urgar, still whittles the reason for this shop's name: crudely charming toy wooden jumping frogs that are for sale at the counter for 1 cp each. One pushes down the tail end of the frog, which is a lever, and it forces the thing to hop.

I found Urgar to be a fascinating source of information about the many old mines in the mountains around the High Dale. He insists that the mines hereabouts were largely abandoned not because the ore was all taken out, but because the monster attacks grew too heavy—and that there are not only rich mines up there standing unused with exposed veins of precious metals gleaming in the walls, but several hidden



valleys. Some of these, he insisted, are inhabited by humans who have little or no contact with the rest of the world! It is tempting to dismiss all this as just one old man's fancies, but I have visited the Vale of Volkumburgh located not so far north of here in the Thunder Peaks and had prospectors who had spent their lives exploring this mountain range there scoff at my tales of the High Dale with its villages and meadows and a valley nearly as long as the Thunder Gap itself.

Interested travelers should seek out Urgan Hurlstone. Bring him a handkeg of Old Smoke, as a gift, and he will give you a day or more of local lore. While talking with me, he named at least three of these hidden hamlets and one lost dwarven city: High Crimmond, Jewelstone Falls, Orcsin's Gate, and Thunderholme (dwarven).

Ironhand's Arms

Weaponsmith



This workshop is full of its weaponsmith owner's work: top-quality weapons and tools! Azan Stonesplitter, the dwarven smith and owner, overcharges a trifle, but he makes bladed weapons of the very finest quality. (His prices, which are about 10% higher than average, are not out of line considering this remote location.) Given time enough, Azan can forge swords fit to ride on the hips of kings. Azoun of Cormyr is probably wearing one as you read this. He owns several of Azan's blades and prefers them for everyday use because they heft well and keep a good edge.

Ironhand's is a real find and a surprise in such a small settlement. It is

worth any traveler's time for a look around. A traveling companion of mine left this place with beautifully balanced throwing knives strapped all over her. Her advice: This is *the* place to buy tools and weapons that you want to have as life-long friends. Do *not* miss the sets of matched throwing axes under the east windows!

TAVERN

The Shield and Keep



This alehouse well deserves the fame it enjoys in the nearby reaches of both Cormyr and Sembia. In both realms it is sometimes called "the Halfway Tankard" because of its location. Folk in the High Dale really enjoy good minstrelry, and the Shield and Keep always features a bard or the like here in the early afternoon and evening. Worry not, though: It also schedules "talking times" when no performer plays, so that those who want to talk business or just chat can do so without interruption.

The Shield has curtained booths around the walls, old and stout furniture, and a dimly lit "lovers' gallery" overlooking the main taproom floor. A few visiting merchants who like to hear themselves talk sometimes get up on the stage here and deliver the latest news from Cormyr or Sembia in ringing, rolling orator's tones – and the locals love it! The booths each have their own stone fireplace to keep off the chill in winter.

Overall, the Shield is a lively, friendly place that sells hearty drinks and rib-sticking viands. Its kitchen serves soup, lamb stews in winter, sausages, and blood pudding. When local hunters



bring an excess in, roast mountain goat, hare, or snow bear are sometimes added to menu. The featured drink is Highwater Ale, which is made with water from the inn's own well. This icy, home-brewed ale is a minty, clear, throat-burning beer that is very much an acquired taste. It is not to my knowledge sold outside the Dale.

The keep in this tavern's name, of course, refers to the High Castle, but the shield is an actual old battle relic that hangs above the bar—a battered, fire-blackened, almost unrecognizable thing said to have once been borne into the fray in this mountain pass by the elven hero Orndacil "Stormstars" Ereuvyn, who whelmed humans, half-elves, and elves against an orc horde in the early days of human habitation in the Dragon Reach. Though it was badly damaged in the battle (Omdacil died wearing it), the shield is said to still bear a few of its minor enchantments, and the auras I detected bear that tale out.

I tested the only shield power that Highdalesmen claim to recall—that nothing can shatter or crack within 90 feet of Orndacil's Shield—by flinging a wineglass at the stone floor, and it did not break! The tavernkeeper, a fat, friendly fellow named Bedar Duskwood with a wispy, jaw-fringe beard, advised me that testing the shield's powers is considered bad manners because it is so often soon followed by an attempted theft of the relic. So if you visit, you had best take my word on its properties or face the displeasure of the tavern's patrons.

Another tale of treasure is associated with this old tavern, too: The Shield's water comes not from the nearby stream

like most other establishments in town, but from a very deep well. At the bottom of this well are said to lie the gems of an elven princess that were thrown there centuries ago and never recovered. One adventurer magically changed shape into a flying snake in order to descend and search for them, but he never came up again. Locals believe that monsters dwell at the bottom of the well and that their bones give Highwater Ale its strange taste.

INNS

The most splendid accommodation in town is the Swordsmith's House, which is notable enough to warrant its own entry (see hereafter). That leaves me but to describe the only other hostelry in Highcastle, the sorry hole known as:

The Eagles' Eyrie



The Eagles' Eyrie is dirty and unheated. Cold winds get in through crevices and even gaping holes in the walls and windows. These same holes allow birds, rats, and mice free passage, so expect to share your stay with these fellow creatures. To top it off, the staff members are surly or merely absent for long periods—no doubt they are eating and getting warm at the nearby tavern. The only redeeming quality of the place is that it is relatively cheap. Five pieces of silver buys you a stable stall, a room with beds for three (a fourth can sleep on the floor if she or he does not mind getting walked on all night), a meal of hot bread covered with melted cheese with the color and taste of old candle wax, and water to drink.



The Swordsmith's House

Inn



This justly popular, first-rate inn closes during the winter for lack of trade, but the owners, a busy halfling family and their hired, long-term human help, spend their closed time building new furnishings and improving the inn. At least one guest room is redone every year, and the quiet luxury of the place just keeps getting better. Call this place “cozy and quiet, with everything done right,” and you will not be wrong.

The name of the inn comes from its former owner: Azan Stonesplitter. Azan put it up to give buyers a place to sleep, but he had no interest in running it, and it stayed just that: a cold, empty barn of a place to sleep with cots and a huge fireplace. Guests had to wake up throughout the night to stuff firewood into the hearth from the pile of split and stacked cordwood that filled one half of the main room. For warmth in the cold months, all guests slept around the fire; in summer, they dragged their cots to the windows. More than one likened the inn to a camp pavilion. Azan was only too happy to sell it to the Buckoonwatch halfling family—and their purchase has been every traveler’s gain.

The Place

As pair of crossed, rusting boar swords as long as most draft horses form an archway that guests pass through to enter the inn. Any rough and rustic image they may foster in the minds of guests is dispelled, however, the

moment they see the entry hall. It has seats facing a gleaming, polished staff desk, and stretched and tacked-down bearskin rugs cover the floor. A lovely sweeping wooden stair adorned with tinted-glass candle lanterns climbs from this hall to the upper floors. The staircase overhangs a ballroom, which is seldom used for dances but is handy for setting down luggage when large groups arrive or depart). The ballroom’s elegantly wood-paneled walls are studded with doors opening into an array of private dining rooms or meeting rooms that can be rented by the evening. In front of the ballroom is a many-windowed common feast hall. It features a magnificent fireplace adorned with stag’s heads until it looks like a wild forest of antlers.

Behind the staff desk are offices and kitchens, and the kitchens are in turn connected to extensive pantries and root cellars below. The Buckoonwatches say they store enough food at all times to feed the entire Dale comfortably—with all the servings one could want, and no skimping—for the longest, hardest winter one could imagine. After seeing several rooms devoted just to jars of pickles, and a wine cellar that looked like an endless warren, I can well believe such claims. The staff insisted that if I mentioned the richness of the inn larders, I also note that several mantrap cages await unwary thieves in the cellars.

All this is ample and grand enough, but one’s stay at any hostelry comes down to the privacy and appointments of just where one sleeps—and it is here that the Swordsmith’s House shines. Two floors of guest rooms offer connected suites on the lower floor, and smaller individual rooms



are available on the upper. Each guest room has its own bath, walk-in wardrobe, and canopied bed. There are even hammocks available for those who prefer such for slumber.

Even the smallest room has paintings or tapestries on the walls. Guests can buy these if they wish; three of the halfling lasses are skilled painters and have a score or more paintings—all on wooden board, so the traveler need have no fears as to the durability of a purchase—in readiness to replace any that are taken away.

All chambers also have all the pleasantly carved, comfortable furniture one could want, from easy chairs to footstools to luggage tables to bedside “longarm” tables that have a leaf one can swing out over the bed to hold books or drinks. Sachets are placed in corners to

make the rooms smell pleasant, chambers are aired whenever guests are absent, and the place is thoroughly soundproofed with the best spells available in Sembia.

The Prospect

The house-pride and attention to detail of the owners and staff make this house a quietly luxurious stopover that some merchants even use for retreats, staying here a tenday or more to relax, breathe the clean mountain air, and rendezvous for business meetings on neutral ground, as it were, with rivals or partners. Other folk use it for more amorous meetings, coming here to be with folk they dare not be seen with at home. The nobles of Cormyr and the rich, self-styled merchant “nobles” of Sembia have both taken to arranging business trips in



each other's countries and just stopping here on the way instead.

It is not unusual to discover that one's fellow guests include knights and lords of Cormyr, powerful merchant princes of Sembia, agents of the Harpers, war wizards, and royal household members. The latter two or three types are usually keeping an eye on the first two or three types—whether or not they know it. The meeting rooms at the Swordsmith's House have seen not only some surprising things done on the tables, but some conversations wherein great matters have been decided that shape the lives of folk in entire Realms or change the existing balances of power in politics or in the practice of magic. I would give a lot to hear some of what is said in some of those rooms, and I suspect that Yandrin Thorl *does* give a lot (in both coins and magical aid) to the Buckoonwatch family in return for the opportunity to work some "listening for later" spells in those rooms that can record all sounds for him to listen to at another time!

My favorite comment about the Swordsmith's House came from Princess Alusair Nacacia of Cormyr who once spent an adventuresome four days here with a holy warrior of Sune, one Ranald Ironblood of Turmish. According to the princess, "The Swordsmith's House is the only place I've ever stayed where the staff *helped* me pounce on someone and propel him backward into a tub full of grapes—and then cleaned up afterward! A great place—I cannot praise it enough. No snobby airs, just gracious patience and helpfulness. I'll be going back!"

It should be noted that her father Azoun and his queen have also been seen at the Crossed Swords (the nickname given to the inn in Cormyr) though the place was apparently so crawling with war wizards at the time (registered as guests, of course) that nobody else could get a look at their majesties. I have even heard a rumor that Vangerdahast, firmly in disguise, uses the place for covert conferences with various undercover agents of Cormyr—the meetings are strictly related to intelligence-gathering for the Forest Kingdom, I am sure.⁵

The Provender

All of the exalted guests that this inn hosts would not come back if the food were inferior—or would insist on bringing their own cooks. My stay was enlivened with superlative chicken cooked with almonds and mountain duck with a persimmon-and-orange sauce that was both tart and hot. I heartily recommend both.

The Buckoonwatch cooks were happy to share the secrets of their kitchen with me so long as I printed only one of their recipes. I chose one traditional to the High Dale that they are known for: High Dale lamb. One can find it repeated in many home kitchens in Highcastle and elsewhere.

The Prices

A stay at the Swordsmith's House costs 13 sp per night, stabling included. Folk who drop in just for meals pay 1 gp for all they can eat and drink (carrying away a single hamper is allowed) or 5 sp for all they can eat with drinks costing extra. Nonguests

⁵*Elminster*: Nice to see Volo annoying some *other* old wizard with his sly revelations for a change. (Chuckle.)



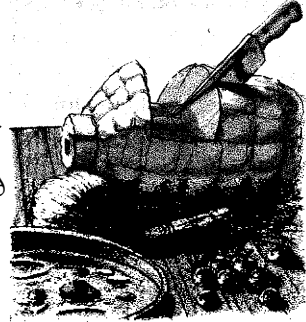
High Dale Lamb

Divers pieces of Lamb Leg
or shoulder, enough to
fill a greatpot
1 handful of ground
black pepper
1 handful of salt
1 clove garlic
1 ONION
1 carrot

1 stick of celery
1 pour dry red wine (of
any quality, so long as
it be not yet vinegar)
1 pinch grated nutmeg
8 knives butter
1 sideslab⁶ of bacon
6 handfuls fresh cherries

Stone the cherries, cut the Lamb into bite-sized cubes, and slice the carrot, onion, celery stick, and garlic into strips (separately). Then set a greatpot at the edge of a goodly fire to warm and chop the pork into small cautiels.⁷ Put the pork into the greatpot and slide it onto the heat, frying the cautiels until brown. Add then the butter to the pot and in it fry the Lamb, adding a little at a time and turning, until browned. Remove then both pork and Lamb and in their places add onion, carrot, garlic,

and celery.
Fry until
lightly
browned,
then take
the greatpot
away from
the fire and
allow it to
cool just
until the
sizzling
ceases.



Then add back in the Lamb and pork, pour the wine over all, and season to taste with salt and pepper. (Here let it be said that nigh every cook doth add a secret seasoning at this fair tyme.) Cover the greatpot and put it back on the fire, cooking until the Lamb is just starting to feel tender to thy fork.⁸

Then stir in the cherries, and cook until the meat is tender and the cherries soft.⁹ Then let the dish be served hot and right speedily.

pay 5 sp pay night per beast for stabling, which always includes a full rub-down and hoof care.

If the “drinks extra” option is chosen, prices are 8 cp per talltankard for beer and 6 cp/tallglass for wine. All Dragon Reach region brands of beer and ale are available, and the wine cellar is splendid; many large, haughty inns in Sembia cannot match it. Guests pay 1 gp per meal with all they can drink included—a bargain, knowing what I saw downed on my visit!

Travelers' Lore

The Swordsmith's House has acquired a ghost. The phantom of a haggard, fully-armored knight with drawn sword in hand stalks the upper floor hallways by night. He is silent, does not react to guest salutations or actions, and passes harmlessly through all he encounters. He is said to be a Chessentan knight—name unknown—whose stabbed body fell out of a wardrobe one day when a maid opened it.

⁶Elminster: This cut of pork corresponds roughly in amount to the pale plastic packages labeled “bacon” that I have found in thy fridges and, ah, supermarkets—an entire package, mind ye, not one of these paltry strips one finds within!

⁷This word, which means literally “a small bloody piece of flesh,” means a triangular, flattish wedge or slice of meat in Dragon Reach cookery. In this case, the cook is making the equivalent of bacon.

⁸About two hours.

⁹About another half hour over most fires.



The Wyvernfang



This tooth-shaped bare stone crag marks the eastern end of the High Dale, rearing up on the Dale's northern side.

(Hooknose Crag, the other local peak whose name is known to most travelers, is at the western end of the pass on the south side.) The Wyvernfang¹⁰ is the reason Eastkeep bristles with ballistae and catapults and is so well-manned. It is also the main reason why the High Dale has always been the least popular route between Cormyr and Sembia.

As its name suggests, the Wyvernfang is home to a large family of wyverns. They lair in a large cavern high up on the sheer, bare southeastern face of the Fang. This cavern is extremely difficult to reach by climbing without being caught on the rock face by the wyverns, for there is almost always at least one of the beasts perched on watch somewhere near the Fang, waiting to see if someone is going to be foolish enough to bring livestock near or come riding alone on an unarmored horse without benefit of lances or companions.

The wyverns have grown wary of swooping to attack just anyone on the road because of Yandrin Thorl, who took to assuming disguises and going out with blasting spells at the ready to effortlessly collect a wyvern head for his researches and a wyvern tail for the kitchens of Swordsmith's House. And the wyverns do have a back way out of their cavern, which Yandrin discovered on the one occasion that he flew up to reduce them

all to ashes. They all took wing and scattered across the Thunder Peaks before he could destroy more than two of them.

A later attempt by the Dale Council to hire a school of wizards from Sembia to cleanse the Fang was thwarted by the Cult of the Dragon, who got wind of the scheme and arrived covertly to fight on the side of the wyverns. The resulting spell battle was a nightmare of chaos and bloodshed that the Highdalesmen do not want to soon see again.

It is thought that more than a dozen adult, full-sized wyverns lair in or near the Wyvernfang plus twice as many or more smaller younglings. At least one of the beasts is more intelligent than most of its kind. Increasing evidence, gleaned from identical reports given by several dragon-riding mages and pegasi-mounted adventurers who knew nothing of each other or the tales told by the other observers, is mounting that the wyverns have not devoured everything they have carried off. Instead, they have established herds of sheep and goats in several inaccessible (save by air) valleys in the heart of the Thunder Peaks range north of the High Dale. They can survive on these steady sources of food most of the time and need not attack dangerous targets on the road when driven by hunger.

Unfortunately, lone wayfarers or prospectors—especially when leading a train of pack mules—are not viewed by a wyvern as dangerous, but rather as a nice meal. Over the last 60 years or so (the time during which there have been constant reports, of wyvern trouble in the area), hundreds of travelers are thought to have been carried off and devoured by the wyverns. There is no sign that the beasts

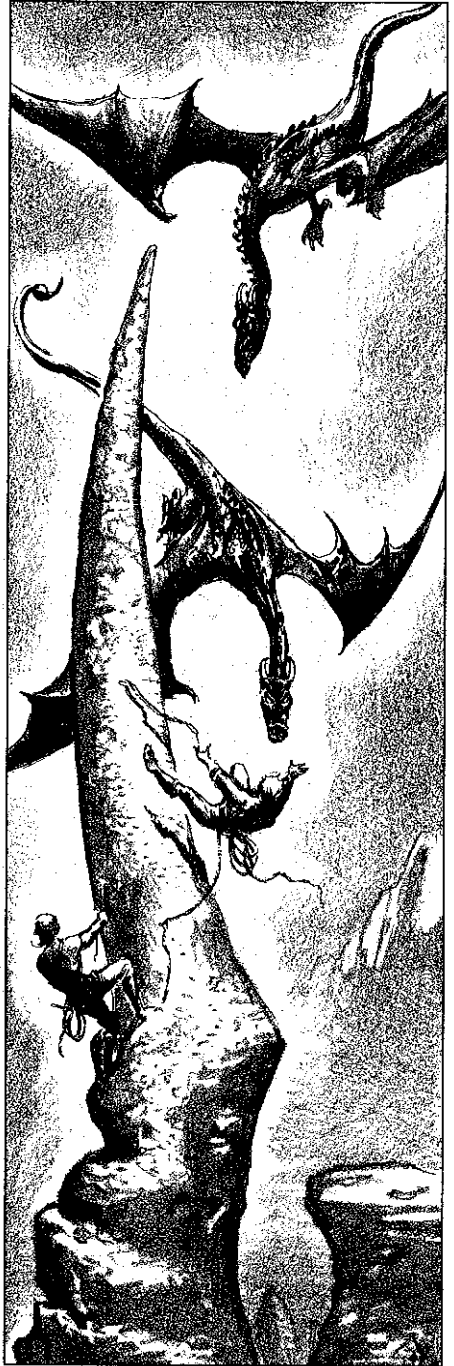
¹⁰The location of the Wyvernfang is shown on the first map in the section on Highcastle earlier in this chapter.



keep humans or other intelligent prey to try to breed for food or use as ransom captives. Most such unfortunates, it appears, are eaten immediately by the wyvern catching them. If they do not, other wyverns tend to try to steal such a tasty morsel when they see it, the same way gulls squabble over a fish.

Since the wyverns have caused so many deaths, local legend holds that there must be treasure galore scattered in the wyverns' cavern and on the rocky heights nearby. Thus far, no Highdalesmen have cared to go looking for it, but they will happily sponsor any adventuring band in such explorations if they think the adventurers have half a chance of slaying wyverns. (Locals know that *anyone* who goes up on the Fang ends up battling the beasts.) Three adventuring companies—the Bold Bravos of Selgaunt, the Company of the Bellowing Boar from Arabel, and the Hand in the Dark from Lyrabar—have assaulted the Wyvernfang in the last decade. Of them all, only two half-dead warriors returned to limp back to Lyrabar; and they claimed an unconfirmed score of six wyverns slain.

The High Dale militia members have become experts in striking specific areas of sky within missile range of Eastkeep, and their skill has ended the wyverns habit of gliding down through the Dale and snatching at sheep and goats with impunity. The last wyvern to try this tactic crashed down dead only a few wingbeats west of Eastkeep so transfixed by missiles as to resemble some sort of spiny dragon. In short: Be wary when on the road at the east end of the High Dale, but sometimes a single *magic missile* or flaming arrow might be enough to make a diving wyvern think better of attacking.







Mistledale



Perhaps the most fortunate Dale of all, Mistledale is almost entirely composed of the peaceful, fertile, well-drained, prosperous farm country that the other Dales wish they had more of. Ancient elven lore tells us that eons ago a “falling star” tore a 100-mile-long, 30-mile-wide swath of open country through the heart of the elven woods, destroying the elven realm of Uvaeren. Trees have never grown over that scar, but the land is unusually fertile—and is now, as Mistledale, one of the best agricultural regions in all Faerûn. Other Dales envy Mistledale its strategic location: It is protected against the aggressive powers (such as Zhentil Keep, Sembia, and more recently, Lashan of Scardale) and orc raids out of the wilderness by other Dales, but traversed by the Moonsea Ride, an important trade road linking the Moonsea with Cormyr and thence, the west.

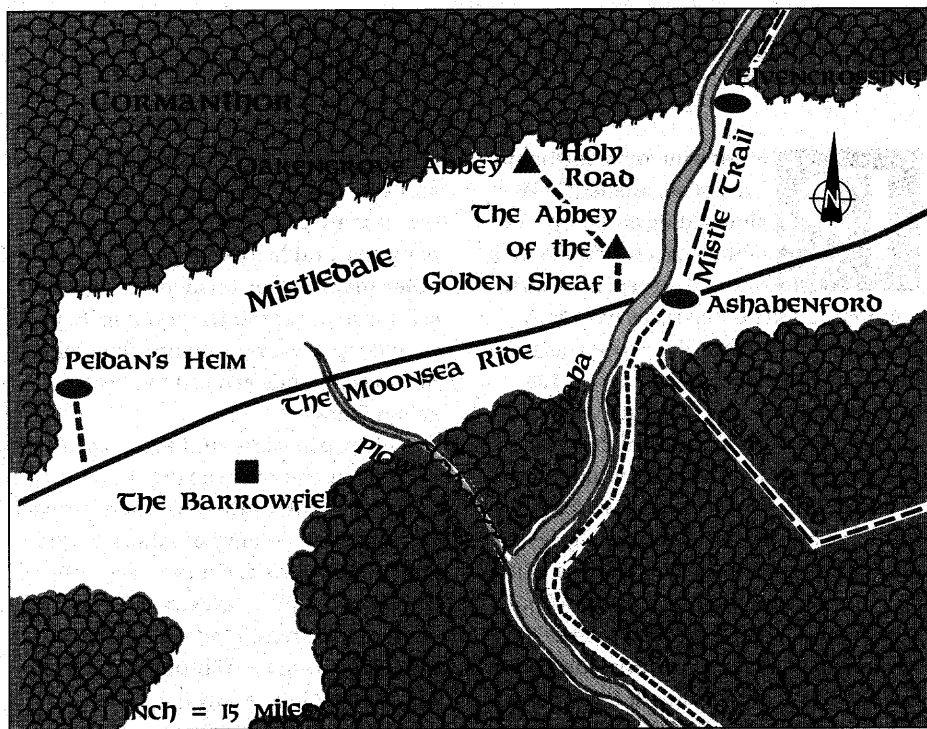
Where the Ride crosses the River Ashaba stands the capital of Mistledale, Ashabenford; the ford is so shallow and solid that a bridge has never been built. Ashabenford is another example of a tiny hamlet that in the Dales is graced with the title of “town” because of its local importance. Almost 500 folk dwell in Ashabenford. The next largest settlement in the Dale, Elven Crossing, is a quarter the size.

In the many years of relative peace, Mistrans have grown into prosperous folk indeed, and their farms have become truly the larder of the Dales. No

other Dale has such large herds of cattle and sheep, and no other produces so much grain and hay. Potatoes, beets, parsnips, and leafy vegetables are the other major crops Mistledale’s farmers sell throughout the Dragon Reach, and, via enterprising merchants, throughout the coastal lands around the Sea of Fallen Stars.

This prosperity—and the heavy road traffic that can move so quickly and easily through the Dale—has often brought thievery and the envy of others to Mistledale. Mistrans are quite conscious of the vulnerability and desirability of their land, so they have made laws and kept them, becoming a well-policed, careful, law-abiding folk, many of whom serve in the mounted, well-trained, and well-equipped, Mistledale militia in their youth. They revere their standing police force, the famous, lance-bearing, mounted Riders of Mistledale, who under their captain, Nelyssa Shendean, a paladin of Chauntea beloved of all Mistrans, patrol the Dale with vigor and diligence. Riders can arrest but not sentence, and they bring all malefactors before High Councilor Haresk Malorn in Ashabenford for sentencing. Most of these responsible and respected Riders are warriors, but some are paladins of Chauntea or rangers.

During the Time of Troubles, the Riders, bolstered by the militia, some Harpers, and the Knights of Myth Drannor, defended Mistledale against a Zhen-tarim-led army said by some to be over 7,000 strong! In a day-long battle that



saw Tempus, Lord of Battles, himself walk the field and the death and resurrection of Captain Nelyssa, the defenders of Mistledale inflicted a stunning defeat on the Zhent army, smashing it to rubble. The Riders then turned and rode up the Mistle Trail the next day to help defend Shadowdale against another Zhent force reportedly led by the god Bane himself!¹

The Countryside

The countryside of Mistledale looks very much the same from end to end: rich farm fields broken by the occasional lane, stream, or wood lot, and here and there a cluster of buildings or a walled

abbey. Fields tend to be divided by rail fences, not hedgerows, and little blocks one's view across miles of verdant growing lands.

The Moonsea Ride runs along the spine or center of Mistledale, which has been called by one sage "a gigantic sword whose tip points to the Standing Stone." The Ride is a high-banked dirt and gravel road wide enough for three wagons to pass abreast, sloping down into large ditches on either side. The only other major roads in the Dale meet the Ride in Ashabenford. Here the Mistle Trail runs north to Elven Crossing and thence to Shadowdale (the traditional friend and sister Dale to Mistledale), the Yeven Trail winds through the deep

¹The tale of all this strife is told in the novel *All Shadows Fled* by Ed Greenwood (TSR, Inc., 1995).



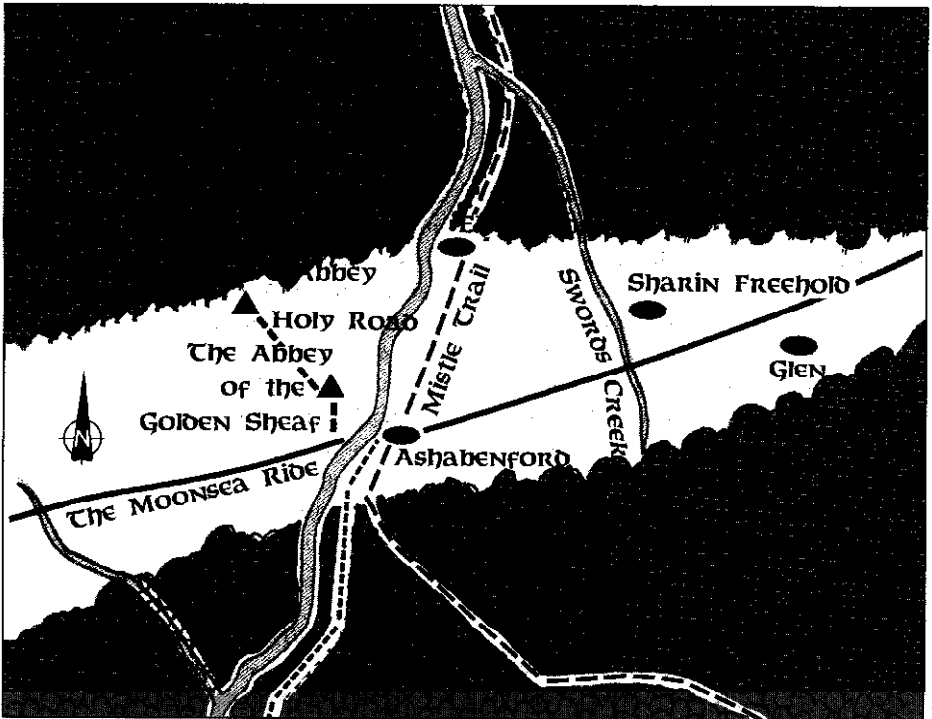
elven woods along the eastern bank of the River Ashaba to emerge into Battledale near the Fool of Yeven, and the Dark Road meanders to Essembra through the depths of the woods. The Dark Road is little used, and travelers are advised to avoid it, for it plunges into the very heart of the Vale of Lost Voices, the ancient burial grounds of the elves where banshees wail, baelnorn hold vigil, and elven ghosts drift through the trees seeking to destroy all nonelves who disturb the sacred forest fastness.

Although the Riders patrol as far as the eastern mouth of Tilver's Gap to ensure that brigands and raiding bands of orcs, hobgoblins, and bugbears do not lurk just outside the Dale awaiting bad weather or a moonless night to allow them to attack,

the western end of Mistedale is considered to be Darthan's Throat, a narrow passage between the woods. Folk have never dwelt here thanks to the prevalence of monsters at the western end of the woods of Cormanthor.

A traveler taking the Moonsea Ride east would soon come to the signposted trail leading off to the foresters' hamlet of Peldan's Helm. At the sign is a pump, a horse pond, and a watchtower where a Rider usually watches for incursions into the Dale.

Western Mistedale to about as far east as Plow Creek (located roughly halfway between Peldan's Helm and the River Ashaba) is a dangerous place. Monsters and brigands roam the many abandoned freeholds, and even all the





mercenaries Mistedale's gold can buy have not been able to clear the land of the monsters. They seem to breed and prowl faster than they can be slain. In fact, the numerous fell creatures that abound in the region is the reason the eastern flanks of the Thunder Peaks have never been settled.

Before reaching Plow Creek (which is just a ribbon of water, not any sort of settlement), travelers going east see a line of low, grassy hills to the south. These are the Barrowfield, a haunted area that Mistrans avoid; outlanders ought to do so, too, and the why is covered in detail in a later entry in this book. Proceeding east, one passes a hill crowned with a fire beacon for use in rousing the Dale against invasion, and the land promptly becomes more ordered, with well-kept farms, broad lanes, and a lot of activity. This area is where soil is being imported from the elven woods in an effort to get trees to grow in coppices that can be harvested regularly to yield poles and fence posts. Shortly before the Ashaba, the Holy Road, which leads to the two large abbey compounds in Mistedale, runs off from the Moonsea Ride. The Abbey of the Golden Sheaf, found just a few miles west of the River Ashaba and about the same distance north of the Ride, is sacred to Chauntea whose faith is the dominant one in the Dale. The road then winds northwest from that abbey through Oak Hollow and over Dunstar's Hill to Oakengrove Abbey, a monastic community dedicated to Silvanus, on the edge of the forest.

Going east from that abbey, travelers come to the upstream ford of the Ashaba, Elven Crossing. It is so-named because it

is where the elves, who shun the open land of Mistedale where the Falling Fire destroyed so many of their brethren long ages ago, still choose to cross the Ashaba in the shelter of the trees. From there, most folk take the Mistle Trail south to the lower ford at Ashabenford because, although it is hard to get really lost in long, narrow Mistedale, it is quite easy to spend days wandering along lanes that all look about the same as each other and do not go in quite the way you want to head—unless you are a Mistran and know their windings well.

About halfway between Ashabenford and the Dale's eastern end is Swords Creek, where a few battered old trees stand on the banks of a tiny, muddy rivulet that winds across the Dale. Unimpressive to view, it is an important landmark to all Mistrans. This creek's intersection with the Moonsea Ride is where, throughout the years, the folk of the Dale have traditionally taken their stands to repel invaders from the east—most recently, Lashan of Scardale and the Sword of the South Zhent army. So many folk have fallen here over the years that the priest Baergil, once captain of Mistedale's Riders, was able to raise here a mighty magic, the *ring of skulls*, that acts on the bodies of battle dead. His act cost him his life and won him the admiration of the war god, Tempus, who came to the field to take up Baergil's body. Tempus's appearance is an event that Mistrans still speak of in awe—for why would Tempus walk upon Toril save to claim a most faithful servant to be his own and serve him in some special way beyond death? Whatever the truth in all this, be aware that Mistrans do not take kindly to those who scoff at or belittle



tales of the heroism of that day or who do not show Swords Creek the same respect they do.

Not far north of Swords Creek is the rich and progressive farm of Sharin Freehold. It is run by Ulwen Sharin, a graceful matron who is one of the Six Councilors who rule the Dale. Here the visitor can see both fantastic herb gardens sprayed by an elaborate system of water pump fountains and livestock breeding programs of great complexity that seek to make cattle hardier and give pigs wings strong enough to let them fly for short distances to avoid harm.² This freehold stands in the heart of the richest, most splendid farms in Mistledale. The area is heavily patrolled by militia forces led by lone Riders in order to discourage theft and vandalism. (Rival Dales and Sembian interests have been known to hire rough folk to damage crops here to drive up prices for the sale of their rival commodities.)

East of this region and south of the Moonsea Ride sits the hardy hamlet of Glen, where travelers will probably be surprised to find a flourishing community of dwarven farmers! These doughty farmers bear the brunt of monster incursions from the south, for the elven woods in that direction are dangerous here at the eastern end of the Dale. And in the woods not far from Glen lurks the abandoned keep of Galath's Roost, known since the Zhent advance to be riddled with traps set by the Harpers.

Passing out of the Dale, travelers heading toward the nearby Standing Stone (the eastern limit of Rider patrols)

encounter a tiny ruined keep and covered well where the open land of Mistledale ends and trees draw in around the road again. This is Treesedge, and the stretch of road between it and the Stone is sometimes called Bowshot Run because folk on the straight, tree-lined road can so easily be slaughtered by archers before or behind them. In earlier days, this area had a persistent brigand problem. Keeping lawless people from using Galath's Roost as a base as they once did is one of the reasons Mistrans have made no move to clear out the Harper traps there.

So ends your whirlwind tour of Mistledale. Unless you read a guidebook like this one, it is all too easy to dismiss this pleasant land as unutterably boring.

The Mistrans

Mistrans tend to be open-faced farmers who lead simple lives in tune with the weather and the ways of the land. Their wealth allows them to hire minstrels and order in books from the scribes of Cormyr and Sembia, so do not make the mistake of thinking their simple lives have anything to do with simple wits! Nor are they craven, as the battle ballads of the Dales attest. It is generally agreed that the 5,000 or so folk who dwell openly in Mistledale as taxed, rolled citizens are good folk, blessed with a work ethic, respect for law, and lots of common sense. Elminster has called them "good friends and good folk," and I think that says it as well as anyone could.³

²Elminster: So now ye know whether any pigs have wings without the need for a sage to tell ye.

³Elminster: Why thank ye — ye young, yapping dolt. Patronize me, will ye? I'll see if ye like life as a toadstool soon, see if I don't!



The Abbey of The Golden Sheaf

This prosperous walled religious hold is dedicated to the worship of Chauntea Grainmother. Its heart is a series of 12 triangular fields fanning out from a circular center, where the many-spired abbey stands. Lanes circle the abbey and barns and fan out between the fields, running arrow-straight to cut them into a foursquare pattern and then dividing each quadrant into three equal "pie slices" of cultivation. These fields are over three miles long and are bounded by a broad road ringing them within the wall. The strip of land separating the two is planted as an orchard and herb garden. The wall itself, over which vines are trained, is an earthen bank as wide as a house lined on the outside by rubble that is home to many bees, wasps, snakes, and giant centipedes.

The abbey is very impressive. I have never elsewhere seen such fertility in a single holding this small. Goldenfields near Waterdeep is more impressive, but it is also much larger, more warlike, and established in a colder climate, so its plantings are less lush and more prone to incursions from ankhegs and other pests.

The abbey soars up in the center of it all, its stone spires stabbing the sky and impressing even the most jaded visitor. Extensive underground granaries stretch out from its cellars, and in the holy house dirt is packed down on the stone floors to encourage the growth of vines and creepers over every interior surface. Growing things are everywhere, and as the warm months pass, one is surrounded by a heady floral perfume while inside. As the name of the abbey suggests, wheat is supreme here, but the triangular fields

are planted in strict rotation, alternating wheat and like grains with other crops that restore to the soil what the wheat takes away to ensure the best possible health and yield for the wheat crop.

The abbey is said to have enough food stored away to feed all the Dales for years and enough wealth hidden in its walls to buy them all thrice over. It is known that the abbey was Lashan's main reason for turning north through Battledale rather than striking at the richer southern Dales. He gave strict orders not to harm the structures or crops when the abbey was taken—orders that were luckily never carried out, as his forces never got this far.

The clergy members practice private sacred rituals to Chauntea behind the abbey walls along with holding services open to lay worshipers. They also tend all sorts of exotic plants in growing houses set around the outside walls of the abbey so as to keep a constant store of seeds. (Some plants from the distant Mhair and Chultan jungles even have to be kept warm and damp with special spells.) Selling these seeds brings the abbey its greatest wealth, though it also does handsomely by shipping huge amounts of crops to realms where the crops have failed or war has prevented tillage and food is scarce.

The abbey is run by the soft-spoken, elderly, all-wise Reverend Brother Harvestmaster Derim Whiteshield. The woman representing it on the Council of Six is more typical of the zealous young clergy: Watchful Sister of the Earth Alena (calling her "Sister Alena" is sufficient to be respectful) can only be described as a fanatic who wants to turn all folk in Faerûn into workers in Chauntea's great garden.



Ashabenford

The capital of Mistledale is a pleasant, informal cluster of homes, rustic cottages, and trees located primarily on the east bank of the Ashaba—though the White Hart inn is sited on the west bank hard by the ford. Most of the services a traveler might need are found along the Moonsea Ride, but one will search Ashabenford in vain for a large open market. Farmers coming here stop their carts in the yards and drive lanes of friends or those they have hired space from and sell produce directly from the tailboards. A merchant in search of a wagonload of something may well have to tour the back streets of Ashabenford—not that this is an unpleasant prospect.

Ashabenford is one of those places where folk too old or tired to do more gardening or farmwork for the time being go out for a stroll to chat or sit on their covered porches and hail passersby. They are open and friendly, and the wayfarer who does not appear too nosy can learn all about whatever news has come to Ashabenford in fairly short order. The smell of fresh manure may be strong here from time to time, but Ashabenford is a town that is easy on the eye—if not quite so easy on the purse. The inns here charge prices akin to Cormyr and Sembia, not the bargains found in the more rustic Dales.

Places of Interest in Ashabenford

Unique Sites

Heresk's Pool

The High Councilor Heresk's fish pond is a cool, placid swimming hole where his wife and daughters have sometimes been seen bathing bare-skinned in hot

weather. Imbrautha, Heresk's wife, reports that the numerous fish "softly nip and nibble your toes like an infant trying to find where to suckle." Local legend says that this muck-bottomed pond holds the loot of a bandit captain—strongholds full of coins and jewelry. The bottom has been dragged four times, but nothing has yet been found. Visitors who embark on their own fifth attempt can expect a frosty reception from the Riders of Mistledale house guards.

Horsewater Pool

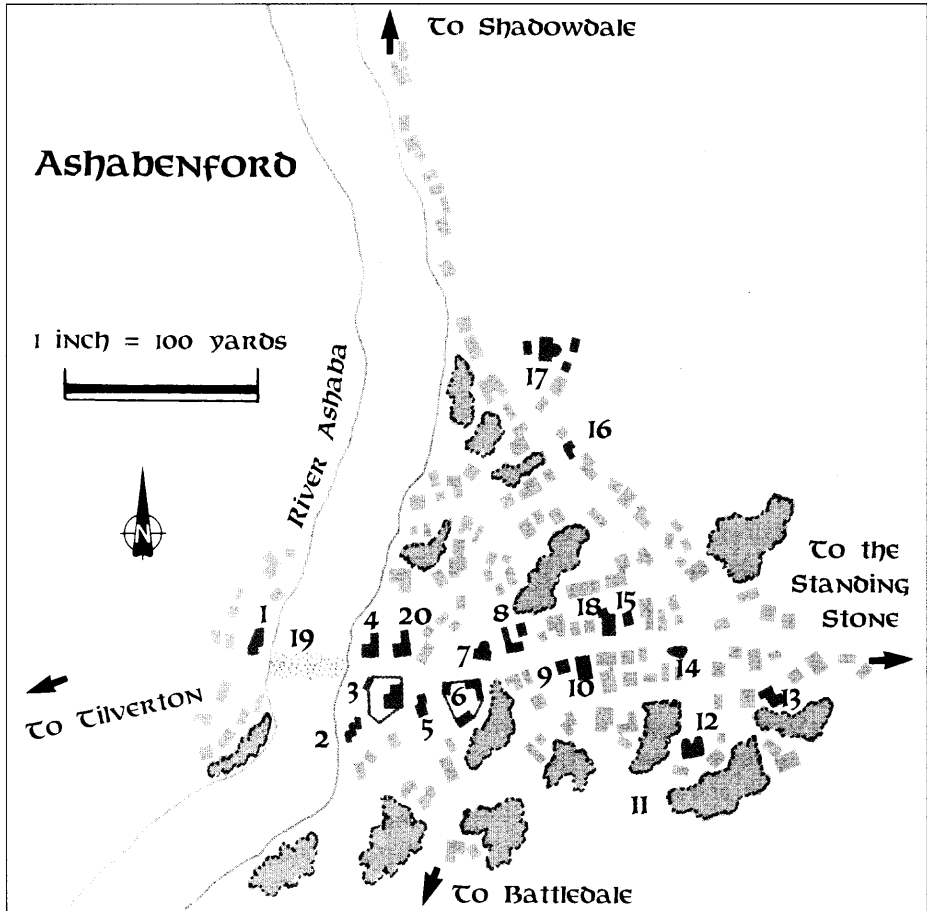
This muddy horse pond is fed by a spring that is led up through a pipe into a drinking bowl and pour spout before emptying endlessly into the pond. It is available for everyone's use, travelers and citizens alike, and can be a delight for mounts and riders after a long, dusty ride up the Dale on a sunny day. Posts at either end of the pond's paved front bear long lead reins, so a rider who does not want to get wet can lead a horse down into the water and along the length of the pool without getting—completely—wet.

The folk of Ashabenford gather at the pond to gossip. It is a great place to meet folk and learn about local news, customs, and personalities. On hot summer days one of the old men of the village is always loudly vending pickles, fruit, and ice-cold beer here.

Residences

The House of the High Councilor

This grand, two-turreted manor house boasts brown fieldstone facing, many large windows, and a pair of sculpted stone griffons guarding the drive lane. It is not just the luxurious private home of the Heresk family (boasting an indoor bathing



Ashabenford Map Key

1. The White Hart (inn)
2. Thorn's Mill (grist mill)
3. Kaulvaeras Stables (horseseller and stables)
4. Lhuin's Fine Leathers (tannery and leather goods shop)
5. The Velvet Veil (tavern and dance hall)
6. The Ashabenford Arms (inn)
7. The Harvest Table (shrine to Chauntea)
8. Arlho's Fine Flasks (brewery and winery)
9. Multhimmer the Merchant (imported glassware, fine metal items, furniture, and general store)
10. Braunstar Wheelwright (wagons, carriages, wagon parts, and repairs)
11. Heresk's Pool
12. The House of the High Councilor (residence and Council of Six meeting place)
13. Black Eagle Coster (merchant coster headquarters)
14. Horsewater Pool
15. Jarwain's Imports (exotic textile, garment, and spice shop)
16. Arvien's House (tinsmith and pewterer)
17. Barracks of the Riders of Mistedale
18. Heresk's Hardware Emporium (hardware and general store)
19. The ford
20. The Six Shields (rooming house)



pool for six, not just bathtubs), but the seat of government for the Dale: Every three months, the Council of Six moves in and meets with Heresk here to vote on matters of import. (The Council is planning to build its own chambers in town soon—if it can only agree on where. Local landowners are all vying to sell them the site.) Visitors are normally not allowed into the House unless they have come to appear before the Council when it is sitting, but the front west turret has a door opening into an audience chamber where Heresk receives guests on Dale business at other times.

Heresk's scepter of office, the black, mysterious *Rod of Peldan*, floats high in the air of this audience chamber, but a thief once told me in confidence—and no doubt from unhappy experience—that the rod here is an illusion cast by the real rod that is concealed somewhere else. It is known that Heresk can call on the *Rod of Peldan* to defend him while he is sitting under it (or its image). Reports about the rod vary. Some swear it can entangle folk by shooting out a beam that creates an effect akin to *Evard's black tentacles*; others say it is simply a *rod of lordly might*.

Heresk is a wise, honest, slow-tempered man, who has both Rider and militia bodyguards at his house at all times. They guard his family and servants as well as himself. Any troubles guests may have here, they bring upon themselves.

Barracks of the Riders

The black-armored Riders of Mistedale, who all wear on the brows of their helmets the "snorting horse heads" badge of the Dale or a red wheat sheaf if they are paladins of Chauntea, are based here in an

outlying compound on the northeast edge of town. Critics say the compound has been put here so the Riders can carouse unseen—and when called away to danger can ride right across the fresh crops instead of having to jump their horses over the fences and cottages of the town.

The stables, town jail, and militia apartments cluster around the Riders' barracks. (The jail is a surprisingly secure set of dungeon cells fitted with many barred and locked massive iron grate doors.) The barracks also do service as the armory, emergency Dale granary, and treasury vaults. In the emergency granary, enough food and spring planting seeds are always stored to see the Dale through a winter in the event of the greatest disaster: a foe who scours the Dale with fire, destroying everything.

Except when the Dale is actually at war, 50 to 60 militia members are always here training under the instruction of half-a-dozen Riders at the barracks, and another 10 or so are patrolling the town and vicinity. Riders can summon each other by a distinctive rising two-note ("blast-blup!") horn call. All of them wear a horn at their belts and have a spare hidden under the raised back of their saddles.

Shrine

The Harvest Table

Ashabenford has no full temples, but this roadside building may soon become one. The Harvest Table is run by an ambitious young priestess, Watchful Sister of the Earth Jhanira Barasstan, who serves the bounty of the land freely to all who stop in. She dishes up fruits and vegetables from the farms of the Dale that she prepares for dining without the use of a cook flame or any seasonings not found locally



and gives this fare out without charge to anyone entering the shrine. This free food has made the place a hit with locals and travelers alike and won Jhanira her share of annoyances in the form of marriage proposals from admiring diners. Only the gods can say if her enthusiasm will ever make the Table into a proper temple of Chauntea, given its close proximity to the Abbey of the Golden Sheaf.

Shops

Arlho's Fine Flasks

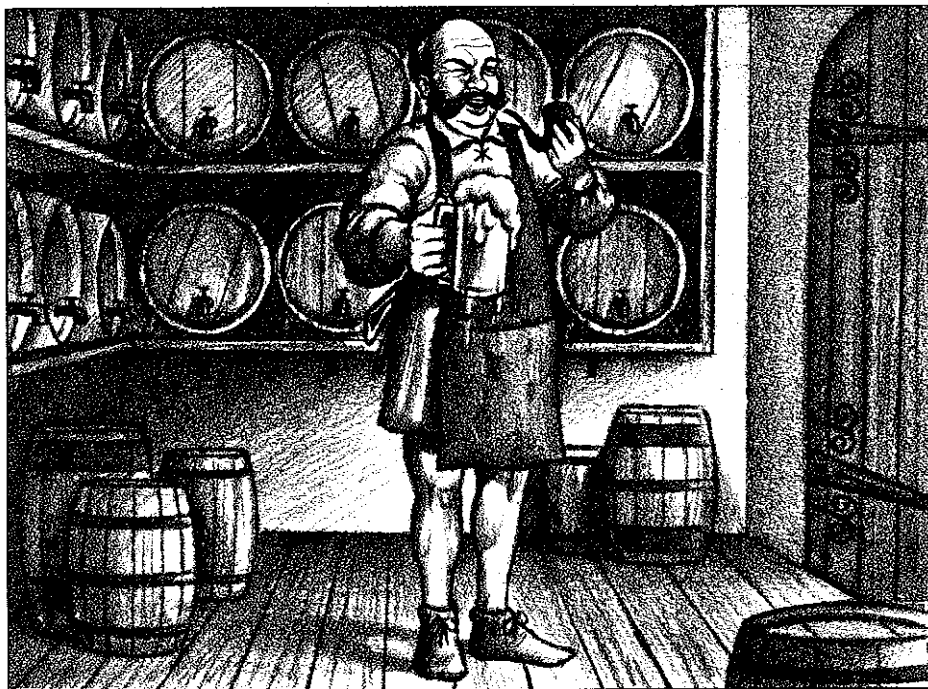
Brewery and Winery



This brewery and winery battles Lhuin's tannery in the war of smells the traveler encounters along the Moonsea Ride and usually loses. Step inside, and it is a differ-

ent story. The beer and wine made here are of exceptional quality—do not miss Arlho's Ashaben Ale and his pride and joy, Black Boot Stout, or the silky-smooth Pearls of the Moon green grape wine (a delight despite its bilious color). Passing caravans snap up all Arlho has to sell, but he increases his production only enough to make sure Mistrans do not go without.

I asked him why he did not expand—his drinks are as good as any made in Cormyr, Sembia, or the Vast—and Arlho told me he has coin enough to live quite comfortably and does not want to grow larger and “lose the magic.” Well said—but travelers should move therefore fast to get any handkegs on offer (5 sp for all ales, 7 sp for Black Boot Stout, and the wines go from 4 sp to 7 sp) before the next merchant through snaps them up.





Arvien's Home

Tinsmith and Pewterer



The skilled, shrew-tempered local tinsmith and pewterer Arvien Blackhair dwells here, spending much of her time sitting in the window watching the passing traffic. The women of the town say she does not miss noticing when someone in Ashabenford "breaks a nail in their bed-chamber." I noticed her strolling around the back streets of the town in the early evening, and her eyes certainly missed nothing. When she passed me by, I felt like I had been laid out under strong lights for an examination of every wart and mole!

Arvien works in the back rooms of her home and certainly turns out top-quality goods—for top prices. She uses her parlor to show off samples of her work. Lots of buyers stop in to take tea or wine and examine the tankards, goblets, bowls, salt cellars, bells, and spice dishes on display. If they place an order and leave a deposit, Arvien sets to work. Her business is making identical items in large quantities (for example, 300 tankards for an inn, all inscribed with the arms of the establishment), and it takes someone of rare skill to make so many of something and have them all be come out the same.

Arvien lives alone. She occasionally has guests who stop over for a night, but more than one of these has left hurriedly in the morning with Arvien's shrieks ringing in his ears and lumps of miscast metal bouncing about his head and shoulders—to the amusement of the neighbors.

Black Eagle Coster

*Caravan Shipping, Provisions,
and Small-Scale Brewing*



From this small warehouse at the east end of town, a former adventuring band led by the swordsman Iletian Blackeagle buys local grain, ale, cheese, and barrels of salted meat and runs them to Hillsfar and the harbors of Harrowdale and Scardale for sale overseas. The coster is not interested in selling wares that can earn it so much at dockside to passersby and overcharges anyone who wants to buy one of the wheels of cheese stacked in the window.

Iletian makes his own beer on the side—but the raw, fiery (I swear he uses pepper!) Blackeagle Brew is not for most palates. I am told it is a hit in Glister, though, when the nights are cold—but I have no wish to go there just to appreciate it.

Braunstar Wheelwright

Wagons, Wagon Wheels, and Carriages



Elmo Braunstar is a wise, quiet man and an expert at his craft: making and repairing wheels, wagons, and carriages. Braunstar's wisdom, far-sightedness, kind understanding and ability to keep secrets have made him the man to talk over problems with for all within easy reach of Mistledale. He has the ability to see to the heart of a problem, and clearly outline realistic options. (Braunstar hates his first name, by the way; do not use it.)

Braunstar's prices are so reasonable that many merchants frequenting his



establishment on their way through Mistedale buy a pair of spare wheels, purchasing two so they match each other in size and can be used on an axle no matter what size the wheels they replace were. (One cannot choose the place where one's wagon will break down, but wheels at least are portable.) As a result, Braunstar never has enough wheels, despite keeping six partners busy in the workshop at all hours.

Many nobles drive his Swanswing covered carriages (with the slide-back suncover), and his Fleetrun long wagons are the pride of Dragon Reach caravan merchants. The long wagons back-ordered for three years as a result, and they have become desirable items for thieves even when empty!

Heresk's Hardware Emporium

Hardware and General Store



The long-time Malorn family business, this shop (despite its grander name) is simply an old, cluttered general store. The high councilor is too successful and too busy with Dale business to run this shop himself any more, but he has several elderly relatives and trusted retainers who do so for him who dwell on the upper floor of the shop.

Do not miss the carved wooden shark hanging from the ceiling! It was carved long ago for the use of a wizard in ridding the Ashaba of the monster water snakes known as the quelzarn. (The wizard's spell unfortunately failed.) It is a good 12 feet long and sports ferocious teeth guaranteed to haunt the dreams of any youngling who gets a good look at it!

Jarwain's Imports

Exotic Textiles, Garments, and Spices

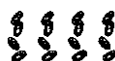


This half-elven warrior buys cottons, lace, silks, and rare spices in Cormyr and runs them here by swift caravan (guarded on the perilous run through a business arrangement he declines to discuss) for sale at rather steep prices. He has an eye for the finest goods and finished garments with flair, though, and the Mistran ladies are in and out of his shop all day like birds fluttering around fresh seed. Like Arvien, Jarwain spends a lot of time at the window, watching travelers go by—and does not seem to miss one detail of their wares, origins, or equipment.

Jarwain is a soft-spoken but fire-eyed fellow who guards his shop with some sort of enchanted, animated blade. It hovers ready when he is opening or locking up. He has a magnificent, polished, flat, brass filigree dragon sculpture bolted to the wall behind his desk, but its origin and why he favors it so are other things he does not discuss.

Kaulvaerus Stables

Horseseller and Stables



This walled compound located on the east bank of the ford and across the road from Lhuin's Fine Leathers is the saleyard of Kaulvaerus Greymantle. His huge horse farm is found well south and east of town. One of the better horsebreeders in the Dales, Kaulvaerus keeps a fine selection of riding horses here and sells at fair prices for the quality on offer. Travelers trading in a tired or lame mount can get prices



down to somewhat of a bargain, but the kind-hearted Kaulvaerus puts such beasts out to pasture. He does not risk harming his reputation by selling horses he has not bred and reared. The lucky traveler may occasionally find a battle-ready war horse for sale here.

Lhuin's Fine Leathers

Tannery and Leather Goods



This aromatic tannery and workshop is the pride of Lhando Lhuin, who sells belts, leather armor, bridles, lead reins, weather cloaks, wide-brimmed hats, horse collars, and saddles of his own making here at prices that average about 10% less than can be found elsewhere! Lhuin refuses to make gloves or boots, saying he is just not good enough, but the wares he does sell are the equal of any I have purchased. His shop is a "must" stop for any merchant or traveler in need of fresh harness.

Multhimmer the Merchant

Imported Glassware, Fine Metal Items, Furniture, and General Store



This general store tends more toward furniture and finished items than its competitor, Heresk's Emporium, which in turn concentrates more on nails, pegs, lashings, lamp oil, and the like. Multhimmer, in turn, also sells most things at about 20% more than one would pay in, say, a streetside shop in Sembia. He specializes in imported glassware and fine metal items such as lamps, platters, wall hooks, and adornments. I suspect he also discreetly deals in all sorts of stolen goods, taking care to keep his hands clean

when dealing with his fellow Mistrans and their personal property.

Thorm's Mill

Grist Mill



Mistledale's only mill is this bustling, flour-caked place. It is busy at all hours grinding the wheat, oats, and other grains of Dale farmers. The owner, Thorm Ubler, always has milled flour to sell to passing caravans—even if some of it is not his. Thorm is a greedy miser who takes advantage of his monopoly to shamelessly overcharge customers. The river is too shallow and low at Elven Crossing for a proper mill, and three attempts to build a rival grist mill downstream along the Yeven Trail have ended in mysterious fires and murderous bandit raids.

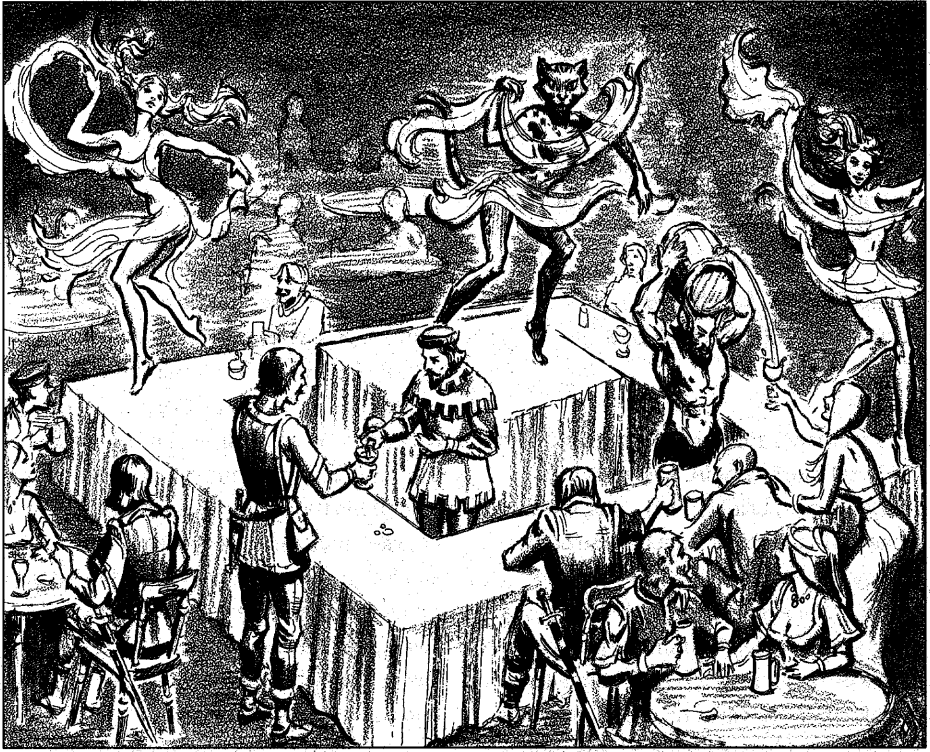
However, everyone in Ashabenford wishes Thorm good health and long life, because his two cruel, sneering sons, Heldo and Parvus, are even worse! They spend their days playing pranks, shirking work, fighting with anyone they do not like the look of (which includes all strangers—be warned) and trying to buy the favors of any woman unwise enough to come within spitting distance of them.

Tavern

The Velvet Veil



This cheerfully rowdy dance hall long ago took over the task of slaking thirsts from the Ashabenford Arms (which is now an inn with no taproom for walk-in patrons) and goes at it in fine spirit. Folk often stop over in town for an extra night so as to spend most of a day in here dancing,



watching others dance, drinking, and talking with other guests.

Others come here because the Velvet Veil's features exotic dancers. Shows spotlight a tabaxi whose dances leave every man in the room sweating and even a centaress, among others. Veils fly in all directions during performances, and female guests sometimes leave in scandalized disgust—unless they discover the room around the back where male dancers, including satyrs, prance and preen in front of hollering, whistling women!

Those who'd rather sit in peace or talk business quietly in private can use the booths and curtained alcoves of the Quiet Rooms upstairs. Spells ensure that the sounds of festivities below do not annoy, but they might not prevent listeners in adjacent booths from overhearing what is said. Above the Quiet Rooms are several

floors of bedchambers where the dancers bathe after their exhausting performances or when those who work as escorts bring guests. Dancers and guests can quickly get to the back door from all floors by means of a greased brass sliding pole.

Overall, the Velvet Veil is an impressively appointed, fun place. But do not get overactive in your enjoyment: The adventurer owners act as their own well-armed security service.

INNS

The Ashabenford Arms



If the recently opened White Hart is Ashabenford's fun, informal inn for adventurers, the Arms is its time-honored house of quality. The all-inclusive (save for even feast and drinks) fee here is 16 sp per



head. That buys the best service in the Dales and just about anywhere else. Guests each have a discreet, kindly—and quite good-looking—personal attendant from the time they arrive until their farewell. The attendant is male if the guest is female, female if he is a man, and seems more like an old friend than anything else. They escort the shy to the dining room, see to all clothing and food needs at all hours and clean up behind one—but no, they do *not* provide the personal services of a festhall.

Many merchants divert from faster overland routes to stay at the Arms and be pampered for a few days. The staff members even remember what drinks regulars like and have them ready. Where else could a guest who falls asleep in the bath find herself dried, taken to her room on a dignified draped litter, and put gently to bed, all without being awakened? Or on first arrival, find his escort has seen his weariness and whisked him to his room to prop him up in bed with a mug of hot soup while she washes his feet? Bliss. Inns do not get any better than this. (I have tried to hide this entry away here in the midst of my discussion of sites of lesser import rather than setting it off by itself only because I do not want the Arms overcrowded and ruined.)⁴

The Six Shields



This rough-and-dirty, recently opened rooming house stands east (downwind) of

Lhuin's tannery. Its open front porch is where residents sit most evenings (for inexplicable reasons, considering the ambient windborne odors). In the words of Elminster, the Shields was "opened to house field workers, drovers, and others too cheap to stay at the Hart or the Arms." A room here is 1 cp per night or 6 sp per tenday, and includes stabling and two simple meals of milk, cheese, and hard-bread per day.

The White Hart



One gold piece a night buys a guest at the White Hart stabling and horse care, a luxuriously furnished room, the use of hot and cool bathing tubs shared with other guests (eight or so of whom can get in at the same time—and will), and all the tales of adventure one cares to hear. This inn is run by an adventurer, the warrior Holfast Harpenshield, and caters to adventurers—and, yes, to Harpers, who seem to lounge about the place playing soft music, chatting, and sharpening their blades at all hours.

I loved this place. It has good, simple, hearty food, lots to drink, and good folk to share it all with. Most folk who love the spice of danger and far travel will love it, too. Harpenshield even keeps a secret safehouse⁵ for hiding away folk of good intent whose escapades have gotten them into trouble. I highly recommend the Hart.

⁴Elminster: Ah. Discretion at last. Self-serving, I see, but discretion nonetheless.

⁵Elminster: No! Not again! Volo, ye utter and complete dolt! Be a frog! Aye, be a frog a long, long time! (Thy long tongue should be admirably suited to catching flies.) Ah, well, but the damage is done. On second thought, I shall save thy punishment for another day—I have just had an inspired thought about some clandestine work I shall request—that ye do.



The Barrowfield

This line of low, grass-girt mounds is about 30 miles south and east of Peldar's Helm in the dangerous "Beast Country" of western Mistedale. Mistrans shun the mist-shrouded hills, believing them to be haunted by the nameless dead buried here. It is commonly known in the Dale that the hills are tombs: Walking skeletons were unleashed from one of them some years ago when a band of outlaws dug into the most easterly mound, thinking they had found the site of brigand treasure. (The robbers tried this spot after slaying a gullible old merchant who had bought a fake old treasure map in Scardale. Because the old man fought so fiercely to keep it, they thought the map must be real.)

After consultations with several sages and a peek at the library in the Leaves of Learning in Highmoon, I can say with certainty that there are still undead guarding the Barrowfield. They are the remains of Netherese who fled here after some battle or magical disaster. These survivors soon perished, as they were horribly changed so that they sickened and died by what is recorded as "overexposure to magic."

Much of what I read about them is speculation, but it seems they were either cursed or willingly linked to a specific magical item each—and suffered unforeseen effects. This magical "twisting" (akin to the wild magic zones now abroad in Faerûn) made the Netherese into wraiths who are unturnable and, it seems, undestroyable. If slain, they vanish back into the buried magical items to which they are each linked, only to reappear the next day. Moreover, each wraith can emit a sin-

gle spell effect of the item to which it is linked in a beam it can control as a weapon. One sage writes of what can only be an *ice storm* unleashed by a wraith on shepherds who tried to camp on one barrow hill; another describes a *cone of cold* being hurled at adventurers from behind by a wraith that rose up out of ground they had walked over.

Some brave adventurers, the Proud Mace band of Westgate, managed to "send down" (temporarily destroy) all of the wraiths in a titanic spell battle and proceeded to dig up some of the items. They soon discovered that the wraiths remained linked to the items—not the tombs—when they reappeared, attacking fiercely, the next day at the same location the items had been moved to. Wounded and low on magic, the Proud Mace members barely survived this second battle, so they returned the items to the barrow and fled, hoping to be rid of the nightly wraith attacks—which is what happened.

As far as the Riders of Mistedale know, only a lone brigand band has recently dared to dig into the barrows. They dug up the grassed-over but clearly disturbed earth where the Proud Mace adventurers had dug and carried off only one item: some sort of magical rod with thorny protuberances and glowing inset gems. They had traveled only a little way from where they obtained the rod before succumbing to the wraith attacks. To prevent the reach of the undead creatures (who seem to stay within a certain distance of their items) from extending further toward the Dale, the Riders bravely rode in and bore the rod back to the digging. Presumably, it remains there to this day. Needless to say, camping on or near the barrow hills is not recommended.



ELVEN CROSSING

This settlement of a little over a hundred folk shelters in the trees on the edge of the elven woods where Mistedale ends and the River Ashaba emerges from the forest in its run down from Shadowdale. The Mistle Trail passes through Elven Crossing, which, as its name suggests, is where elves like to cross the river. They either ford it here or go upstream a little way to the Living Bridge. This little-known local landmark is a massive shadowtop partially uprooted in a long-ago spring flood. It toppled across the river but was caught in two other trees and wedged in a horizontal position. It is healthy, and its branches leaf out each year to cloak the huge trunk in a bower that conceals folk using it to cross on foot; it is not wide enough for a wagon to use it.

Elven Crossing itself is a small, shady place of woodcarvers, hunters, and mushroom-pickers. These folk love the forest and augment their incomes by hunting for herbs that grow wild in sun-dappled glades deep in the woods. They react very severely—usually with a warning arrow shot into the flames—to folk who light campfires along the Mistle Trail except in a stone hearth. These fire hearths have been built by the folk of the Crossing all along the forest run of the Mistle Trail to prevent forest fires from sweeping their livelihood—or their community—away.

Elven Crossing has no inns or taverns, but does have two large pavilions—one by the riverbank and one at the eastern end of the settlement beside the Mistle Trail—that are set aside for travelers. These have pump wells, privies, hammocks, rough wooden tables and chairs, stone hearths and chimneys, stocks of ready-cut fire-

wood, and local folk to watch over them. The “overseers” are viewed by the folk of the Crossing as a necessity since the time one chilled group of wayfarers decided to chop up all the furniture and build a fire to keep warm—and promptly set their pavilion on fire.

Lacking a tavern, locals gather for drinks at Amaratha’s Teahouse. Travelers looking for conversation, a bite to eat, and something to drink should go there. They will find that some odd folk live in Elven Crossing—but then, it is an odd place.

PLACES OF INTEREST IN ELVEN CROSSING

Shop

Dusty Dragon Pottery

Jugs and Figurines



Dusty Dragon is a tiny shop where six flighty-headed local women sell the cute dragon and mushroom figurines they make. They also make some fine jugs whose spouts are smiling beard faces, too. The shop is worth a look.

RESTAURANT

Amaratha’s Teahouse



Made out of the hollow stumps of three massive trees joined together, this place is all windows and chatter. Locals come here to drink various woodberry teas and eat honeyed biscuits or Amaratha’s (very good, sharp!) marbled green cheese—which one can buy in bulk if interested. Amaratha also serves brandy and some wines made from forest plants. Amaratha’s is a very relaxing and unique stop—I would recommend it.



Galath's Roost

This abandoned keep began its life as the hold of a bandit leader who raided the Dales and caravan traffic in the area so long and successfully that his band outgrew the caverns they had been using (caverns that lie east of Rauthauvyr's Road in the trackless depths of the Elven Court woods northeast of Haptooth Hill). He and his fellow outlaws won wealth enough to have this keep put up on a rocky knoll in the woods overlooking Mistedale. From its battlements Galath's bandits could easily see caravans approaching down through the Dale or lob stones at any armed bands that came near by means of catapults.

Galath eventually grew bolder and saw himself as the ultimate and rightful ruler of the rich farms of Mistedale and the lawful owner of the roads around the Standing Stone. He felt justified in charging a steep safe-passage toll on all traffic going past the Stone on these roads. This toll was too much for merchants in the newly founded land of Sembia. They hired scores of mercenary mages, warriors, and fighting priests in Calimshan and Tethyr and formed a force that descended on the Roost to blast it open and either kill Galath and his fellow robbers or transform them into creatures of the sea so that they died lingering, painful deaths, flopping about and unable to breathe or keep cool.

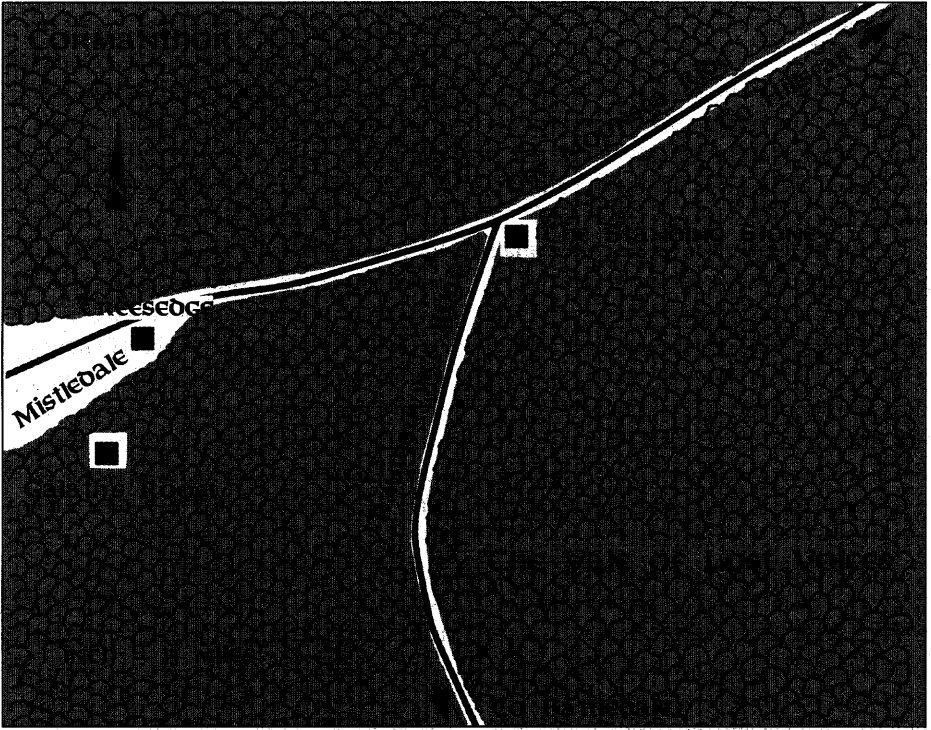
The Sembians decided to leave the ruin as a reminder to all brigands of the folly of their lawless trade, but their plan backfired: From the time the mercenary force left the riven keep, frustrated in its attempts to find the treasure Galath was widely rumored to have hidden there, brigands have used the ruined Roost for

shelter—except when monsters too powerful to overcome chose it as a lair.

Throughout the centuries since, Galath's Roost has always been a dangerous place avoided by Mistrans and all other law-abiding folk, though adventurers have probed it from time to time in search of the legendary treasure.

When the Time of Troubles came down on the Realms, Harpers came to the Roost knowing that the Swordlord of the Zhentarim-led mercenary army being whelmed in the lower Dales and northern Sembia intended to use it as a base from which to assault Mistedale and then command the Standing Stone traffic just as Galath had intended. The Harpers transformed the place into a series of falling-rock and collapsing-floor traps. Many warriors perished there when the Zhent army tried to occupy the Roost. Adventurers are warned that many of the Harper traps remain unsprung, since the Zhents perished in still other traps before reaching them. One Harper estimates that over 600 traps were worked into the riven keep, which today stands quietly among cloaking pines with gaping holes in its walls inviting tramps and foresters alike in.

Persistent fireside stories in the northern Dales tell that the Roost is haunted by the ghosts of Galath and his band. These were confirmed for me by Rhauntides of Highmoon, who said he investigated the Roost years ago and found it swarming with wraithlike undead guarding the lowest crypts. These lowest passages were flooded by a natural spring and were the area where he believed the treasure must be. Some adventurers evidently thought the same thing, because their drowned bodies were floating in the lightless



waters. Some sort of magic was also lighting up the waters from time to time as it was unleashed from some unknown active item beneath them.

Interestingly, the dwarves of the nearby hamlet of Glen recount a legend that insists that gates from other worlds open into the flooded crypts of the Roost, and that some of the drowned bodies Rhauntides saw were of otherworldly creatures who could not survive when they found themselves deep underwater. Recent Harper reports (deliberately made public around the Dales to alert folk) indicate that priests of Cyric and of Loviatar have been nosing around the Roost and surveying it—and its traps—for ritual uses. The reports also say that on both forays the evil clergy were intercepted and run off by

Dragon Cultists, who have taken to camping in the woods east of the Roost and evidently view it as an ideal site for establishing a new dracolich lair.

All of these activities would seem to make the place too crowded for those seeking adventure to even reach, but other, less public Harper reports say that in the last three years no less than six adventuring bands have perished in—or suffered very heavy losses before retreating from—the Roost. These secret reports also say that larger explorative bands of Red Plumes from Hillsfar (obviously acting under orders from Maalthiir) and hireswords acting for someone in Sembia also came to grief in the crumbling Roost.



GLEN

Situated south of the Moonsea Ride at Mistledale's eastern end where the Dale is narrow enough that one can clearly see the boundary forest to both north and south, Glen is a hamlet of stone-and-thatch cottages that is much grander than it appears. It fills a small gorge or depression in the ground, so that what look like single-story cottages from afar prove to descend three floors or more to the cobbled, steeply sunken streets. An elaborate system of drainage gutters collect rainwater safely into cisterns to prevent flooding, but ice must make the streets deadly for much of winter!

Glen is home to many dwarves who are masters of farming on platforms held up on poles, in tubs, and in cellars (where mushrooms are grown). They also specialize in growing crops under glass frames in the depths of winter, and they seem to be doing quite well at it. I have never seen such a contented community of red-cheeked, jolly dwarves in all my life! (Humans and a few halflings dwell here, too.)

Glen is more than just a market town for the area. It has the expected smiths and masons, and one can see gears and wheels and metal machinery all around, but Glen is also home to the only mine in the Dale: the Deep Mine. For hundreds of years the smug folk of Glen have kept secret something that would make their fellow Mistrans rise up to smite them and have the mine closed with spells and rocks, a secret I believe I am the first to reveal to any outsider.⁶ This is the dark truth—the Deep Mine is not a mine at all, but an elevator into the Underdark!

It seems the dwarves of Glen trade their extra produce not with the folk of Faerûn at all but with the distant realm of Dwarves' Deep and other dwarven communities along the way. They move their produce and goods by means of the Long Road, a route that stretches for thousands of miles through the Underdark and is under constant attack from drow and other fell races. Knowing that an army from the depths could well boil up into the heart of their verdant farms would make the Mistrans sleep a little uneasily of nights, I am sure!

This Underdark connection explains why certain dwarven merchants come here so often to "buy mushrooms" when they must be able to get lots of them nearer home. Not only are they getting the large, luxurious 'shrooms of the Underdark, they are bringing in goods to trade for something far more precious: dragon eggs. Yes, they trade for unhatched but fertilized dragon eggs that are kept cool in cellars in Glen to inhibit their growth until buyers take them away. I have seen these treasures, and like all true dragon eggs, they are white and leathery-skinned and about as long as a small human child is tall. (In other words, they look like turtle eggs of gigantic size.)

If, as I did, you fancy acquiring your own investment—or if you are crazy enough to think you can rear, feed, and tame a pet dragon—you too can buy dragon eggs from certain farmers in Glen. You may have to line up behind Dragon Cultists, though, to do it, and you will need to collect coins for a while to make your purchase: These days, the things go for 17,000 gp or more—usually *much* more.

Here is how to tell what type of wyrm might hatch from an egg: Hold the egg up

⁶*Elminster*: Ah, no! *Volo! Volo!* Don't ye give a moment's thought to the consequences of what ye say?



to a strong white light of either a burning strip of magnesium or a spell's glow. (Under normal daylight or yellowish torchlight dragon eggs simply look white, and any tinges of color you see cannot be trusted.) With white light behind the egg, the tinge of color seen in the dragon egg tells the species within, as follows:⁷

- *Very faint reddish spots:* red dragon.
- *Purple:* shadow, deep, or amethyst dragon.
- *Yellow:* brown dragon (only!).
- *Webwork of thin blue lines:* blue dragon.
- *Greenish-white:* a type of dragon whose breath weapon is a gas or vapor—probably green or white.
- *Gold flecks:* copper or bronze dragon. (Bronze eggs have fewer and larger spots; copper eggs have many tiny spots.)

Experts know far more about egg hues and their meanings than the few indicators I have set down here, and a person should get expert advice if contemplating the outlay in gold such a purchase would entail.

Places of Interest in GLEN INN

The Dark Door



Once Glen's big secret becomes clear, the cryptic name of this inn becomes all too obvious. The Door is expensive, well-furnished (though *everything* is of stone) and pleasant enough. It is recommended—especially if one is a dwarf—but *not* tell them I sent you.

⁷*Elminster:* He is as smug as an illithid in a bowl of brains in revealing this, but I fear he is also right in this case.



The Oakengrove Abbey

About 20 miles northwest of Ashabenford across the Ashaba on the edge of the elven woods is the second abbey of Mistledale: a walled stronghold that protects an ancient oak grove sacred to Silvanus. The abbey is almost hidden by trees, but its outer shape is defined by a large fortress ring studded with small towers, which are actually the cells where the priests live. The ring is almost a mile across and encloses a woodland alive with a wild variety of trees and crisscrossed by small chuckling streams and meandering paths. Wherever a path crosses a stream, the bridge takes the form of a tiny meditation hut, and these are lovely in their serenity. At the heart of the ring is a hill crowned with old, massive oak trees: the sacred grove itself.⁸ The priests have had to fight off some brigand raids over the years; it seems that one Dale rumor says treasure is buried here.

Only eight clerics now serve the Lord of the Forests within walls that once held over a hundred devout worshipers—and some of these priests are very old. They are led, however, by a young and ambitious man, Oakfather Gannon Durei, who was led here by a vision sent to him by the Divine Forestfather himself and dreams of fulfilling that vision by renewing old Oakengrove into the mighty community it once was. Gannon sees three things he must do to achieve this: attract wives (and even better, female clerics or druids) to wed the priests so that the cycle of life Silvanus speaks of can be followed within the abbey and younglings brought up to

revere the Forestfather from birth; make a reputation for the abbey by sponsoring adventurers to do great things in its name; and bring back living specimens of rare plants and trees and plant them in the abbey to bring about the abbey's own renewal. He hopes to hire adventures to scour western Mistledale of all monsters and then tackle the menaces lurking around Myth Drannor and Daggerdale in the abbey's name. He also plans on using hired adventurers to search out rare trees and flora for growing from seed or transplanting to the abbey, for he dare not risk himself or his dwindling flock of aged priests on such forays.

Gannon can only accept trustworthy folk to serve his abbey, and they must be led by one who worships Silvanus. Through the Harpers and hired merchants, he has located three such young men. They are bored noble younger sons from Sembia who have grown to hate the filth, crowding, and empty wealth of the cities they have grown up in. Gannon now desperately needs some adventurers of sylvan or good faiths to lead these young heroes before they grow bored and wander away from the abbey. As a result, Gannon has been advertising in Ashabenford and by means of merchants and is hopeful that adventurers will soon come to his isolated abbey who can pass his magical tests and prove worthy to serve Silvanus. If the youths or, even better, an adventuring band of greater size grows to become loyal to the abbey, Gannon could die content, secure in the knowledge that he had at least set the abbey on the road to recovery.

⁸For the powers of a sacred grove, refer to Appendix 7 of *FA1 Halls of the High King* or the similar summary of their abilities in *Warriors and Priests of the Realms*.



Peldan's Helm

This forester's town of 80-odd folk is home to many rangers, hunters, and woodcutters. It stands as a refuge to all in Beast Country, the perilous western end of Mistedale. The Helm began as the freehold of a retired Cormyrean soldier, Peldan Faern. He chose this spot as his own by driving upright the two-handed sword he had borne in battle into the ground and claiming all the land in sight of his helm, which he had placed atop the sword. Everyone in the Helm claims descent from Peldan now. His helm and sword hang in the rafters of the local meeting hall, which is used at various times for freevote meetings on matters of importance, militia patrol assemblies, and worship services for all woodland and good-aligned faiths.

Peldan's Helm does not present many sites of interest to see: Citizens live in stone cottages surrounded by high, stout stone walls and emerge in large, well-armed bands to plow fields or go into the woods after game or trees to fell. Carving and furnituremaking is done inside the walled yards of the cottages, and strangers are only encouraged to enter if they have business with the folk within.

Despite the Helm's wary nature, many adventurers and game hunters from Cormyr and Sembia seeking wall trophies come here and are welcomed: Every monster slain is one less to menace the folk who spend their lives here. These courageous, hard-working folk are still unable to even stroll in the woods with a loved one without sword in hand and a horn at their belts ready to cry alarm if they are beset by danger too great to overcome or flee from.

Adventurers come here to gain experience in monster-slaying and in hopes they will be among the lucky few to actually find treasure hereabout. Mistedale reveals the past more than elsewhere, since farmers to plow the stone relics of old holding walls or the bones of ancient battles away are fewer. The Dale has often been the site of pitched battles over the years, since it is one of the few places in the Dales where armies (especially cavalry) can assemble in large formations without being hemmed in by trees where archers can harass them from concealment. As a result, battle spoil left behind when priests and wizards used earth-twisting spells to bury foes alive or embattled forces buried the fallen in hasty mass graves without stripping bodies for valuables is plentiful. Every spring plowing turns up something of interest and sometimes something of great value—from items of powerful slaying magic to suits of armor or gems and coins seldom seen today.

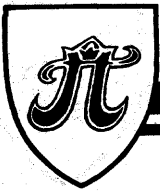
Places of Interest in Peldan's Helm

Inn & Tavern

The Man With Fire in His Hands



The Helm offers citizens and visitors alike just one place to gather, drink, dine, and sleep: the Man With Fire in His Hands. The name of this house commemorates a local (and long-dead) fire-hurling wizard, Murgar. His striking portrait over the bar, in which he is depicted hurling fireballs in all directions, is the only interesting thing in this very average and adequate roadhouse.



Scardale



travelers' warning: Do not, repeat, do *not* enter the Scar, the gorge of the River Ashaba below Feather Falls. Recently infamous as the seat of Lashan, the self-styled Ring of the Dales who whelmed an army that rolled over Featherdale, Harrowdale, and Battledale before he was fought to a standstill, Scardale has found disaster again in the Year of the Tankard (1370 DR)!

Journeying thence to survey the Dale for this guidebook, I found the towns of Scarsdeep and Chandlerscross had grown from nothing to bustling trading centers since Lashan's defeat. However, word reached me in both of plague! With my own eyes I saw folk fall ill who had recently come from Scardale town fleeing the outbreak—so stay away, lest you join their doomed ranks!

The symptoms are these: Victims first start to shake uncontrollably, a trembling of the limbs that ruins any attempts at the somatic gestures of spellcasting and accuracy with a bow or sling but does not impede movement or speech. This shaking continues until victims perish or are cured.

The disease progresses over a tenday or so, next producing black eruptions or pimples on the lips, then the entire face, the armpits, and the groin. These swell, turn yellow, and burst, weeping fluid freely thereafter. This liquid is a golden, sticky flow that can infect others who touch it. The throats of some victims then become affected at this point, so that they begin an almost ceaseless whimpering from the pain.

Cure disease spells proved initially ineffective against the plague, until someone cast one at the same time as a mage cast *dispel magic*—and the plague fled instantly from the victim. Wizards wiser than I say this can only mean that the affliction is magical as well as physical¹ It may well be a deadly attack from some fell magic-using power bent on scouring Scardale—or perhaps all human lands—of life.

Whatever the cause of the Shaking Plague, its cure can only be effected by two very expensive spells, so most folk are doomed since clergy who serve the common people and the impoverished are spread so thin in the region. Some few people seem to recover on their own, but it must be repeated: I mean some *few*. Farscrying mages report that the streets and wharves of Scardale are heaped with the dead, and the harbor is choked with floating bodies. (Immersion in water seems to bring some relief from an itching, burning discomfort that accompanies the last stages of the plague.) Lizard men are immune from the malady the watchers say, and are coming up out of Scardale harbor (with more dire things, it is rumored) by the hundreds to slay the few folk left and devour this feast of carrion.

At this time of writing, I am assured that the plague is contained in the Scar and that members of the clergy and mages are working feverishly to eradicate it. Whatever befalls, Scardale is bound to be so changed by this plague from the grimly garrisoned place left behind after Lashan's fall that I cannot describe it in these pages.

¹Elminster: That's me. Mind ye heed: Volo joketh not.



Shadowdale



Shadowdale is probably the most famous of all the Dales thanks to its status as the chosen residence of Elminster the Sage,

Syluné and Storm Silverhand of the Seven Sisters, and the Knights of Myth Drannor—and for the battle that saw the destruction of the avatars of the gods Bane and Mystra! It is also a land known in its own right for its traditional relationships: friendship with the elves and with neighboring Mistledale and enmity and opposition to Zhentil Keep, whose invading armies the vastly outnumbered folk of the Dale have hurled back time and time again.

The most independent and powerful Harpers make pilgrimages to this Dale to meditate on Harpers' Hill and to take training under Storm Silverhand at her farm here. Learned folk and mages travel thence from all over Faerûn for a chance to speak to Elminster, the Old Mage, perhaps the most important archwizard of our time.¹

I had planned to survey this beautiful farm and woodland Dale in loving detail as befits so important a place. Shadowdale boasts one of the best inns, the Old Skull Inn (established at the foot of the bare rock knoll of the same name), and the most famous fortress, the Tower of Ashaba, in the Dales. The Tower of Ashaba, or Twisted Tower, was

built long ago by drow to guard the exits into what is now Shadowdale from the Underdark—exits some say remain open to this day, though the Zhents the drow traded slaves with are gone!

I had hoped to show you Shadowdale flourishing under the most capable and caring ruler in the Dales, Lord Mourngrym Amcathra, and rising back to strength after the forest-burning battles of the Time of Troubles. I was prevented in this, and here I tell you all why:

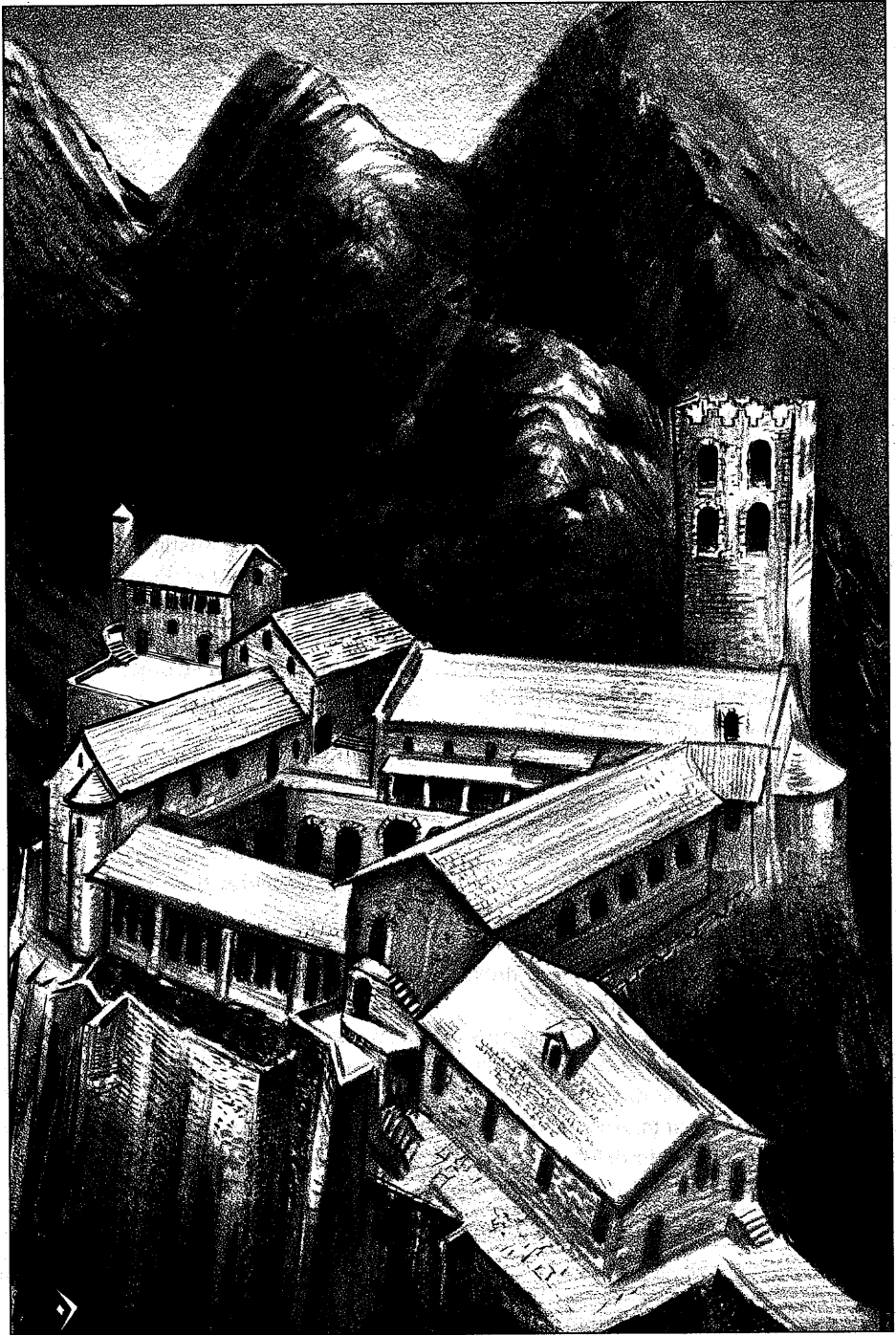
As I rode up the MistleTrail to the southern guardpost of Shadowdale, the air around me suddenly hummed and flickered and became blue-white. I felt the stir and surge of strong magic: Then my mount and I were frozen, unable to move. I could only watch helplessly as 'a bright mote appeared in the air before me. It grew swiftly to become a scroll and unrolled to display the words: "Turn back, volothamp Geddarm, and write not of Shadowdale or be feeble-minded forever!"

Then the scroll faded, leaving behind only the words, letters of fire floating in the air. The display was impressive, perhaps, but I call such a warning the act of an arrogant churl² and will cleave to that opinion to my dying day.³ Yet, you will find no more of Shadowdale written here.

¹Elminster: Ahem. I'm not going to change my mind, ye know, so ye can drop the flattery at any moment—I've heard better.

²Elminster: "The act of an arrogant churl"? After the butchery ye've done on the lives and secrets of honest Dalesfolk in these pages, I think *not*.

³Elminster: Which need not be all that so far off—if ye catch my drift.



The Abbey of the Just Hammer



Tasseldale



ne of the richest—if not the wealthiest—of all the Dales, Tasseldale is most like the “creeping Sembia” that threatens to swallow it up. In

fact, one sage¹ has called Tasseldale “a cluster of colonies of craftsfolk working for Sembia and trying to be like Sembia—only smaller and nicer.” That about sums the land up.

Tasseldale lies in an ancient, gently sloping river valley some 80 miles long and up to 30 miles wide that runs from Arch Wood to the present course of the Ashaba near Blackfeather Bridge. It is a peaceful, prosperous land and was once given over almost entirely to cattle farming after the elves retreated and the land was logged over. Livestock ranches are few these days, though, and are tucked between fruit farms, coppices of straight, thin, polelike trees planted for use in Sembian fences, and the many small tassels (towns) of the Dale. A prominent trail, the Tasselway runs the length of the old river valley but in truth this Dale is crisscrossed by lanes that run in all directions and are crowded every day by foot traffic, riders, pack trains, and wagons going this way and that. Tasseldale is truly the crossroads of the Dales.

Again, travelers from afar may raise their eyebrows at hearing the tassels are towns, when they look very like what would be called a village elsewhere, but “in the Dales, the Dalesfolk rule.” In Tasseldale, it would be more accurate to say that Sembia rules: Tasseldale has kept its independence in part because it has always accommodated its larger neighbor and never directly defied or confronted it.

The Countryside

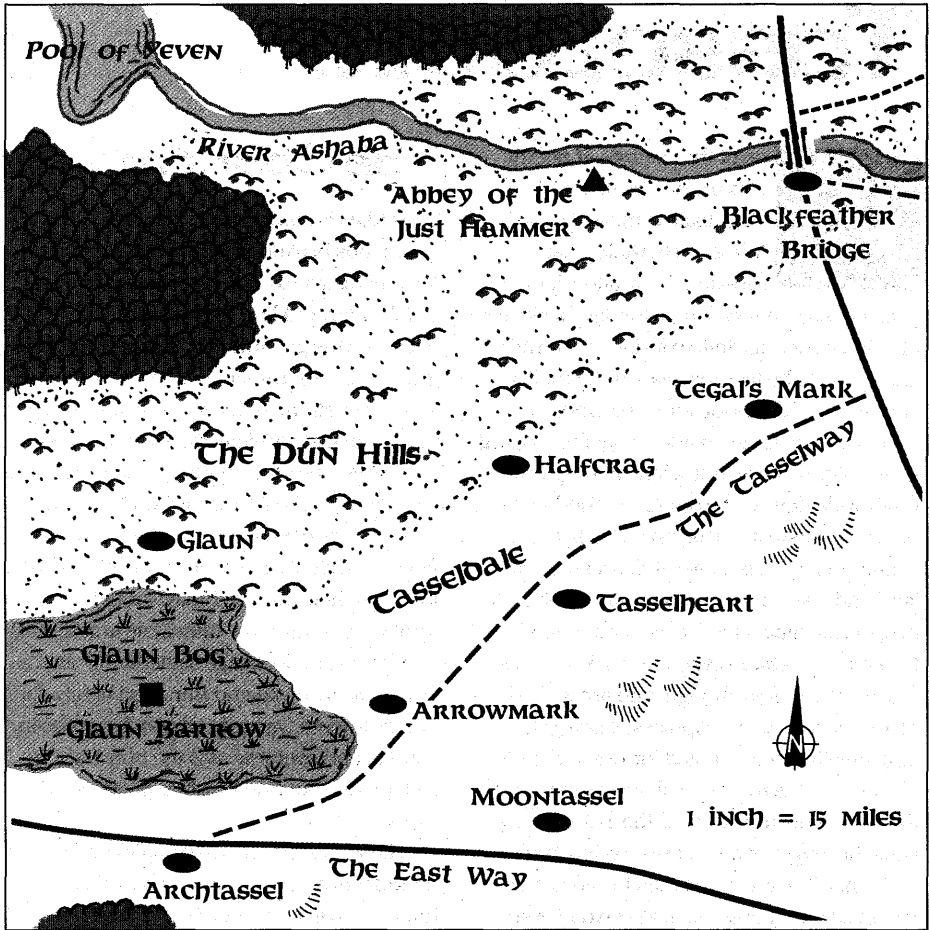
Tasseldale is comprised of gently rolling grasslands broken by many small coppices, farm hedgerows, and little dells where the Dale’s many tinkling streams suddenly cut deep into the ground and then vanish below ground to run unseen in little caves down to join larger streams that eventually empty into the Ashaba. Mists cloak the Dale on most mornings since the nights are clear, still, and cool, and the days are sunny and breezy.

In earlier days, when the land was more open, Tasseldale was where Sembians liked to gallop their horses. Today, though its pastoral beauty remains, Tasseldale is at heart a handful of small cottage settlements where craftsfolk grow old and hunched before their due time from turning out goods for sale in Sembia and overseas. It is the only Dale, in fact, to turn out fine-finished products for export.

The Dun Hills run diagonally across the far northern part of the Dale, forming a buffer between Tasseldale and Battledale in the north, Deepingdale in the west, and part of Featherdale near the Ashaba. Wild ponies and the occasional troll or lurking band of goblinkin roam the Dun Hills, but Tassad-rans generally consider them safe and find their own ways through them from one side to the other without benefit of guide or guard.

The Glaun Bog squats beneath the southwestern part of the Dun Hills, completing the western separation of Tasseldale from Deepingdale, and easy access between the two Dales is limited to the East Way and the small

¹Oraum of Luthcheq, *My Travels in the Barbaric Dragon Reach Lands*, the Year of the Serpent (1359 DR).



strip of land to either side of it. The Bog has fewer and fewer monsters and brigands these days but remains a dangerous region of quicksand, sinkholes, and carnivorous plants. Most Dalesfolk think of eerie mists and will-o'-wisps when one mentions Glaun Bog and by night, that is exactly what it usually looks like. An evil tomb hill Glaun Barrow, rises at its heart, bestowing some sort of curse on all who disturb it—but some folk of Tasseldale who know their ways around the Bog mine peat, soft coal, and a small amount of poor-quality iron ore in its wet heart and

hunt its reedy ways for waterfowl and game to eat or to sell the pelts of.

The Tassadrans

The folk known as Tassadrans are a contented lot. They are as well-off in their own ways as the rich Sembians of the south, but they are surrounded by more natural beauty, are pressured by less crowding, and must deal with less crime and dirt. "We have more choices," they like to say when comparing themselves with admittedly richer Sembians.



Like all Dalesfolk, their independence is vital to them, but do not throw it in one's face as, say, the folk of Archendale often do. Tassadrans are proud of the skills of their crafts folk, and it is said in the Dales that if someone of Archendale, someone of Mistledale, someone of Shadowdale, and someone of Tasseldale go into the same shop in a far land and see the same ornate pot for sale the Arkhen person will toss it to the floor and break it, the Mistran will check its drainage and size for how well one can grow things in it, the citizen of Shadowdale will dismiss it as "too showy," and the Tassadran will turn it over to look for the maker's mark in hopes of seeing the three joined tassels of Tasseldale. If the Tassadran does not find them, she or he will shrug and say, "We make better than that," and very carefully put it back on the shelf for it is a thing of beauty in its own right and not to be marred.

It is tempting for others to dismiss Tassadrans as faceless money-grubbing folk who

would be bold, brash Sembians if they could afford it, but this would be very wrong. Although it is true that a lot of Sembians have country estates in Tasseldale—country estates that they value highly and keep because they think of them as "quaint" and beautiful and different than their homes back in Sembia—native Tassadrans are brave, cool-headed, patient fighters who see the best way to achieve what is right and then quietly set about doing it,

The mairshars, mounted warriors who defend and police the Dale, are the embodiment of this spirit. Skilled in battle, they are also level-headed judges and peacekeepers who try never to let emotions mar their overriding regard for the long-term peace and safety of their land. They are headed by Grand Mairshar Elizzara Whitehand, an ex-adventuress who—fittingly for a Tassadran—looks tired and careworn, not proud or complacent.





The Abbey of The Just Hammer

This prosperous monastic fortress is dedicated to Tyr, Lord of Justice. It nestles on the northwestern flank of a hill known as the Tyrtor in the Dun Hills overlooking the River Ashaba.

The abbey can claim to be the main reason that monsters no longer infest the lands around the Pool of Yeven as they once did. In his younger days, Lord High Justiciar High Avenger Deren Eriach led many clerical battle bands out to scour the land of "unholy beasts." His warrior-priests proudly display a many-tentacled illithid head and a shriveled beholder in their Hall of High Entry (located just inside the forecourt of the Abbey where guests are greeted) and report that even more impressive trophies were stolen by folk who wanted them for "unholy reasons." (I suspect this means that a Cult of the Dragon raid made off with an entire dragon skeleton, judging by the size of the now-empty display plinth.)

Lord High Justiciar Eriach may have a taste for adventure, but he frowns on adventurers, viewing them as a force for lawless chaos to be hindered or even imprisoned if they come within his reach. It is wise to have a signed royal charter from Azoun or a specific writ or contract from a Sembian patron if one ventures west of Blackfeather Bridge along either bank of the Ashaba in an armed band that lacks caravan wagons in its midst.

Fifteen priests serve the One-Handed God here under Lord Deren. They are assisted by as many veteran warriors who are also devout followers of the High Lord of Justice. They follow a stern code

of justice and can be judgmental about apparent behavior without knowing the reasons for it. They are, however, willing to apologize and make amends if they mistakenly attack folk they meet. It is best not to make enemies of them if one intends to travel widely in the Dales for they have watchers everywhere.

Lord Deren is not a man very given to changing his mind or permitting exceptions to holy rule (in other words, law-breaking). However, if a clever person can argue law against law or show good and just legal reason why this law does not apply or that law should take precedence, he listens. If convinced, he graciously gives way, uttering his admiration.

"If convinced" is the problem most folk run hard into, because the lord high justiciar has a grasp of legal matters approached by few living beings in Faerûn. He has even instituted an unusual service offered free of charge by the abbey: Instruction in the varying laws and codes of conduct prevalent in the Dragon Reach lands to all who come to the abbey and request it.

By this means, Lord Deren hopes to spread the effective reach of law in the Realms. At home in Tasseldale, he has run into some resistance. He recently instructed the grand mairshar to send all mairshars to him for "proper instruction" in not only Dale laws but in how to enforce them. She crisply told him that justice is easy for priests who sit apart from the real world and that he could do as he had ordered when he was chosen grand mairshar by the people—and not a moment before. He is still composing frosty replies.



ArchTassel

Archtassel is the only tassel south of the East Way. About 200 folk dwell hard by Arch Wood in this most southwesterly of Tasseldale's tassels.

The folk of Archtassel have always made their living through woodcutting and trapping in Arch Wood, bringing home furs and wood to carve. Locally produced honey-colored fox fur studded with clear rock crystal drops (called "brethyl" fur, though there is really no such animal) has always been highly prized by haughty Sembians for use in trimming their garments. The carvers of Archtassel specialize in relief-cut wood panels for use in walls and doors, often custom-carving them with the heraldic arms of pretentious Sembian clients. They are generally considered by

outsiders to be the best woodcarvers in Tasseldale, though crafters from other tassels (of course) hotly dispute this.

Tasseldale and Archendale have argued over the mere existence of Archtassel since Archtassel's inception. The aggressive Arkhenfolk consider Arch Wood exclusively theirs and have several times shown up in force in the tassel to order its folk to leave "sovereign Arkhen territory." On the last such visit, a passing wizard was so infuriated by the effrontery of the Arkhenfolk that she cast a spell that temporarily paralyzed the right sides of the Arkhen warriors and bid them drop their useless swords and go drag themselves back home.

Though the folk of Archtassel have never abandoned their homes, they have faced more than a few suspicious brigand raids that came out of nowhere and – so





local Tassadrans claim—must have been Arkhen-sponsored. Some time ago some tassel trappers vanished in Arch Wood, and locals blame Archendale for their presumed deaths. Angry talk has been going around since about raising a force to wipe out an Arkhen logging camp near where the trappers disappeared, but so far, talk is all that has occurred. The mairshars have ordered the local townspeople to settle down and discuss their options for a while more. It is thought that rather than confronting Archendale in battle, Tasseldale may hire a few unscrupulous adventuring bands to practice being “brigands” on Arkhenfolk near Arch Wood.

Given that history, travelers might expect to find a fortalice in or at least earth ramparts around this tassel, but nothing like that exists. Archtassel is just a stand of trees with lanes snaking in and out around the many small cottages that nestle under the branches. Folk from the nearby East Way who want to trade easily find an open area that has been set aside for parking wagons, a handpump well ready for their use, and a bell they can ring to signal their arrival to anyone who might want to come out and trade. The tassel features an assortment of craft shops and a lone inn.

Places of Interest in Archtassel INN

Baeremar’s Stargirt Stallion



This nice but unremarkable inn is small and cramped but has splendid views of the tassel out its windows and fresh soup every morn—a delightful smell to wake

up to. Craft items made by the folk of Archtassel are displayed (and for sale) on every shelf and lintel, and the inn has a bathing pool out back that is spellwarded against insects where staff and guests alike gather on hot evenings to soak and chat.

Exotic teas (one has sweetened cocoa from Maztica dissolved in it!) are the order of the day here, and the staff also make bite-sized biscuits that are split and spread with a variety of weird-looking green pastes made of mixtures of local herbs and vegetables with butter or soft cheese. These taste nicer than they look, but many guests prefer more robust fare. For them, the inn staff bake fowl in clay jackets in an oven—delicious!

Only about a dozen guests can sleep here: It is obvious the locals banded together to build this inn when they got tired of travelers on the East Way asking for rooms for the night. The inn does not see heavy use, and locals often drop by to chat with the staff or take over the lounge for impromptu meetings—usually to discuss joint craft ventures with a Sembian agent.

The name of the inn, echoed in its magnificent relief-carved signboard whose “stars” (actually just bumps in the wood) are enchanted so as to glow and sparkle, commemorates a local legend. Supposedly, long ago, a warrior escaped marauding orcs or folk from Archendale (versions of the tale differ) after a brave battle in which his beloved, a mage, was slain. She cast a dying spell of stars on his mount that enabled it, trailing little motes of light, to leap across a lake. The lake lay just west of the tassel, but it has long since dried up.



Arrowmark

This small place of about 120 folk lies northeast of Archtassel, just off the Tasselway. It is the forgotten tassel of the Dale; even many Tassadrans forget about its existence. The bowyers and fletchers of this tassel do very fine work, and in Cormyr and even in distant reaches of Faerûn one should always examine a graywing (goose feather) shaft near its tip for a tiny spiral with an arrow through its heart—the mark used by the folk here to identify their work.

Like Archtassel, this tassel takes the form of cottages clustered in the shade of a stand of trees and has no landmarks or religious sites. Unlike its neighboring tassel, it does have an arrow-straight main street that is sometimes used by locals to test how far and true their new bow or new arrow design can fly. Beware when walking down the street: The sound of a triple chime means that archery is imminent. All homes in this tassel have such a chime, and the repeated ringing of it summons the tassel's inhabitant to assemble in the main street, armed and ready to repel an attack.

Places of Interest in Arrowmark

Unique Sites

The Gray Lady's Ruins



Near Arrowmark on the edge of the Glaun Bog are some overgrown elven ruins. Even most elves do not recall who dwelt there or what befell the inhabitants. The stones are generally considered to be the home of the most notorious resident of Arrowmark: the Gray Lady.

The Gray Lady is the seldom-seen phantom of a gowned elven maiden who flees westward screaming silently through the Dale on summer evenings. She always passes down the main street of Arrowmark—though her consistent detours through some homes and shops suggest that the road may have traversed a slightly different course in her time—and heads for the ruins, where she simply fades away. Folk whom she passes through are chilled to the bone and often swoon on the spot, but suffer no lasting ill effects except receiving a disturbing handful of visions of what the Arrowmark area was like long ago. These vivid mental scenes stay with their recipients for years and sometimes point the way to exactly where elven treasures lie in the Lady's ruins.

From fragments of different folk's visions after her passage, people have pieced together some of the Lady's story: The Gray Lady was ridden down and horrifically killed long ago by greedy human reavers from what later became Sembia. The ruins she was vainly fleeing to were among very few stone buildings known to have been used by elves of the time and are thought to have harbored much magic. Treasure—often exquisitely beautiful filigree-and-gems elven jewelry, but sometimes magical items—has indeed been occasionally found in these ruins.

Shops

The Sheathed Dagger

*Caravan Shipping Silks, Dyes, Spices,
and Exotic Knickknacks*



Despite its sinister name, this is not a wild tavern or a thieves' brotherhood, though some Tassadrans who have bought wares



from the owners may disagree with that. Rather, this place is an outpost of a Selgaunt-based trading coster of the same name. Through their factor (their agent), Darnar Presnyl, they sell imported silks, dyes, spices, and fancy knickknacks from the wealthy homes of Sembia.

The Old Archer's Eye

Bowyer and Fletcher Collective



This building smells pleasantly of cedar and various oils and varnishes. The Eye is a trading collective set up by the best of the local bowyers and fletchers so that they are not interrupted in their work by a constant stream of buyers wanting a particular bow or asking them to "make me one like this only black and about eight feet high, eh?" Within the Eye, the work of each crafter is clearly identified and set in its own glass case, which is carefully cooled by a floor-treadle fan when necessary to prevent warping.

Expect to pay 125 gp and up for any bow, and 1 sp each for a war or hunting arrow here. Custom bows can be ordered if buyers can stay in town for the bowyer to test his work on them as the bows are made, but all such items cost at least 200 gp.

Taverns

I Shot an Arrow



This tavern is an inexpensive, rustic place decorated with helms transfixed by arrows, shields transfixed by arrows, pieces of armor transfixed by arrows, and other quaint trophies of archery used in anger. The locals seem to have fairly low

standards in beer and no liking for wine at all, judging by what is offered here, but the places does serve robust zzar and (surprisingly) has a nice selection of brandies, liqueurs, and cordials. The peach smoothwater is especially fine, though locals swear by the fiery—and far more expensive—rubyfire.

Most craftsfolk in town drift over here for a quiet drink after work or during highsunfest too exhausted to appreciate revelry or brawling. They all rise together, though, to eject any visitor who grows too loud or belligerent. Bards sometimes harp quietly in the background here, but folk do not dance on tables in a rowdy manner or conduct sing-alongs as one sees elsewhere.

Inn

The Stag That Got Away



This quiet, good inn is a labyrinth of dark passages and old, but exquisite, carved wood panels. As one might expect from the inn's name, leaping stags are carved everywhere, even on the seat of the men's jakes. (I did not examine the ladies' for obvious reasons of discretion.) Rooms are furnished in old, rather shabby luxury, but service is almost nonexistent. The staff members get the room ready before one arrives and clean it again after one leaves. Between those two times, one sees nothing of them. The one delightful, small surprise about the place is that one back door leads into a delightful, overgrown, little rose garden with a tiny fishpond and even a bower for the amorously inclined. The Stag provides safe, clean, and perfectly adequate—but unexciting—accommodations.



Glaun

By a hair the westernmost of the tassels, Glaun sits in a fold of the Dun Hills, a bowl-shaped valley often overhung by the tattered smokes of its smelters. About 370 folk call Glaun their home. The town is a busy, happy one, whose crafters make steady coin turning the pig iron the Black Axe Ironworks turns out into lanterns, cold-wrought railings, scrollwork shelf brackets, and other decorative ironwork for sale around the Dales. Glaun, in fact, is a settlement that grew up around the truly ugly Black Axe Ironworks, which was founded by the dwarf Irythn Darrtar after the death of Glaun the Smith.

Glaun was a human smith who set up his shop here more than two centuries ago after discovering iron ore in the Glaun Bog that lies to the south of the tassel. This treacherous mire is known best by a dozen or so aging guides who dwell here. They lead teams of younger people (some say by long and round-about ways so that only the guide in the end knows where they are or how they got there) to cut peat or retrieve coal for use in the smelter fires and to bring out the iron ore that the tassel's wealth is built on.

Perytons and wyverns have in the past been problems in the Dun Hills, but they all seem to be gone now. One of the last of the wyverns was slain by a huge lance made locally and fired into the sky over Glaun by a gigantic ballista. The slain creature crushed a cottage in its fall, and the locals all agree that they did not like the taste of the wyvern meat that everyone cut off and took home to try.

Trolls, goblinkin bands, and the occasional brigand are all that trouble folk in

the Hills now, but they are enough for Glaun mothers to forbid their younglings to go sling hunting for rabbits and grouse on the slopes above the tassel.

Places of Interest in Glaun

Unique Sites

The Wyvernspike

Rising like an abbey spire from the center of the bowl-shaped valley is a rusting black iron spire at the center of the open marketplace. On this iron spire the folk of Glaun have always set out their battle trophies, from captured Arkhen raiders in chains to peryton and swamp monsters. The last group of Arkhen ruffians chained out here withered in the sun for days until the Swords of Archendale reluctantly surrendered a fat ransom fee for them; a fee, it is reported, that they were immediately set to earning back through indentured labor to their Dale.

The bones of the last wyvern in the Dun Hills can still be seen on the Wyvernspike's flanks today, dangling in disarray from drying sinews. The wyvern was hauled up and transfixed here after its death over a season ago, and the Glauntans seem content to leave it there forever—or until the next foe to cross them comes along.

Shops

Black Axe Ironworks

Iron Smelter Collective



This evil-smelling, dirty, littered yard and smelter is the heart of Glaun. All the local crafters get their iron from here. Since the unfortunate death of Galatar the Greedy, the last private owner of the



place, who decided to increase his prices tenfold and later the same evening somehow mysteriously went out on a catwalk he had never set foot on before and fell into the main melting vat below, they have collectively owned the Ironworks. This ensures low, steady, and fair prices for all so that Glauntan crafters can plan each season ahead of time.

Outsiders are not generally welcome to buy iron here for fear of slighting the supply to local folk. Exceptions are made for those willing to pay four times the usual price or more. Such windfall profits are divided equally among all the crafters, not pocketed by the Ironworks staff.

Dreshen's Tack and Harness

Tack, Harness, Wagon and Caravan Equipment



This shop is generally considered the best source of elaborate multiple-wagon harnesses in all the Dales. Aldo Dreshen sells crude but rugged wagons, spare wheels, feed, saddles, tack, and harness, and continually wishes business were more brisk. "I am starving," he moans, "Starving! And if I had married, all my little children would be starving, too!"

The Tasselway Coster

Caravan Shipping, Tin Work, and Assorted Foodstuffs



This informal and locally popular operation is owned and operated by the Drasden brothers, Beritar and Thag, a pair of weathered, cheerful, pranksome ex-adventurers. They run small, fast caravans along the East Way, taking ale,

tin work, pewter goods, wool, salted meat, grain, fruit, and cheese from Tasseldale to Arabel for sale to the shops and merchants there. More than once they have escorted young Sembian ladies and men who were running away from home along on their journeys without troubles and without asking any awkward questions. More than one happy Sembian-born couple, now dwelling far from the strictures of home, fondly regards Beritar and Thag as honorary uncles.

Tavern The Thirsty Pig



This house's name refers to pig iron, not a thirsty beast. It is a dim, strong-smelling place where workers reeking of sweat and the smoke of the Ironworks sit and drink the hot dust out of their throats before staggering home to sleep. Rowdiness is neither appreciated nor often encountered, but good cheer, conversation, and minstrelry are not much in evidence, either. Drinking seems to be serious business in Glaun.

Inn

The House in the Smoke



This accurately named place is not one I can recommend. It stands too close to the clangs and curses of the Ironworks for any but the determinedly deaf to get a good night's sleep. Average prices bring one lackluster food and rather sparse and rudely furnished, dingy rooms—but, of course, it is the only inn in town.



Halfcrag

This small, isolated village of less than 200 folk is the largest farming center in the Dales and the only tassel with its own mounted defense force: the Crag Strikers. They serve to run off brigands, wolves, leucrotta, and other predators that come down out of the Dun Hills after the local sheep, goats, and cattle. They also herd those same valuable animals where they are wanted, either to market in Tasselheart or away from heavily grazed areas that the Halfcrag farmers are trying to reseed.

Halfcrag gets its name from its defensible site: It sits atop a flat-topped "half crag"² that stands a little way out from the main Dun Hills range. The tassel today is a cramped cluster of tall, thin homes separated by narrow, winding lanes. Space is so short atop the crag that from a distance the tassel resembles a single structure—a strangely unwarlike castle that is perched high atop the half crag's rocky base.

Troubles with brigands, goblinkin, and even Arkhenfolk in the past have made the people of Halfcrag very cautious about hiding their wealth, and the soft rock in the center of the crag itself has given them the ideal solution. This community rests atop many trapped, undead-guarded underground vaults, whose precise whereabouts and access are concealed behind cryptic rhymes known only to family members, false fireplace walls, and ceiling trapdoors above the canopies of canopy beds. In earlier days, priests of Myrkul took handsome fees from the Halfcrag folk for bringing enthralled undead into such hiding places. These days, the purchase of helmed horrors or

shadowy guardian creatures crafted in certain secretive cellars in Sembia has largely replaced the use of undead because priests of Kelemvor want to set the undead to rest and other evil priest-hoods are trusted by Halfcraggers about as far as they can be thrown by a small lad or lass.

This cautious fortress mindset has made Halfcraggers very reluctant to allow outlanders—even other Tassadrans—up onto the crag. The mairshars have recently had to issue several crisp reminders to the folk of Halfcrag that *all* Tassadrans must be welcome anywhere in Tasseldale.

The market hall, caravan campground, and pavilions are located at the foot of the crag itself in a compound. Guests may sleep in the pavilions with a roof over their heads and water, privies, and firewood free at hand, but Halfcrag has no inn or tavern yet, though it seems some locals plan to build one of each soon. This visitor area at the crag's foot is overlooked by a ballista tower on the crag above and enclosed by earthen ramparts. (The ballista is firmly in the control of the mairshars.) The stables of the volunteer Crag Strikers are also located in this area alongside a paddock used by Halfcraggers to show off their stock to visiting buyers.

Halfcrag exports live animals, barrels of salted meat, wool, and rather spicy, greasy sausages favored by those who cook over open fires because they fry well. If visitors do not come here to buy such things, there is not much to see—unless they are of a mind to explore the Dun Hills, in which case they should be sure to look up Romantic Dreams Forays.

²Elminster: What ye would call a mesa.



Places of Interest in Halfcrag

Unique Sites

Romantic Dreams Forays



Romantic Dreams Forays is a business run by a band of semiretired and very beautiful female human and half-elven adventurers. They charge stiff fees to patrons—usually bored, wealthy Sembians—who want a taste of adventure.

After patrons participate in a day of languid weapons practice and being fitted with equipment in a steep-sided dell hidden from view of Halfcrag, the Foray guides get patrons pleasantly tipsy around a campfire and tell chilling tales of the dangers of the Dun Hills. Then, in the chill of early dawn, the company rides up along the most scenic trails the Foray ladies could find or make into the heart of the loftiest hills.

There the brave force finds ample monster tracks—thoughtfully placed there the day before by some of the Foray guides—before battling a wing-clipped stirge and a devenomed snake, which were also set in place earlier. Then the victorious band retires to a hidden pond for a swim and a leisurely highsun meal accompanied, if the patrons are sufficiently attractive, by some flirtation—“That is the ‘dreams’ part,” Anjanna of the Foray ladies told me.

When rested, the Foray force arranges the monster trophies it has obtained on the bands saddles for a triumphal return to the base of the crag. This is followed by a group exploration of the crumbling ruins of an old keep. There the band finds a handful of gold coins scattered among the bones of fallen warriors on a stair—right where a Foray guide left them the

day before. Then a prepared spell causes a ghostly image to menace the party, and the Foray lady guides grimly order their patrons back, since, in their words, “we have not the magic to defeat a deathghost.”

As the mythical deathghost is an illusion that ignores holy turning attempts, it would seem they are right, so the heroes retreat—only to be swooped at by a low-flying, snarling wyvern (more illusion magic) before emerging into a valley where no less than 16 masked brigands yell a challenge and charge. The desperate outlaws never seem to catch up with the fleeing party, and the Foray band comes galloping back to the crag campground, breathless, in time for evenfeast.

Some patrons come back time and time again for this fun, and I am sure they know it is all faked, but they do not seem to mind. The fee is 50 gp a head in advance, but if someone the ladies recognize signs up, they do try to vary the excitements. Of course, sometimes real monsters, observing the regular movement of prey along a set route, do join in. The Foray staff members still talk about the time a pair of firedrakes pounced on them, badly wounding one of the female adventurer guides, and their bored Sembian patrons roared into battle, slaughtering the beasts with reckless flair.

I was assured by Tanatha of the Foray ladies that they always carry plentiful *potions of hearing* and *elixirs of health*, and they also have a robe of *useful items* along. When I suggested that telling me about this magic could bring them danger from thieves, she smiled thinly and told me that anyone who thought the Foray guides were just pretty women in daring armor would be very unpleasantly surprised.



Moontassel

Named for its proximity to the vanished Moondale (which is now Ordulin and its outlands, located in the heart of the Sembian interior), this large, prosperous tassel is a sprawling town of craftsfolk. Its bold signs advertise blown-glass, life-sized mermaids that one can pump colored water through, custom-made chimes that play complete tunes, and much more such ostentatious nonsense. It comes as no surprise to most travelers to learn that this tassel is where most sheltered city Sembians go to shop in the “quaint Dales” and pick up a useless, pretty little something for the third parlor and an uglier useless something to give Aunt Myrthel when she visits.

Moontassel has certainly changed from the quiet, pretty place of my last visit, and choosing places to sleep, drink, and be entertained is now difficult in this everything-goes town, so I have selected just one inn and one tavern for abbreviated entries: the Lunge tavern and the Boar and Lion inn. The only landmark in this noisy chaos of high commercialism (“Get your dragon weathervanes here! All types—we’ll paint ‘em the color of your choice! Each with a genuine dragon scale on it!”) and unregulated building sprawl is a ring road at Moontassel’s center. It encloses some high stone walls within which can be seen the tops of many rather ragged trees. These stone walls in turn enclose the haunted ruins of Moontassel.

Places of Interest in Moontassel

Unique Sites

Haunted Ruins of Moontassel



Visitors to Moontassel quickly notice that the walls around the haunted ruins have no gate or door. There is no way to enter them except by climbing or flying. Getting caught climbing brings one a hook down with a mairshar’s peace pole and a 6 gp fine on the spot—or an unfed night in jail if one does not have the funds.

Inside the wall stand the remnants of a small school of wizardry that was blasted apart in a battle with rival mages long ago. The ruins were stripped of all magic that could safely be taken away before the wall was put up, and adventurers are warned that the wall has been sited so as to enclose a wild magic area created in the battle. The wild magic area, reports go, does not extend all the way down into the cellars of the riven school. Where it ends, strange automatons controlled by a lich who lurks somewhere in the deepest part of the old school can be found.

Although they do not go in after explorers, mairshars look poorly on wholesale attempts to dig up the ruins. They stand guard to relieve such curiosity-seekers of anything they bring out when they exit. A shadowy, sinister local network of Dragon Cultists watches for forays into the ruins and *does* follow adventurers in, trying to slay them and seize all treasure they have found or brought in, so beware of any convenient aid a stranger suddenly offers to someone in the ruins.

Shops

With so many shops to choose from, I have found it hard to select a few for the traveler’s interest. In addition to those below, people following in my footsteps to Moontassel should investigate Iyldro’s Fine Paperworks, a fledgling business in its first tenday when I visited the tassel.



The Dancing Death Knight

Adventuring Supplies



A striking bit of *programmed illusion* work makes the name of this shop come vividly to life four or five times a day. If one stops by at the right time, it is worth seeing the skeletal figure in black armor twist and gyrate through the air. It is certainly the only *safe* way to ever see a death knight up close!

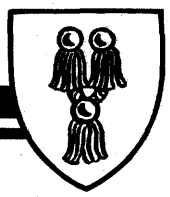
This shop caters to the would-be adventurer, selling both new and used weapons; gear of all sorts, running from mountaineering equipment to iron maidens; armor; and—in the yard out back—guaranteed monster cages. How one collects on a failed guarantee was something the staff seemed reluctant to discuss.

I was served by a young lady wearing one of the shop's disguise masks, a rubbery thing that gives a person the features of someone else. She was also wearing a truly incredible breastplate, all wicked-looking spikes and cutouts to show her bronzed ribs beneath. Her ribs were also adorned with glowing rune patches meant to look impressive for the Sembian clientele and scare folk and monsters alike away with her demonstrated "mastery of magic" (even if in truth she knew none). Of course, similar temporary "rune tattoos" are on sale in the shop.

Among all the gimmicks is a thorough range of things adventurers might need, a selection of exotic spell components; and some hard-to-find items. Everything was for sale here from tents and folding boats to monster-head masks and skins, from jars of dragon bone dust and real bug larvae, to



Iyldro's Fine Paperworks (A Fledging Moontassan Business)



shark cages to lower adventurers into dangerous places but keep monsters at bay. The availability of such rarely encountered items on the shelf, rather than as custom-made or specially acquired items, *may* make adventurers in a hurry willing to pay the eyebrow-raising prices—or not. During my visit, six patrons made purchases, and I heard six variations on: “What?! Ye jest, surely!”

Ruirmorn’s Silks and Linens

Textiles, Bed Linens, and Carpets



This company, operated by the warrior Ruirmorn, a somewhat sinister and mysterious man, imports Sembian textiles and silks from the east. This shop is the best place to look for bargain prices on such wares. (Carpets with bloodstains on them go very cheap.)

Tavern

The Lunge



Most taverns in Moontassel are horribly overpriced places where wildly costumed Sembians parade to show off their daring to other wildly costumed Sembians. The Lunge caters to the traveler on a budget. This dimly lit taproom has curtained booths for the use of professional escorts entertaining guests. (The escorts rent the booths; they are not on staff.) It keeps the main floor area for simple drinking and conversation. Dancing and minstrelry are for more expensive places.

A full range of beverages can be had here, but beware the Old Smooth Throat whisky: The tavern’s animated signboard depicting a lunging swordsman can look pretty threatening after one has had a glass of this stuff.

Inn

The Boar and Lion



A fee of 13 sp per head per night brings visitors excellent food and service at the Boar and Lion—perhaps the best in town. Regulars know this, so the Lion is always crowded. It was once a tavern along with being an inn, but the taproom and dance floor were needed to make more guest rooms, so no common drinking room exists anymore. Guests in the Lion find narrow halls, blessed silence (thanks to good spells), and meals served in their room on covered platters; there is no space to spare in the Lion for a dining room or parlor, either.

The Lion rises five floors from the street. All rooms are furnished with knotted climbing ropes for use in escaping fires. In my experience, they are most often used to bring unpaid guests up to sleep or for other business and then to let them out again before morning.

Festhall

Five Wanton Witches



This place is named for its owners, five exotic dancers from Sembia who do a false magic act as the climax of every night’s show. It features lots of flashes, colored smoke, and vanishing parts of costumes. (Yes, I admit I stomped and whistled like everyone else.) A lot of the fun here consists of pouring beer or wine over other patrons and then plunging into heated pools to wash it off again—along with lots of other friendly people. In sum, the Wanton Witches is a rowdy, mindlessly fun place.



Tasselheart

This fast-growing tassel stands near the center of the Dale. There has even been talk of moving the mairshar headquarters to Tasselheart because of its more centralized location. Thus far the folk of Tegal's Mark have cried "Tradition!" and won the day; however, the talk never dies down.

Though Tasselheart was once just a trail-moot, it is now the site of the Dale's large, tenday-long Midsummer Market, at which folk from all over the Dale come to meet, gossip, and trade goods. "Inexpensive good value" seems to be the day-to-day order of things in Tasselheart. Its folk show a kindly, open, caring spirit that makes travelers come back year after year to embrace innkeepers in the street with glad cries. In short, it is a place worth stopping at.

Landmarks

The only landmark in Tasselheart is the great open Midsummer Meadow, a grassy plateau that the ring-shaped tassel is built around. Used as a playing field and grazing area, it is overrun (there is no better word) by the merchants who suddenly set up stalls for the Midsummer Market each year here, staking their claims for good spots in a brawling, underhanded process now policed by the mairshars to avoid bloodshed.

Travelers are free to camp in the meadow if it is not Midsummer Market time. Fires there are strictly forbidden, though, and an untroubled sleep may prove elusive. Bands of local youths play pranks on each other and anyone else who is up here at night, and the meadow is also the local trysting place. Reports tell that a doppelganger took advantage of all this fun in the dark to slay several people

last year. It got clean away, so it may still be lurking in the area or even impersonating a local Tassadran!

Places of Interest in Tasselheart

Shops

Thorik Rivenrock's Ores

Precious and Utilitarian Metal Ores



This small coster is owned by Thorik's six sons: Jarvik, Holorun, Iltzimmer, Darguth, Blundrik, and Saram. Their now-dead father was a dwarf of no small reputation in Tasselheart, for he led several hastily assembled Tassadran forces to victory over Sembian bands who seemed determined, at the time, to forcibly add the lands of Tasseldale to Sembia. The sons continue the work that made their father rich: bringing metals bought in Cormyr and Archendale to the crafters of a Dale that has no mines or known ore lodes (not counting the poor iron ore in the Glaun Bog).

The leader is the burly, outgoing Jarvik Thorsson, who dreams of reopening the rich mines of lost Sessrendale. He blames pig-headed Arkhen aggression for slowing the growth of Tasseldale. If he meets an Arkhen man alone and there are no witnesses about, he tries to lay serious fear of Tassadrans into the Arkhen man with his fists. ("One less born troublemaker," he will grunt afterward).

The coster is beginning to hire adventuring bands to probe those lost Sessrendale mines for them, but they warn all the folk they hire to beware of Arkhen spies. They fear Arkhen forces will occupy the barren former Sessrendale just to keep its ores out of the hands of others—namely, themselves.



Tavern

The Addertongue



This rowdy, dangerous alehouse is frequented by a lot of hireswords and layabouts looking for work and a reputation, so brawls are frequent and can be deadly. All races are tolerated in here—I even saw a well-armed orc once—and the drink is cheap. This tavern is not a place, though, to try to conduct private business or to relax—even for an instant.

Inn

The Tasselway Arms



A stay at the Tasselway Arms only costs 7 sp per head per night, and stabling and a

good evenfeast meal are thrown in, so the Arms is widely used by Tassadrans traveling in their own land. It is nothing spectacular, but rather a good, solid, family-run inn that caters to families, honest merchants, and folk of peaceful intent and manners.

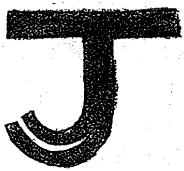
The Arms is owned by a mairshar and his son is another mairshar. They make sure that all guests see their badges and uniform tabards as they go in and out of the inn on business so that folk who may be trouble do not even think of stopping here. By and large, this strategy works. Potentially rowdy-looking guests who are not perturbed by their badges may well hear this greeting: "Adventurers, eh? I'll expect your best behavior, now, or you'll be relocated down the street to the warmest room in the jail! Enjoy your stay, now!"



Tegal's Mark

Tegal's Mark is a pretty place that folds around two wooded hills located amid verdant vegetable farms. From afar one can see its three major landmarks: two grand houses that share the crest of Tegal's Hill and an old watchtower. The Mark is not much larger than the other tassels (only 440 or so folk dwell here), but it is the seat of Tasseldale's government and—to non-Tassadrans—probably the best-known tassel.

The Mark was founded almost 200 years ago by Tegal, a human swordsmith. The blades that came out of his forge and swordworks were so eagerly sought after that a village of metalcrafters, polishers, scabbardmakers and the like quickly grew up around it. The future tassel was called



Tegal's Mark after the "T" mark with a forked tail where the tails curl off to the left that Tegal engraved on all his work.

Places of Interest in Tegal's Mark

Unique Sites

The Sharburg

The fortified base of the mairshars is an old watchtower rising out of a much more recently built walled compound. The compound sports a council hall for the grand mairshar) the mairshars' barracks, and a stable. The Dale army and main dungeons are in the tower.

This was once the site of an elven watchtower. Legends say that someone who utters the right words can summon into being a door in midair here that leads to an elven safehold crammed with weapons and magic.

The Temper Pond

Long used by the Tegal smiths to temper their weapons in, this clear, cool pond is the local swimming hole. It is also supposedly where the notorious highwayman Buren the Black Mask hid the gems he stole from the throats of dozens of different fine Sembian ladies on the roads.

Residences

Elgaun Manor

This grand, many-windowed manor is the summer home of a wealthy Sembian merchant family who spend their winters in their home city of Yhaunn. Here they read, bath in their own indoor pool, and hire mages to delight them with illusions and minstrels to move them with music. They often throw parties that bring splendidly garbed Sembians to the Mark for a few nights of abandoned revelry spiced up with the occasional murder, some pranks, and one or two accidents. The grand mairshar has asked to be warned beforehand of all future festivities, and the family has agreed to this—the highlight of their last party—two flying rival mages furiously trading fireballs over Tegal's Hill in anger—was as much a surprise to them as it was to all the Markenfolk.

Theremondivyr's House



This small but impressive house and garden is home to the timid scholar, sage, and wizard Theremondivyr, a law-abiding type who spends his time in quiet studies. He delights in helping folk answer lore queries with his researches—but is a fan of adventurers and aids them with an eagerness that overcomes his usual nervous, retiring ways.



Recently he helped the Suzailan adventurers known as Not Just Any Reckless Blades, and these rich nobles' sons were so grateful to him for saving their lives that they sent a crew of war wizards to put a few defenses around the kindly old sage's tower. Though he does not know it, a *gate* from the palace in Suzail was also erected so that they can step right in to visit when they want to see him again—or a war wizard can swiftly get near to northern Sembia.

Theremondivyr was very grateful, and his fees to them are forever waived, but his fees to everyone else have risen as he grows more confident. He would still like to see folks who want to hire a wizard for something not too dangerous, and not too political, though.

Shrine

The Scattered Seeds

The local shrine to Chauntea is a domed building whose upper windows are inset with colored glass so that sunlight forms impressive moving patterns on the marble floor. A fountain and garden grow up from in the center of the shrine. The garden is tended and the fountain kept clear and clean by three worshipers, but no priests dwell here.

The shrine is open to all who wish to shelter here. In all the years it has been open, it has only once been vandalized, and it is thought that passing worshipers of Talos did that.

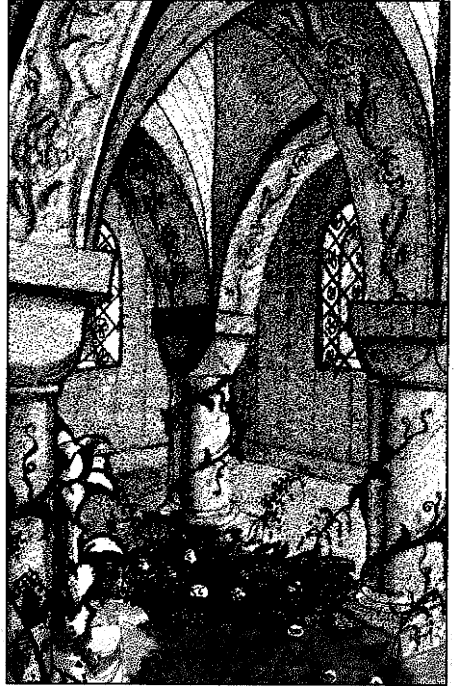
Shops

Aladium's Imports

Spices, Silks, and Exotics



This small, pleasant shop is crammed with spices and silks brought in from Sembia. It



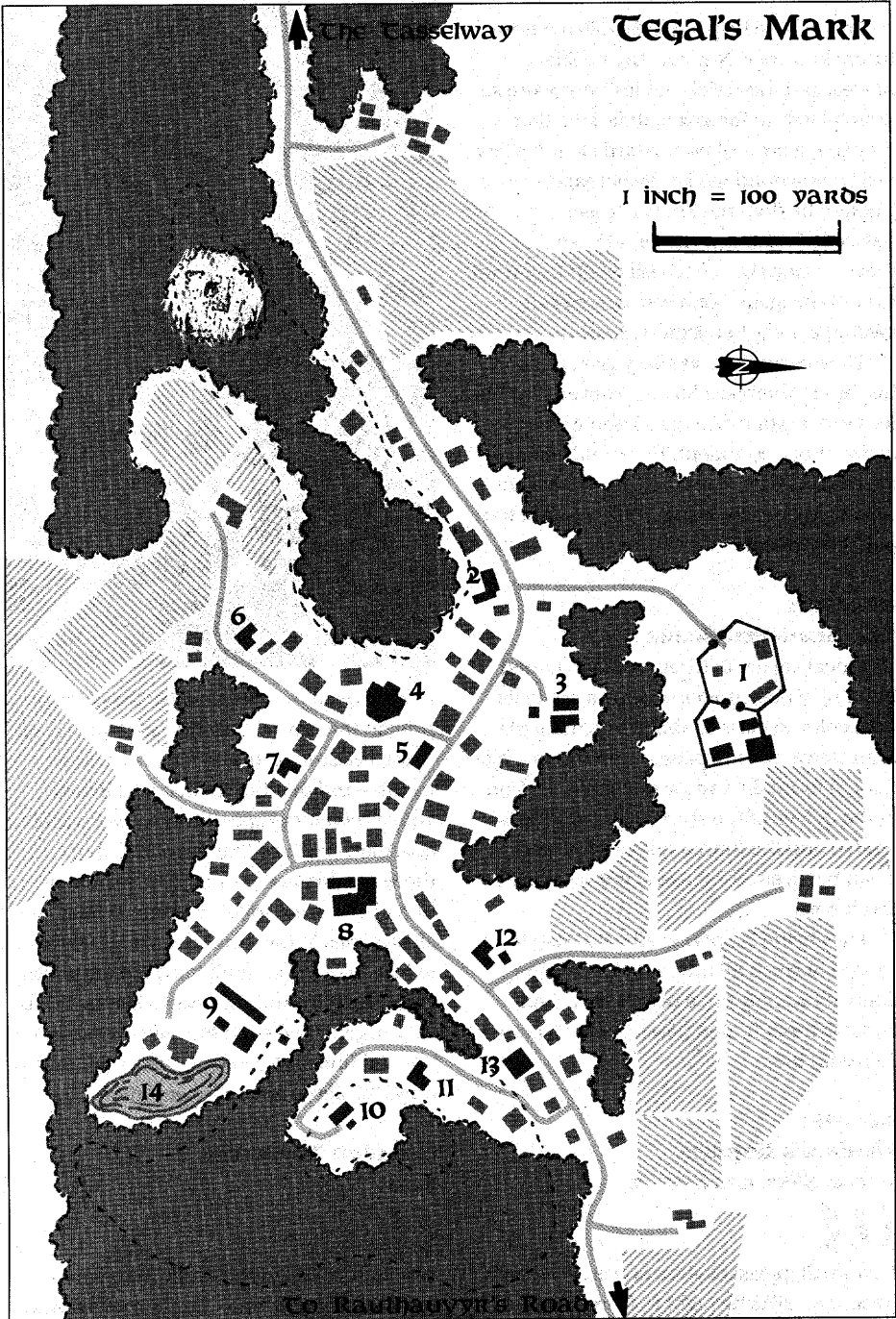
is fairly open local knowledge that its proprietor, the retired Calishite adventurer Aladium, is a smuggler and fence of stolen goods—and that he can defend himself with a *scimitar of speed* and some invisible guardian creature that once tore apart three Sembians who angrily confronted him about some missing property. Aladium always tries to hire any adventurers he sees to just “take these small things to my cousin Daljav in Selgaunt.” He always claims this is very urgent, and once the adventurers set out and find angry folk on their trail, they may well agree about the urgency. . . .

Grenden Toymaker

Toys



Grenden is a friendly, kindly man who loves to play with toys. He often gets down





Tegal's Mark Map Key

1. The Sharburg (mairshar tower, including a council hall, barracks, a stables, an armory, and dungeons)
2. Aladium's Imports (exotic imports shop)
3. The Red Wyvern Company (merchant coster headquarters)
4. The Sword and Sash (festhall)
5. The Royal Flagon (tavern)
6. Tormel Cabinetmaker (fine furniture shop)
7. Grenden Toymaker (toymaker and toy shop)
8. The Markhouse (inn)
9. Tegal Swordsmiths (weaponmaking workshop)
10. Elgaun Manor (wealthy Sembian family summer home)
11. Theremondivyr's House (wizard/sage residence)
12. Turnell's Provisions (prepared foodstuff and hardware shop)
13. The Scattered Seeds (shrine to Chauntea)
14. The Temper Pond

on his knees to show a child how this warrior jumps or how that wind-up dragon flaps its wings. He is truly happy when someone buys a toy for a child.

His shop holds many wonderful toys, including a few brass and glass imports meant for grown folk to admire, but mainly clever, sturdy wooden moving toys' of Grenden's own making. He makes everyday toys that might be sneered at in sophisticated cities, but children the Realms over would have fun playing with one should it fall into their hands.

I always buy some toys here to give away as gifts on my travels—and so should you. I have even seen the great Elminster give

some away from time to time.³ Toys of Grenden's own making are 1 cp to 6 gp; the imports go up to 212 gp for the life-sized armored knight.

The Red Wyvern Company

Caravan Shipping, Textiles, and Smelted Metals



This outpost of a Sembian merchant coster based in Ordulin imports bolts of cloth and bars of smelted metal into Tasseldale for sale to crafters. It is known for its large wagons, fast drivers, and rude employees. No one argues right of way on a road with Red Wyvern wagons except mairshars, adventurers, and fools. The drivers of such wagons tend to be handy with hurled knives.

Tegal Swordsmiths

Swordsmiths



The descendants of Tegal's original apprentices have become the largest weaponmakers in the Dales, and in nearby Sembia they have acquired an almost legendary reputation for strong, durable blades that hold their temper even in dragonfire⁴ and have a nice heft and balance. They also sell for hefty prices, and thieves are warned that all of the nine smiths and 14 apprentices working here can hold their own in a fray and have magic to prevent any passing wizard from emptying the swordworks of all its goodly blades. Moreover, some of the blades are said to be able to defend themselves.⁵

Only the smiths have the right to put Tegal's mark (the mark described at the

³*Elminster*: Listen up! Shush, blast ye! Can't a person have *any* secrets?

⁴*Elminster*: Do not go trying this, now

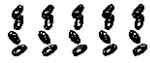
⁵*Elminster*: Coy, isn't he? Why not just say they are animated, intelligent blades? (Sigh.)



beginning of the section on this tassel) on anything, and the best Tegal smith is generally acknowledged to be Jalissa Two-hammers. She often makes blades for wizards to enchant for a cost of 300 gp and up, depending on the type of blade. She tends to be booked up for about three years in advance. The half-elven female Tegal smith Vaerdalee, I am told, is almost her equal.

Tormel Cabinetmaker

Fine Furniture



Tormel is considered perhaps the finest furnituremaker in all the Dales. Folk in Cormyr, Sembia, and even Impiltur collect his seat chests (traveler's strongchests finished luxuriantly enough to double as seating in grandly furnished rooms), armoires, and dressers. Tormel is old and semiretired now, and his son Senn is a bit of a lackwit, though he does beautiful scrollwork. As new Tormel pieces grow scarcer, the present prices of 100 gp a piece and up are sure to rise. Tormel's mark is a "T" inside a circle in the shape of a snake biting its own tail.



Turnell's Provisions

Prepared Foodstuffs and Small Hardware Oddments



Turnell's is the closest thing in the Mark to a general store. It offers prepared sauces and foods not made by the local farmers and small hardware items. Among the foodstuffs, Sembian brands, such as the Joyous Thresher and Milver's Silver Star, predominate. For the convenience of

obtaining these foreign condiments and comfort foods, customers pay about 10% over the usual prices for everything in the store. No wonder Turnell is so fat.

Tavern

The Royal Flagon



The Flagon is neither a memorable nor a well-appointed alehouse; it is just handy and well used. The low prices and giant-sized tankards here make this taproom particularly popular with adventurers and travelers, and the Flagon's "no music, no fighting" policy encourages a lot of chatter to go on and tall tales to be swapped.

Hireswords find the Flagon a good place to get hired, and wayfarers find it a good location to hear the local news, gossip, and rumors. Since she acquired a magical ring that allows her to change her appearance, the grand mairshar has even taken to dropping in here in disguise to enjoy a brew and hear what Tassadrans are saying, so adventurers are warned not to discuss illicit or dangerous things too freely.

Inn

The Markhouse



The Markhouse is a fine inn—and no wonder. With no state apartments to accommodate important visitors, the grand mairshar makes very sure that the local inn is of the best quality. By and large, she succeeds. It is not large and has not the modern touches and the absolute luxury of, say, a haughty house in Waterdeep, but for a road inn, it is of the very best.

Rooms here cost 1 gp per head per night, and stabling and everything else but



drinks beyond the evenfeast wine laid on by the house is included. Every suite has a bathtub and a bathmaid to do the scrubbing and filling, and every floor has a parlor with muffins, biscuits, and chilled berry juice always available.

I especially like the news criers. Once each hour, a comely youth runs up the stairs to each parlor and in a soft and pleasant voice recounts the latest news of events both great and small to reach Tegal's Mark. ("In Glaun, Bester's black cow has given birth again. That is her twenty-third calf, and it is a boy.") Charming.

Festhall

The Sword and Sash



There is an old Tegal joke to the effect that whenever one is looking for a mairshar in an emergency, she or he is sure to be at the Sash. This bawdy theater and escort club recently stopped serving all ale, wine, and brandy after reaching an agreement with the owners of the Royal Flagon. Only zzar is poured here now—but I am sure few of the customers have noticed. Most customers never take their eyes off the jest-roaring comedians on the stage or the almost-unclad assistants who aid those funny folk and provide pleasant escort company to those who pay when shows are not running.

The Sash is a fun but riotous place where 16 tipsy revelers once jumped into the same bed on a bet and sent it through the floor to crash onto the stage below. Of course, the spectacle they created was the funniest thing on the stage that evening.





Appendix 1:

Folk of The Dales

Folk listed herein are by no means the only important people in the Dalelands. Indeed, Volo avoided rulers and envoys as much as possible and, as is his wont, concentrated on individuals of interest to the traveler, rogue, and adventurer. Not all of them cooperated with his inquiries, so what appears here can be considered a *very* incomplete roster of names that matter in the Dales today.

With Elminster's aid, probable levels and other game statistics of these beings have been estimated and personal details added. This information is fresh, so statistics published here take precedence over earlier published data. People are listed alphabetically by their first names herein because many folk in the Dales lack surnames. (Nicknames and titles have been ignored when alphabetizing a name in this index.)

ALDUVAR SNOWBRAND (NG hm M10). Alduvar is a merchant-mage who operates Jendalar's Fine Fruits in Archenbridge, buying produce from Dale farmers and shipping it swiftly to the large cities of Cormyr and Sembia. Unbeknownst to most except senior army officers, his consort and business partner Selni Ravenhair (CG hf T2), and his fellow Swords, Alduvar is Blue Sword of Archendale. He often rides with the soldiers of the Dale cloaked in the illusionary disguise of a middle-aged, veteran horse lancer.

Through his trade ties, Alduvar works in secret to gain allies for Archendale in Sembia. He believes that Cormyr is an imperialist power and that Hillsfar and Westgate are just itching to become even worse expansionist aggressors, and that all the Dales need new allies now that the elves have gone—allies that can match the magic that the Zhentarim, the war wizards of Cormyr, and the mages of Mulmaster, Thay, and Hillsfar can hurl! He is still trying to find such allies and to build his own magical powers to protect Archendale as it needs to be protected.

A cautious, quiet man who is a very good actor and a farsighted strategist, Alduvar makes a dangerous foe and, for anyone not of Archendale, a less-than-reliable ally. En pursuit of his goals, he seizes (or has seized) odd or magical items, spellbooks, and scrolls from any adventurers foolhardy enough to brave the ruins and tombs in Arch Wood if they cross the Swords.

BELURASTRA STORMFALL (NG hf F1). Belurastra is the shrewd, soft-spoken, and keen-witted owner and senior escort of the Bold Banners feshall in Essembrá. A tall woman of striking beauty but quiet, almost shy gait and manners, Belurastra is beloved by many regular clients, who find her company an oasis of kind and quiet calm in a harsh world. For her part, Belurastra genuinely likes most folk and does her best to make them feel at ease.

For this reason and because of her farsighted investments, Belurastra rose to own the



Belurastra Stormfall



Bold Banners after its owner, the gruff old merchant Eldeburth Greensheaf, perished in the fall of Zhentil Keep. The festhall has quietly prospered under her hand and enabled her to invest in Sembian real estate and businesses. She employs several carefully anonymous agents to place and manage investments in Sembia, Cormyr, and throughout the Dales. One envious Essembran said of her, "She owns a good quarter of northern Sembia's farms and buildings, only the Sembians don't know it yet."

Belurastra likes fine (not provocative) clothing, tea and exotic liqueurs, and talking about the future of the Realms—the changes coming in the everyday lives of common folk—with intelligent, far-traveled, and discerning folk. Such talks are free to folk she likes; others must pay for her time.

Belurastra survived a Zhentilar occupation of Essembra during the Time of Troubles despite (local rumor insists) slaying a powerful Zhentarim mage. Her mastery of mercantile investments is surpassed only by her iron calm. It is believed that one of her frequent clients is no less a personage than Maalthuir of Hillsfar himself! (He is said to visit her in disguise and to have given her several magical items with which she can defend her person if attacked). She is revered by the ladies of the Banners, who regard her as a mother as well as an employer. To them alone she is "Mother Astra."

DHEREN OGRESBANE (LN hm F9). Dheren is a handsome, intelligent young officer of Archendale. He is the commander of his own Ride and secretly Red Sword of the Dale (one of its three mysterious rulers). The Red Sword is Lord Champion Commander of Archendale's armies and is responsible for equipping them, training them, deploying them, and maintaining their internal security. This last entails rooting out agents of Cormyr, Sembia, Mulmaster, Thay, Westgate, various merchant costers, the Cult of the Dragon, and the Zhentarim from the ranks.

A careful, diligent, and very observant man, Dheren takes his duties seriously and always has the Dale's forces in readiness for long sieges or the onslaught of a large invading army. Food, water, healing potions, and battle magic are hidden at the ready, and decoy troops and equipment are in constant use and movement so that no spy for another power can learn the true strength and disposition of all of the Dale's forces. Through several agents, Dheren has begun to hire adventurers as part of his duties to use them to test the vigilance and mettle of his own troops, to learn things about the armed potential of Sembia and Hillsfar, and to investigate possible traitors to the Dale—in particular, the Darkwater Brand.

ERETHUN RIVENSTAVE, Burgher of Harrowdale (NE hm M11). Burgher Erethun is a silkily polite



*Erethun Rivenstave,
Burgher of Harrowdale*

and ostentatiously wealthy wizard who dwells in a shorefront tower on the edge of Harrowdale town. None of the Harrans trust this oily, superior man, but so far they are unaware that he is an agent of Mulmaster (the source of his wealth) or that he laid the spell trap that slew his predecessor at High Blade Selfaril Uoumdolphin of Mulmaster's command.

Selfaril hopes to covertly control Harrowdale in years to come, giving Mulmaster a port in which to base a fleet in the Dragon Reach. Now that Zhentil Keep has fallen, he strives to control all access to the Moonsea in preparation for an assault on rival Hillsfar.

Selfaril is sponsoring a lot of trouble in Scardale right now to distract Sembian agents and interests from noticing what is occurring in Harrowdale—and that, according to Selfaril's plan, is the murder of the remaining six of the Seven Burghers, one by one and in as unsuspecting a manner as possible. They will then be replaced by other agents of Mulmaster under Erethun's control, and Mulman money will make them the wealthiest Harrans whenever surveys are taken.

Erethun Rivenstave has been promised overlordship of Mulmaster's holdings in the Dales, which will expand steadily until Sembia is pre-



Baffle-Chaplain Gordon Stakaria

capitated into war, whereupon agents of Mulmaster all over Sembia will strike at important citizens, treasuries, stores of magic, and the like). He is shrewd enough to know that Selfair and his Mulman co-conspirators will find it very convenient for him to die once Mulman influence is revealed so that events can all be blamed on his personal evil ambition and not any plan set in motion by Mulmaster. In light of this, he is planning to engineer his own false death and escape into a disguise he has been carefully building at the Fall of Stars.

Right now Erethun is trying to improve his own mastery of magic as much as he can without revealing his hard work to his masters. Through the Fall of Stars club, he is seeking to hire bands of unscrupulous adventurers to gain spellbooks, scrolls, and magical items by raiding the towers of certain elderly, failing mages of Sembia and by exploring ruins and elven safeholds in the Elven Court woods.

Erethun has a soft, purring voice and very quick wits. He is known to wear a *ring of the ram* and a *ring of invisibility* and to carry a *wand of polymorphing* at all times.

BATTLE-CHAPLAIN GORDON STAKARIA (CN hm P10 battleguard of Tempus). Battle-Chaplain

Stakaria is a scarred, close-mouthed veteran warrior-priest who is Swordmaster of the Shrine of Swords in Swordpoint, the fortress at Archendale in Archendale. Gordon dedicates himself to the service of the war god through the feats and faithful worship of the soldiers of Archendale and has little time for those of other faiths or devotees of Tempus who hail from elsewhere. He has seen much and is impressed by little.

In return for healing, prayers to Tempus for the war gods favor, and the like, the Swordmaster prefers to exact services from the faithful as payment. These often center on personal hardness and endurance, such as: "Climb a certain Arkhen peak in winter with only a dagger and leather armor, find a wyvern lair, and kill at least one wyvern, then bring back its head to this altar as an offering to Tempus in proof of your deed."

Feats of prowess in battle performed by those of other faiths do impress Gordon. He views them as achievements not aided by Tempus. He is deeply stirred by hearing of women who are bold and skilled in battle, as he spent much of his youth seeking a suitable mate with such qualities, only to have one swordswoman after another tragically slain in their adventures together.

GULMARIN RELDACAP (CN hm P9 Gondsman of Gond). Gulmarin, the Lord High Smith and Artificer of the House of Gond temple in Essemбра, is an arrogant, peace-loving old man who gets upset by change and even more upset by what he sees as the loud, irresponsible arrogance of the young. These are strange views in a priest of Gond, and there are increasing rumors that the complaints of faithful whom he has refused to help will result in his removal from office.

Gulmarin cares nothing for such complaints and does not believe for a moment that he will ever be demoted by any "outsider clergy." Whenever he is visited by an envoy from elsewhere in the loosely organized priesthood of Gond, he presents the envoy with the results of his latest tinkering: a small but useful invention she or he has not seen before. This brilliance of invention is Gulmarin's great secret, and the reason he does not want to be pestered by the daily concerns of the faithful—or anyone else.

Over the years, the Lord High Smith and Artificer has devised locks that require three keys; self-filling oil lamps that take in fuel from a reservoir when needed without needing tending or relighting; box jigs that allow carpenters to cut boards and posts identical to each other; sliding metal lids for tin buckets to keep water and vermin out of them; cage spits for the cooking of small fowl over a flame; and many other small items. In addition, his work has improved candle molds, dry ingredient measures, and cart suspensions.

Gulmarin's underling Caldeen resents the old man's difficult nature and neglect of his duties, since Caldeen must act for the temple without



receiving the recognition and pay of the high office. The other two priests at the temple, Oldbrin Stonelun and Targarth Snowul, recognize Gulmarin's genius and are content to keep Essembra's temple in dusty public neglect while assisting their master behind closed doors on his projects.

JALANDYL O' STARS (CG hef F11). Jalandyl is a dancer at the Drunken Lion alehouse in Archenbridge. Secretly, she is also a Harper agent who has often aided those who come to harm in Archendale. She is muscular and has old sword scars on her arms and legs but is still the most beautiful of the Lion's ladies.

The owner of the Lion, Meerkun Habalar, owes her over 20,000 gp that he has borrowed from her over the years to keep the place open. He dare not eliminate her and his debt together, because he knows the Harpers will hunt him to the far corners of Faerûn if he does. Though he and Jalandyl neither like nor trust each other, they have made an uneasy partnership that has lasted for over 20 years now—and have grown quite comfortable with insulting each other.

Jalandyl has practiced throwing items in the tavern for years and is skilled in the use of the sling thrown daggers, and the bolas. She has a +4 attack bonus with any of these weapons in the taproom of the Lion and a +2 bonus elsewhere. She must be up on a table to have room to use the bola. Her bola (weight 2, size M, type B, speed factor 8, damage 1d3/1d2) can bring down a man-sized target. When the bola successfully strikes, the victim is held fast and must take a round to make a Strength ability check in order to get free. Failure means the bola is still holding fast.

A successful called shot attack to the legs entangles a victim, who must make a Dexterity ability check to stay standing; this check is at a -3 penalty if the victim was moving. A so-entangled victim stops moving. A successful called shot to the arms prevents weapon and shield use (Strength check at a -2 penalty), and a successful called shot to the head strangles the victim (unless a great helm or closed-face helm is worn). This causes an additional 1d3 points of damage per round the first round of contact and an additional 1d3 points every round thereafter until the bola is removed.

Jalandyl knows a lot about the mining delves and mountain trails one can reach from the head of Archendale and sells quite good maps of some of these sites, though she warns that monsters in and near them are increasing in numbers. Jalandyl and Jalia of the Old Stonebows Inn know each other well (including each other's secret professions) and both spy for and aid each other habitually. A Sembian merchant who once tried to kidnap Jalandyl for her knowledge of the mountains was attacked by most of the Old Stonebows inn staff—and when he fled, he found a militia troop hot on his heels!



*Lord High Smith and Artificer
Gulmarin Reldacap*

JALIA MOSSGREEN (CG hf F12). Jalia is a grizzled old semiretired warrior of broad shoulders, broad hips, and even broader humor. She has a harsh voice, a laugh that is heard often in Archenbridge, and an impressive collection of battle scars.

Owner and proprietress of the Old Stonebows Inn in Archenbridge, Jalia donates food, mintwater, and ale to all militia exercises in the Dale—and in fact supervises the militia. Her position as Black Sword of Archendale (one of its three mysterious co-rulers) is an open secret among Arkhenfolk. Most people in Archendale at least know that to get word to the Swords, one seeks out "the old laughing lady" at the best inn in Archenbridge.

Jalia has a wide selection of friends, has been known to quietly aid elves, Harpers (including Jalandyl O' Stars), and war wizards of Cormyr. She wears some sort of small magical token that enables her to call on an archmage for aid—but tales differ as to just which wizard she can summon.

Always open to new viewpoints and friendships with all manner of strange folk from far places, Jalia brings the news of distant places to insular, arrogant Archendale and gives her co-



Rhannon Manycoats

rulers (see Alduvar and Dheren) an understanding of motives, current events, and what might soon befall in the wider world that they would never be able to gain otherwise. The other two Swords revere her as "the truly wise one amongst us" and overlook her liaisons with handsome men who for all they know may well serve the darkest of Archendale's foes.

RHANNON MANYCOATS (NG hf T8). Rhannon is a retired thief who now runs the Hitching Post store in Essembra. She is short, spry, and stout, and looks like a well-muscled lady of 60 or so winters. She usually pads barefoot around her shop in what looks like several old Sembian carpets sewn together into a shapeless patchwork dress and wears her gray hair pulled back into a back-of-the-knees-length braid.

Rhannon's manner is always calmly sardonic. She knows everything that happens in town, seems to like living alone, and charges high prices, especially to folk not of the Dale—who face an extra 20% markup atop her usual 10% surcharge. She is known as "Ran" to everyone in Battledale, and despite her brisk coolness is well-liked. She has a habit of snooping out people's doings and therefore their needs and hobbies and then bringing in just the items

they need. When they wander in to the Post, they then find just what they wanted, no matter how obscure or exotic it might be.

Rhannon was born in Westgate, grew up on various merchant ships on the Inner Sea waves, and when on her own; became a thief of the Red Blades pirate band. She operated onshore throughout Sembia, Chessenta, and Impiltur to learn what cargo would be sailing where so that her fellow dastards could strike unerringly at the most valuable ships. She retired from this life when one such treasure turned out to be a wizard's menagerie and it was set loose by its furious owner to hunt down and slay every last Red Blade.

Rhannon is, she believes, the sole survivor of this onslaught. Her quick and well-placed strikes slew gargoyles, trained stirges, oozes, and worse in a year-long flight that took her halfway to Amn before she found herself writhing in dying agony impaled on the talons of a flying golem on her way back to face the wizard. Her captor, the archmage Saelanth of Telflamm, thought her defenseless and decided to toy with his dying captive. Somehow, in a manner Rhannon refuses to discuss, she slew him, found potions to heal herself with, and fled from his tower with certain unspecified items of magic. In an effort to regain these lost items, Saelanth's apprentices are searching for Rhannon, but their master had turned them into less-than-human, tentacle-faced things, and they cannot operate freely in civilized territory.

Needless to say, this experience changed Rhannon's previous self-serving outlook on life profoundly. She used some of her stolen magic to appear older and fatter and, in this guise, retired to a life of building the settlement around her into a gigantic network of observers that report unusual visitors and things to her. Her knowledge of shipping on the Sea of Fallen Stars has allowed her to prosper in the procurement of cheap goods and unusual wares, and she has been careful to befriend the war chancellor of Essembra, who regards her as his most useful citizen. He will come to her aid if she blows a certain horn.

Rhannon is much younger than she appears; she has actually not seen more than 36 winters. She can defend herself with many hidden items of magic, including the following known pieces: a *scarab of scintillating auras* (see Appendix II) that conceals all alignment and magical emanations on her shop and person, a *ring of the ram*, a *ring of flying* (identical in powers to *wings of flying*), a *scarab vs. golems* (effective against any sort of golem), a *wand of magic missiles*, at least two spheres of *iron bands of Bilarro*, a *torc of regeneration* (equal in effects to a *ring of regeneration*), a *belt of spell turning* (equivalent to a *ring of spell turning*), and a *sword of dancing*. She actually has two *scarabs of scintillating auras*: one she wears, and one that is hidden near the center of the main room of the Hitching Post.



Rhannon also has at least three golems (one each of bone, stone, and iron) standing ready to defend her in her shop. They automatically attack—until the target is destroyed or flees—anyone who unleashes any sort of spell within the walls of the Post unless Rhannon specifically commands them not to.

Rhannon is customarily armed with a selection of sleep-poisoned daggers that she wears on forearm and thigh sheaths, concealed under her dress. She is extremely adept at throwing these. (She practices throwing them for at least an hour every day.) She should be considered to have +3 attack bonus when throwing them when inside her familiar shop and +2 bonus when throwing them anywhere else.

RHAUNTIDES (CG hm M14). The Sage of Deepingdale, Rhauntides, is a cultured man who devotes himself to the study of human and elven magic, specifically to its present development and the history of its use and users in the past. In this, his expertise is such that Vangerdahast and the Harpers both consult him.

For the past 30 years he has dwelt in a tower of his own making in Highmoon, the capital of Deepingdale, where he trains his beloved wife and intended successor as Loremaster of Magic to the Realms and Guardian Mage of Deepingdale. His wife is the soft-spoken and beautiful Shaunil Tharm (CG hf M9), an impish, tall, lithe mage of skill who was originally born in Amn whose hair sweeps the ground behind her. Shaunil much enjoys drifting around the skies of Deepingdale by night, flying with a bottle of elverquists in one hand and her lord at her side, taking in the beauties of the Dale below and watching the doings of its beasts and folk.

Rhauntides is tall and thin, and has piercing blue eyes, handsome features, and a small, pointed white beard. His movements are still smooth and supple, and his dark, shoulder-length hair is going white at the temples. He is sometimes mistaken for Khelben Arunsun of Waterdeep by folk who have never actually seen either mage close up.

Where once Rhauntides was driven by his hunger to learn as many new spells as he could find as fast as possible, now he revels in learning and fixing in his mind every last nuance and variant of all the known spells. Because of his depth of learning, in spell battle he is a fearsome foe: He can never be surprised by any combination or application of magic. His amusements center on going to Candlekeep and various mage fairs in disguise and humbling overly arrogant mages or sages by besting them with his knowledge of and power over magic.

Rhauntides's past adventuring prowess gained him not only fabulous wealth and magic but a magical item of fearsome power: the *belt of stars* (see Appendix II). He is said to have cav-

erns full of gems and coins, and he is the only known mage who can command 14 golems into battle at once!

Rhauntides is trying to bring his wife to a greater raw mastery of magic than he has by keeping her reliance on items to a minimum and her roster of learned spells spare and useful. She understands and accepts these restrictions for the time being, and they share a deep, unshakable love.

Thrice the elves of Evermeet have tried to get Rhauntides to move to their realm, ostensibly so that he could have and raise children in carefree surroundings but really to gain his knowledge and spell mastery as one of their resources. Each time he has politely refused the invitation, but as a token of his respect for the offer, he has on each occasion brought a spellbook to Queen Amlaruil Moonflower in Evermeet, filling her courtiers with astonishment and fear due to his effortless and undetected passage through all the elven wards and magical defenses.

LIGHT OF LATHANDER MORRMMASTER

STELLAGA BRIGHTSTAR (LG hef C12 of Lathander). Stellaga is a tall, slender, soft-spoken natural diplomat who is high priestess of the



*Light of Lathander
Mormmaster Stellaga Brightstar*



Glory of the Morning temple in Archenbridge. She is very dedicated to her work, which she sees to be encouraging Arkhenfolk to build things, take up hobbies, and start new businesses or services through gentle, practical encouragement and the freely donated assistance of temple workers. Stellaga has little opportunity to indulge her secret passions: dancing, adventuring, and having whirlwind romances with people from far lands.

Stellaga rarely allows herself to step out of her role as a kind, gentle leader, but when she does, watch out! Elminster tells an amusing tale about one swordsmen, Belorn "Battleaxe" the Barbarian, who spent an exhausting night trying to escort both Stellaga and Jalia Mossgreen through the gardens of Halanthaver House at a party thrown by the Arkhen clan of that name at their manor on River Way in Archenbridge. The two ladies almost came to serious blows over Belorn, and he bore bruises for months afterward from when he foolishly tried to "protect them from themselves."

HIGH HARVESTMASTER THALIACH MINDOGAR (NG hm C8 of Chauntea). Thaliach is an ambitious, energetic, young priest who commands the faithful of the Grain Goddess in Archendale as leader of the Bounty of the Goddess temple there. Seeing the safe, unexciting faith of Chauntea in decline in a town of ambitious investors and entrepreneurs, Thaliach decided to seize influence here by outdoing everyone else at investments. He used the temple coffers to build an impressive and ever-expanding network of subsidiary businesses; trade alliances; favors owed; tithes turned to trade in Sembia, Cormyr, and farther afield; and temple agents who travel Sembia, the Dales, and the wider Dragon Reach lands looking for business opportunities, coming surpluses and shortages, and other information that can be turned to trade advantages.

A rather sickly, slim fanatic, Thaliach rarely leaves the inner rooms of his temple, spending his time in private rituals to Chauntea, collecting and poring over maps of all Faerûn (his personal hobby), and issuing orders or discussing strategies for furthering the powers of his burgeoing trade empire. In Elminster's opinion, Thaliach's network is just growing large enough to be noticed by the powerful merchants of Sembia and Westgate—and be subsequently crushed. Interesting times lie ahead for the temple and for the security of Archendale, the Old Mage believes, for in his words: "While the Swords worry about the rot in the Darkwater Brand, the true weakness at the heart of Archendale sits at a map table in the inner sanctum of the house of Chauntea in Archenbridge and fancies himself a behind-the-scenes world power."

VZOUN DAKKER (LE hm T12): Vzoun is a foul-tempered old man ruled by his grudges, feuds, and imagined foes. Frustrated in his ambitions to become a Sembian lord and a powerful Zhentarim agent, he now works to bring about the downfall of both the Dark Network and the realm of merchants.

Head of the Dakker family (an old, wealthy, and influential Arkhen clan), Vzoun owns the Darkwater Brand, his family's merchant coster, which has bases in Archenbridge, Hillsfar, and Ordulin. Under cover of trading fresh produce and low-grade Arkhen ores for weaponry and other metalwork shipped out of Glistar, Melvaunt, and Thentia, Vzoun runs a flourishing smuggling business and a small but lucrative slaving trade specializing in wastrel offspring of rich Sembian merchants and revealed Zhentarim agents that various folk want to have just quietly disappear without any messy murders.

A dealer in poisons and sleeping potions, Vzoun sees spies everywhere and is especially afraid of wizards using magic to discover his illicit activities. He is careful not to break any laws in Archendale, where he is, as one Arkhen citizen put it, "respected from a safe distance."

YANDRIN THORL (CN hm M17). Yandrin is a quiet but mighty wizard who made it clear to ambitious folk in Archendale, Cormyr, and Sembia that he would not tolerate attempts to conquer the High Dale. He said he would respond to such actions by unleashing "a rain of meteor swarms" on communities in any offending country. His demonstration reduced a forested pirate isle in the Sea of Fallen Stars to melted rock and ashes.

Yandrin lives in a modest-looking, three-story, round, thin mage's tower located just beyond the accepted boundaries of Highmoon next to the trail leading to the Dancing Place. Visitors to his home are greeted by what is apparently some form of intelligent, permanent *unseen servant* and asked by a permanent *magic mouth* to write down their business in a musty volume and then leave. A sign over the book tells visitors that if Yandrin thinks the matter is important enough, he gets back to the visitors within three days. If he does not, then the visitors should consider the matter closed. People who try to damage or sneak onto Yandrin's property usually find themselves teleported suddenly to a distant mountain crag in the Thunder Peaks sans their clothes and equipment.

No one is sure what magical resources Yandrin has to call upon, but it is certain that they are vast. Elminster and he play talis card games once a year every year on the same date for control that year of an unspecified relic or artifact of great power.



Appendix II:

Dales Magic



he Dalelands hold much magic that Volo has not seen, notably what rests in Shadowdale in the care of Elminster, Storm Silverhand, and the ghostly Syluné; what lies hidden in the ruins of Zhentil Keep; and what has not yet been taken from monster-haunted Myth Drannor. Elminster refused to elaborate on what might be found in these places, but reminded us of a fourth locale overlooked by most: the holdings of the many retired adventurers and rich Sembians who dwell in manor houses west of Essembra in Battledale, hidden among their forests and gardens down a labyrinth of twisting, unposted lanes.

He did agree to furnish information on the magic Volo mentions directly, and here it is. The Old Mage himself warns that what you read here may be incomplete and is no substitute for actual instruction in how to use an item by someone else who has used it. He further cautions that openly possessing or seeking either *Orosul's scepter* or the *Taking Bone* probably invites attacks from beings wanting to gain these items for themselves—and that they will no doubt strike early, brutally, and often.

Magical Items

The Belt of Stars

XP Value: Not applicable (cannot be made)

GP Value: 400,000

This unique item was made by Azuth before he achieved godhood, and exists

only at his pleasure. He can destroy it with a thought if it is misused. Both he and Mystra would prefer to see it at work for good in Faerûn by allowing a responsible mage to have power enough to ignore the attacks of lesser mages and pursue worthy ends. When it is not so used, Mystra strips it away, leaving power-hungry or selfish mages bereft of its aid at a crucial moment.

The *belt of stars* resembles a chain of *ioun stones* and appears to be a string of glowing gems that float in midair by themselves. The *belt of stars* is composed of 18 identical star sapphires. The *belt* has the following properties:

- The wearer of the *belt* can *detect magic* and *detect invisibility* in creatures and objects automatically by sight.
- The wearer of the *belt* can *fly* (similar to the 3rd-level wizard spell *fly*) once per day for up to one continuous turn at a time.
- The wearer of the *belt* can cast all spells and launch all known powers of personally carried magical items by silent force of will alone.
- The *belt* wearer can launch more than one spell in a round, up to the limits imposed by the number of gems in the *belt*. Each gem in the *belt* allows the wearer to cast one extra spell of a set level once per eight hours. The *belt* has two stones that allow casting of an additional 1st level spell, two that allow casting of a 2nd level spell, and so on. Thus, technically, an archmage could let loose with 19 spells in a round (two each of 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, and



9th level and another memorized spell of any level). After this round, however, the belt could allow the casting of no "extra" spells for eight hours.

Extra spells cast through the auspices of the *belt* may be selected on the spot without prior memorization or the requirement of material components, but they must be ones that the *belt* wearer has studied and cast at least three times previously, and they must be of a level that the wearer can ordinarily wield. In other words, if a *belt* wearer can think of a particular spell she or he has used before, the *belt* allows him or her to hurl it as if she or he memorized it. Such spells also cannot imbue other magical items or people with permanent magical effects. (In other words, the gem powers of the *belt* cannot be used to cheaply create magical items or gift the wearing mage

with extra permanent magical powers.) Such spells cannot also normally require a unique material component.

Belt gems struck by *dispel magic* spells do not operate for the eight hours, regardless of whether their powers have been called upon or not. A *dispel magic* spell automatically affects a single *belt* gem that is randomly chosen unless the caster is able to touch a particular gem, in which case that gem is affected. Other spells (including such destructive spells as *disintegrate*) cast specifically at the *belt* — not just at the mage wearing the *belt of stars* — are absorbed harmlessly by the gems. The gems also seem impervious to all physical attacks.

Using the gem powers of the *belt of stars* does not stop any of its other powers from functioning at the same time.



Blood of Lathander

This unique minor artifact of Lathander consists of four drops of the god's blood imprisoned in an oval, fist-sized piece of amber.

History

Centuries ago Mystra selected the archmage Sammaster as one of her Chosen. Overwhelmed by the power invested in him, he developed delusions of godhood and set himself up as a seer. His teachings that "dead dragons shall rule the world entire" started the Cult of the Dragon. Sammaster and the cultists then set out to fulfill this prophecy by creating dracoliches and serving them by bringing them treasure.

The Harpers tracked down the corrupted archmage and destroyed many of his followers. Unable to defeat one of Mystra's Chosen, Harper priests of the Morninglord called upon their god. An avatar of Lathander appeared and challenged Mystra's fallen Chosen to battle, outraged by the thought of the unchanging eternity of tyranny the archmage promised. The Morninglord's avatar destroyed Sammaster, but not before the wizard delivered a severe wound. (Sammaster was capable of attacking the deity successfully due to his investiture with some of Mystra's divine essence.)

Four drops of Lathander's blood fell to the ground, where they were gathered up by a priest of the Morninglord from the village of Hap and placed in an amber flask for safe-keeping. Their magical nature fused the flask into a seamless form. During the battle, many Harpers were slain as well as most of the cultists, and in the confusion the newly created relic was largely overlooked. It has languished ever since in Hap, forgotten by most of Lathander's clergy.

Campaign Use

The *Blood of Lathander* currently resides within Lathander's Open Hand, a small temple to the Morninglord located in the tiny village of Hap in Battledale. The energetic new priestess of that temple, Dawnmaster Cathalandra Dovaer, employs the *Blood* to aid adventurers active in the area in quests favored by the Morninglord. If the Morninglord determines the artifact is needed elsewhere, the PCs might be called upon to escort the *Blood* to another site and protect it against the attacks of groups such as the Cult of the Dragon.

Powers

Constant. The *Blood* flies (usually floating motionless) and glows with a rosy radiance at Lathander's will. The glow within the amber varies at the pleasure of the god, from gentle to near-blinding. If it pleases Lathander to do so, the *Blood* can signal his approval or disapproval by pulsing in irregular flashes when a priest of the Morninglord asks a question of him or takes a particular action in its presence.

Invoked. In the hands of a priest or paladin of Lathander only, the artifact can *cure critical wounds* four times a day and *raise dead* once a day. Once every second day it can *regenerate* a lost limb or organ and bestow *restoration* as the spell.

To call on its powers, the priest or paladin must touch the *Blood*. Thereafter it flies about in response to his or her will and must be directed to touch a being and function for the healing powers to act on that being. If two of Lathander's faithful strive against each other to control the *Blood*, it hangs motionless.

The *Blood of Lathander* can also *detect lie*, *identify*, or positively confirm a devotion to Lathander in a being who claims to worship the Morninglord when a priest (only) of Lathander holds it, touches it to a



being or item, and wills it to do one of these things.

Curse. If handled or moved by someone not of the Morninglord's faith, the *Blood of Lathander* pulses in extremely bright, irregular flashes (brighter than a *continual light* spell) designed to make its carrier release it or to draw attention to its presence. If it is carried about by such a being, the bearer's dreams are haunted by images of slowly dripping blood—drops of blood that turn to fire and blaze away before they strike the ground. If a nonworshiper of Lathander continues to carry it for more than three days, it begins blazing with a bright light and heating up like metal affected by a *heat metal* spell; however, once it reaches searing heat in the third round, it stays that hot until discarded by the unauthorized bearer, whereupon it returns to ambient temperature in three rounds.

Suggested Means of Destruction

If the amber is broken, the divine blood blazes away into nothingness instantly. It cannot be captured by a wizard or alchemist.

- The amber must be crushed in the jaws of the eldest surviving dracolich of the Realms.
- The amber must be placed within a dead magic area for 99 years, whereupon it disintegrates.
- The amber must be crushed beneath the boot of an avatar of Talos or in the fist of the reigning god of the dead.

The Crown of Dracandros

XP Value: 12,000

GP Value: 25,000

This item is thought to be unique to Red Wizards. The only known example of its

type was first encountered in the possession of Dracandros of the Crimson, foe to the sellsword Alias of Westgate and the saurian paladin Dragonbait. However, it is thought that he did not invent it himself, but rather acquired it through his own devious means from another Red Wizard before being banished from Thay.

A *crown of Dracandros* is not a crown that one wears at all. It gets its name because it is an electrum circlet large enough to go around the waist of most humanoids that when activated turns slowly as it floats in midair, chiming softly as small motes of light play about it. These radiances resemble gems on and above the circlet, giving it an appearance akin to the construction of many royal crowns.

Such a *crown* has a number of powers that operate constantly in a 90-foot-spherical-range:

- It can *detect invisibility* in creatures and items by chiming. An alerted being who touches the circlet can then see such things as if they were outlined in bright red auras
- It can *detect magic* by chiming and turning a vivid blue. This detection occurs only when a spell or magical item discharge is actually released or moves into range of the *crown* while active. Passive defensive magic (such as *rings of protection* and magical armor) remain undetected by this ability unless they have a charged power that is used.

When activated by touch and silent command, such a *crown* acts as follows: Each round, it has a 1 in 6 chance of emitting one of the following magical effects. Roll 1d6; on a 1, an effect is emitted. Roll 1d12 to determine which effect occurs. All effects are identical to the wizard spells of the same name cast by a 20th-level mage.



These unleashed effects take place in a random direction wherever there is sufficient open space for them to manifest 1d20+2x10 feet distant from the *crown*.

| 1d12 | 1d12 | | |
|------|-----------------------|------|--------------------------------|
| Roll | Effect | Roll | Effect |
| 1 | <i>Flaming sphere</i> | 7 | <i>Chain lightning</i> |
| 2 | <i>Web</i> | 8 | <i>Guards and wards</i> |
| 3 | <i>Color spray</i> | 9 | <i>Fireball</i> |
| 4 | <i>Death fog</i> | 10 | <i>Cloudkill</i> |
| 5 | <i>Cone of cold</i> | 11 | <i>Animate dead</i> |
| 6 | <i>Dispel magic</i> | 12 | <i>Evard's black tentacles</i> |

Such *crowns* are very effective at defending an area the owner does not want anyone to enter. Once activated, the effects harm everyone, even the activator of the *crown*. They can only be ended by a *crown's* owner reaching and grasping the *crown* and willing it to shut down by imagining or speaking the *crown's* command word or phrase.

The making of all similar sorts of these *crowns* is an extremely evil act known to involve the death of a living being who possesses spellcasting abilities or has natural spell-like powers, the destruction of an operable magical item with more than one power, and the use of a scroll of each spell that the finished *crown* can cast or emit. It is rumored that certain senior Red Wizards have developed *crowns* that emit various sorts of *shadow monsters*.

Orosul's Scepter

XP Value: Not applicable (can no longer be made)

GP Value: 20,000

Only few specimens of this special type of Netherese power scepters are known to exist. They are known by the name of *Orosul's scepter* because the wizard of that name at one time possessed half of one and had made a study of them. (Undoubt-

edly they were called by another name in Netherese times.)

Each *Orosul's scepter* takes the form of a metal bar about as long as a small human's forearm with a bulbous metal ball at either end that is faceted like a gem. These *scepters* are made in two halves that join at the center of the bar when touched together. They are always active when fused and whole and exhibit only two powers when separate: The faceted end glows ruby-red when touched to items or brought into areas bearing a *dweomer*, and the entire half-*scepter* glows with a dull blue-green radiance equivalent to a *faerie fire* when within about a mile of its matching half. In the case of the *detect magic* ability the intensity of the red glow is roughly equivalent to the strength of the encountered magic.

Individual *Orosul's scepter* halves cannot be mated to halves made as part of another *Orosul's scepter*. An active, whole *Orosul's scepter* can restore magical energy to items that use charges. It restores one charge in the first hour of continual contact plus one charge every fourth hour thereafter.

Hit points can also be healed by the *scepter* at the same rate as charges are bestowed. Continual contact with the bare skin of the being to be healed is necessary for it to occur. The *scepter*-wielder need not actively hold it in a hand during this time, so long as skin contact is made with the target chosen to be healed (which need not be the *scepter*-wielder, who activates the *scepter's* abilities with a command word). Rather than healing hit points, the *scepter* - wielder can choose to make the *scepter* act to regenerate lost limbs, organs, and the like, or close gaping wounds or smooth away mutilations and scars. Such damage is regenerated in



from one day to one tenday (Faerûnian week) of constant contact.

Every *Orosul's scepter* also has the power to unleash a blasting spell once every fourth round if grasped and ordered to. Most of these spells are fire- or lightning-related, but the precise magic unleashed by each *scepter* can only be determined by using it.

Orosul's scepters themselves do not have or use charges, and there seems to be no limit to their powers, but legends speak of *scepters* failing when taken underground away from the sun for long periods or when moved more one locale to another.

Scarab of Scintillating Auras

XP Value: 4,000

GP Value: 8,000

These rare items appear to be normal works of adornment and can even function when concealed under or stitched into clothing. They emit a blinding chaos of flashing, many-hued magical radiances that are only visible to beings trying to magically discern the alignment of their wearers or the presence of enchantments. They continuously conceal the presence and nature of all such auras within a 90-foot-radius sphere of themselves. The sphere is *not* broken by barriers that foil normal vision. This protection is automatic and cannot be turned off by the *scarab* wearer.

A *scarab of scintillating auras* does have one power that is under the wearer's control: It can turn itself and its wearer *invisible* (as per the 2nd-level *invisibility* wizard spell) once a day when it is grasped and ordered. Once the wearer becomes visible again, a full day must pass from the resumption of visibility before the *scarab's invisibility* power can work again.

The Shattered Sword

XP Value: Not applicable (cannot be made)

GP Value: 8,000 per piece (100,000 if intact)

Accidentally broken and magically transformed during a long-ago, titanic spell battle between the elven Princess of Deepingdale and the Twelve Dancing Wizards who attacked her, this blade has broken into nine pieces. Though they adhere to each other if joined together in the proper order, the original powers of the sword have been lost forever, and combining the pieces gives the wielder no special additional powers.

Some would say that more magic than the nine shards bestow individually is unnecessary, for mere possession of a piece conveys a useful magical power even in nonwizards. The listed spell-like effects can be cast by the bearer without touching the blade, employing spell components, or saying anything. All magic is unleashed by silent act of will alone. The spell-like effects take effect as if cast by a mage of 12th level unless the bearer is already a wizard of higher level, in which case his or her level is used instead. In order from the back of the blade to its tip, the pieces and their powers are:

1. **Hilt:** The bearer can cast *detect magic*, *jump*, *mending*, and *ESP* once each per day.
2. **Quillons:** The bearer gains +2 on all saving throws vs. spell, spell-like powers, and magical item effects.
3. **Blade Base (Thickest Blade Section):** The bearer can cast *dispel magic* once per day.
4. **Motto (Section Bearing the Words "Strike True" in Elvish):** The bearer can cast *identify* once a day when the



bearer is touching a blade section to an item. The bearer does not temporarily lose any Constitution points or experience fatigue from this process.

5. **Flat (Blade Section):** The bearer can unleash *chain lightning* once per day.
6. **Run (Blade Section):** The bearer is somewhat protected against all breath weapons and gases. The bearer receives a +2 bonus on all saving throws relating to breath weapons and gases, and all damage taken from these is lessened by 8 points per round. If this reduces the damage to zero or below, no damage results.
7. **Strike (Blade Section):** The bearer gains immunity to all gaze attacks.
8. **Fore (Blade Section):** The bearer gains the saving throws of a mage of the same level as his or her own if they are more advantageous than his or her own. If the bearer is already a wizard, while in possession of the fore she or he effectively gains a level for purposes of making saving throws and memorizing and casting spells. If the fore leaves the possession of such a bearer the extra spells are forgotten and lost instantly.
9. **Tip (Blade Section):** The bearer gains a +6 attack and damage bonus on any one attack of any sort per day. The attack may be physical (melee or missile), used to aim a magical item, made through a spell, used to make a successful touch to have magic take effect, or even used to make a called shot.

The whereabouts of the nine pieces of the Shattered Sword are a matter of legend and conjecture, but the most likely locations are: somewhere in Undermountain beneath Waterdeep; in Myth Drannor; in the keeping of the Harpers, hidden somewhere in Twilight Hall in Berdusk;

somewhere in one of the former royal holdings in Tethyr; in Silverymoon; lost somewhere in the Ring's Forest in central Cormyr; or hidden somewhere in the Citadel of the Raven. One piece is known to be in the refuge at the other end of the *gate* in Wright's Ferry in Featherdale. Finally, the tip was stolen from Everlund about 60 winters ago by unknown hands, and its present whereabouts are a complete mystery.

The Talking Bone

XP Value: 1,000

GP Value: 2,000

The *Talking Bone* appears to be an unremarkable leg bone from some herd animal. It radiates no aura of magic, but it allows anyone grasping it to speak with the orc god Gruumsh or to any other being that the grasper has touched with the bone at some previous time, as long as that being is on the same plane of existence as the grasper. The *Bone* affords unlimited, two-way, audio-only communication. Its quality is fine enough for distinct voices, tones, and mimicry to be recognized. The *Bone* also transmits sounds audible around the speakers; however, it can, if desired, be used at a whisper, and the sound from its other end will come out as quietly.

The *Talking Bone* is consecrated to Gruumsh and by his will resists all attempts to dispel its powers or to harm it. It automatically succeeds at all item saving throws and remains unaffected even by direct, deliberate attacks. Gruumsh prefers that it be in the possession of an orc shaman of his faith and sends orc champions to regain it if some other possesses it. (Note that these champions are guided to the rough location of the *Bone*, but not unerringly to its presence or to the being possessing it.)



Spells

6th-Level Priest Spell

Dance of The Fallen

(Evocation, Necromantic)

Sphere: Guardian, Necromantic

Range: 30 yards

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 3 rounds/level

Casting Time: 9

Area of Effect: 5-foot- to 60-foot-diameter cylinder that is 5 to 20 feet high

Saving Throw: Special

Dance of the fallen is used to capture, disarm, or force to flee or surrender foes to whom the caster has no wish to do lasting harm. A *dance of the fallen* calls up a whirling cloud of severed limbs, some bony and some still bearing flesh, but all bloodless. These remains are summoned from recent battlefields, and they rotate at high

speed around a central point, forming an immobile barrier. The plane of rotation of the body parts can be horizontal, vertical, or any angle in between the two. The area of effect of *dance of the fallen* is set mentally by the caster upon casting the spell (from as little as a 5-foot-diameter cylinder 5 feet tall or thick to as large as a 60-foot-diameter cylinder 20 feet tall or thick) and cannot be altered thereafter.

Any creature trying to pass through the barrier suffers 4d6 points of damage and must make a Constitution check to avoid being struck senseless. All fragile worn or carried items must make a successful item saving throw vs. crushing blow or be destroyed. Beings who insist on trying to cross through the *dance of the fallen* and are not rendered immediately unconscious take 1d3+2 rounds to cross the area of effect and must take damage and make Constitution checks each round.

Beings within the barrier's area of effect when it forms must make a saving throw vs. spell. If the saving throw succeeds, they escape the barrier by the most direct route and suffer no damage. If the saving throw fails, they suffer the full damage of the spell. Any other intended action than leaving the area when the barrier is formed invites the full effects of the spell.

Only 25% of the damage done by *dance of the fallen* is permanent; the rest is temporary and returns after 1d4 hours are spent resting. Beings reduced to 0 hit points or below by this spell are rendered unconscious and ejected from the area of effect. They regain consciousness in 1d6 turns or more rapidly (1d6 rounds) if a successful healing proficiency check is made upon them. The cloud of limbs remains until the spell expires and then fades silently away. It can also be dismissed instantly by the caster at any time.

The material component of this spell is a handful of bone shards or hair of any type.



Appendix III: Index

The appendices and map keys of this guide-book are indexed here.

Only unusual river names appearing in the text are indexed. Military units and organizations that are arms of government are not indexed. Entries for the Zhentarim have been included under Zhentil Keep. Under the "Settlements" heading only places mentioned in the text that do not have their own guide-book entries appear unless an alternate former or nickname is being referenced.

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