

# ATLAS OF THE NORWOLD REGION

The lands to the far north of civilization is a land of constant warfare and power struggles between the nobility. Once united as the Kingdom of Norwold, with the disappearance of Alphatia, the region's former king was unable to hold onto the reins of power. Now the land is dotted with hundreds of small kingdoms, counties, baronies, and other type of dominions.

The realms of Norwold follow the old practice of feudalism, with the local lord controlling all aspects of life within the dominion. All the rest are merely peasants who toll at their leader's whims. Some are lucky and have benevolent rulers, while others are treated no better than slaves by the tyrants who hold the crown.

The level of education in Norwold varies greatly, as do the cultures of the inhabitants. Those who colonized from Alphatia tend to be literate, as do the people conquered by the Heldannic Knights (thanks to their forced education of the ways of Vanya). Those of Thyatian descent are semi-literate, while the native Antalian people are mainly uneducated.

Norwold is a land where the title of nobility hangs loosely on anyone with power. Rulers rise and fall constantly, and their power reaches only as far as their armies can reach. Alliances are made as lesser nobles swear fealty to more powerful ones, only to find independence once their liege is overthrown.

Many adventurers with money and time to spare try to carve out their own dominions within the valleys of Norwold, only to have another self-proclaimed noble take it away with his own army. Those with patience enough to try again, or those capable enough of holding their own can quickly forge a dominion that will last years. Norwold is the place where the bold and daring can hope to carve out a nation of their own.

Encompassing all the northeastern area of the continent of Brun, Norwold stretches from the frozen Arctic Ocean all the way south to the Mengul Mountains. The beach along the Alphatian Sea delineates the Eastern margin, while the imposing Icereach Range cuts off western Norwold from the rest of the world.

## Correspondents for Norwold

Here is our list of correspondents

### ***Arcadius***

This Traladaran mage is the Baron of Arcadia, a remote and wild dominion in northern Norwold. The solitary wizard tells us about his barony (and himself) in the description of Arcadia.

### ***Christopher Dove***

Formerly an explorer and archeologist renowned in all the nations of the Old World, Christopher Dove has spent the last ten years teaching Archeology and Ancient History at the Univeristy of Corun in Corunglain (Darokin). He has published famous essays on the Nithian and Milenian civilizations, and has made many interesting discoveries in the past years, the last one being the finding of the Tomb of Nennaya-Sherat.

Now in his late fifties, this scholarly and well experienced fellow has agreed to join our cadre of correspondents on behalf of his student and our friend Ursula Bremen: he will cover the region of Wendar (of the Old World) and Denagoth for the Almanac of this year.

### ***Synthala of Aasla***

Born in the once famous city of Aasla, Synthala is a ranger who worships the Immortal Zirchev. Having loved animals as a child, she quickly moved to the wilderness lands of Norwold as soon as she could afford it. Her home is now Alpha, the City of Rangers and Foresters. From there, she travels the breadth of Norwold, exploring all the wilderness she can.

This year, Synthala reports to us on Alpha, Oceansend, and the Arch of Fire.

# Atlas

## ***ALPHA (Kingdom of)***

**Location:** South shore of the Great Bay, at the tip of a peninsula.

**Area:** 9,478 sq. mi. (21,325 km<sup>2</sup>)

**Population:** 90,000, including 2,000 halflings.

**Languages:** Alphatian Common (Alpha dialect, official), Elvish (Shiye-Lawr dialect), Hin (Lalor dialect), Heldannic, Thyatian Common.

**Coinage:** Alphatian Standard: Crown (gp), mirror (sp), judge (cp). Coins of many other nations are in common circulation here.

**Taxes:** 20% income tax, collected yearly.

**Government Type:** Independent monarchy part of the New Alphatian Empire.

**Industries:** Agriculture (grows barely enough for its own use), fishing, logging, mining, and trapping.

**Important Figures:** Ericall (King, human, male, F20)

**Flora and Fauna:** Alpha features the plants and animals one expects of the northern wilderness. The Peninsula claimed by Alpha is devoid of monsters thanks to the Regent Pass, but cold-climate creatures (such as snow apes, white dragons, frost giants, frost salamanders, and sasquatches) fill the rest of Norwold, as well as several scattered goblinoid tribes.

**Further Reading:** CM 1 - Test of the Warlords, GAZ - Dawn of the Emperors boxed Set, AC1010 - Poor Wizard's Almanac to AC1012 - Poor Wizard's Almanac 3, and Joshuan's Almanac.

## Description: by Synthala of Aasla

Alpha, the City of Rangers and Foresters, is blocked off from the inland by a large stretch of mountains that cut off the entire peninsula at the neck. There is only one way through these mountains; an enjoyable hiking path known as Regent Pass. This narrow and rugged gap is guarded by a fortress garrisoned with an entire unit of the King's Guard, including his best woodsmen, climbers, and trackers. This fortress marks the true limits of the king's lands, despite having once claimed all of Norwold as his kingdom.

## ***The Land***

The land between the garrison at Regent Pass and the city of Alpha is almost completely converted into farmland. Unfortunately, there are only the occasional patch of evergreens here and there, and most wildlife has been hunted to extinction. Druidic lore claims that the soil is rich in nutrients, deposited by glaciers from ages ago. Various natural lakes and small streams make sure that every farm has an adequate supply of fresh water.

At first glance, the City of Rangers and Foresters appears to be one immense fortress, with circles of walls within circles of walls to provide ample defense against any invading force. But despite the intense fortifications, the city earns its name by the numerous parks and woodlands found within the imposing walls. In fact, more wild animals can be found within these enclosed parks than in the land outside the city walls.

Alpha has a remarkable deep-water port within the Great Bay, and ships from around the world can often be spotted within the large harbor. Numerous fishing boats can also be seen scattered throughout the Great Bay.

## ***The People***

Ancestry of the Alphans can be traced back to Heldannic, Thyatian and Alphatian roots. Most have been living here so long now that they simply consider themselves Alphans; racial ancestry does not mean much to these simple people. For some reason, the vast majority seem happy to have a King Ericall to rule them, adding what they believe is a needed form of government and order to their lives. A rather strange belief for people who prefer to be left alone, but an accepted one none-the-less.

Most Alphans are simple farmers or fishermen who do not have the typical Alphantian disdain of non-spellcasters. Being removed from the former Alphantian mainland, magic did not become so mainstream in Alpha as to affect their lives very much. In fact, many of them are awed or cowed by displays of the arcane.

They are polite and welcome strangers eagerly in exchange for courtesy and the occasional stories about your travels. Most will mind their own business, and rarely will anyone try to interfere with your plans. The peasants are content to simply do their work and not get involved in politics and “important” things.

## ***Recent Events***

The topic of the year here in the City of Rangers and Foresters was the wedding between King Ericall and Queen Christina Marie Alanira. I myself was invited to the wedding (through connections with the Church of Zirchev), attending the lavish ceremony held with the Grand Ballroom. The Grand Ballroom should surely be included in any list of wonders of Mystara, for the design and architecture are beautiful beyond belief. Even I, who dislikes most buildings, preferring the outdoors, enjoyed my stay in this spacious ballroom.

Still, I have changed subjects. The wedding was a grand affair, attended by almost all the nobles still affiliated with King Ericall (unfortunately for him, that means only a handful). Wealthy merchant families as well as respected priests (such as the Priests of Zirchev) or other town members were also permitted to attend. To celebrate the union, the Town Watch has been renamed to the Queen’s Guard. In fact, the love-smitten king has placed her in charge of the Queen’s Guard; they are rumored to place any of the Queen’s orders before any order given by Ericall himself.

The other major event concerns amassing a large defense force. King Ericall believes in an invasion from Oceansend, and reports of more Heldannic Knights entering the City of the Sea only confirms his worse fears. [Ed’s Note: This is obviously before Oceansend managed to reclaim it’s independence.] King Ericall has started conscripting soldiers, but many oppose this initiative. The decision is very unpopular with the commoners. Many believe that Ericall will recall the law any day now.

Don’t Miss.

One sight to visit would be the main palace of Alpha. It lies atop a large hill in the center of the most fortified area of town. Over a dozen huge buildings all interconnected to each other with arches and bridges and walls. Dozens of chimneys dot the rooftops of the palace, more than likely keeping the place comfortably warm during the cold winter nights here up north. Various small parks and woodlands can be seen within the palace grounds as well, suggesting that great care is taken to maintain its beauty and appearance. And one must not forget the Grand Ballroom, which is a wonder beyond description. Still, despite the architectural decorations, the thick walls and several dozen towers clearly indicate that the main purpose of the palace is indeed defense.

If there is any sight worth seeing above all others, it would be the temple known as the Forest of Zirchev. And despite what you may believe, this account is not biased by my worship of that very Immortal. The Forest of Zirchev is a large temple made out of strong and sturdy oak that stands just over three stories high. A large brass bell tops the tallest spire, which can be clearly heard throughout the city. The true beauty of the temple is its sheer simplicity. Zirchev, in His wisdom, ordered that there be no fancy decorations, extravagant use of riches, or even statues made to honor Him. The only thing indicating that it is a house of Zirchev is a carving of the Forest Immortal’s face just above the main double doors.

Zirchev has granted us many wonderful birds who “sing” the hymns during the prayers that honor Him. This wonderful chorus has earned the admiration of many Alphans. Even priests of other Immortals have been known to observe a ceremony or two just to hear the wonders of nature sing in honor of Zirchev. Because of this, many Alphans have a greater respect for nature than most city-dwellers, as the numerous city parks and the wildlands in the area can attest to. Nature will therefore never be mistreated, and we owe it all to the Forest Immortal.

## ***ARCADIA (Barony of)***

**Location:** West of Oceansend, in the Icereach Mountains, bordering Lake Gunaald.

**Area:** roughly 500 sq. mi. (1,125 km<sup>2</sup>)

**Population:** About 300, including 250 dwarves and 50 humans.

**Languages:** Alphantian Common (Alpha dialect), Heldannic, Dwarven.

**Coinage:** Alpathian standard : Crown (gp), Mirror (sp), Judge (cp); gold nuggets or barter commonly used.

**Taxes:** none, inhabitants sometimes give goods to their baron to gain his protection against dragon attacks.

**Government Type:** Barony in name, no real government.

**Industries:** Fishing, Mining (gold), Crafts (goldcraft, weaponsmithing).

**Important Figures:** Baron Arcadius (human, male, M20), Sandryth (gold dragon, male, young adult), Clanmaster Tark Takkras (dwarf, male, F10).

**Flora and Fauna:** Arcadia consists mostly of high mountain, overlooking western Lake Gunaald. The cold freshwater lake is rich in fish, which constitute all the animal life that can be found in the area. A few evergreen trees grow in the small valley bordering the lake, soon replaced by small scrubs then bare rocks on the towering mountains. Some rare chimeras and wyverns make lair in caverns high in the mountains, while dragons from the Wyrksteeth to the east occasionally swoop by.

## Description: by Arcadius

Hello dear reader. You don't know me yet, as it is my first time writing an article in the famous Mystaran Almanac. So, let me introduce myself briefly first, and we shall go on with the very article later.

My name is Arcadius, wizard and scholar from the lands of Norwold. I was born a Traladaran in a small village of the Grand Duchy of Karameikos, now a Kingdom, but left my homeland in pursuit of greater knowledge. After some years of adventuring around the Known World and beyond, I opted for settling in Norwold where King Ericall of Alpha was giving lands and titles to worthy heroes - and it seems I did qualify as one such, since I was adoubed Baron. I conduct studies in the Tower of Arcadia, concentrating on my favorite subjects, which are history, legends and lore, plus occasionally other fields including magic.

I spoke with a young Glantrian wizard named Alasdhair McAllister during a visit of mine in the elven Barony of Ironwood. He told me of his work as a correspondent for the renowned Mystaran Almanac - I myself own a copy of every tome -, and of business he had in his homeland that would prevent him from completing his tour of Norwold. I told him about parts of the country he hadn't been able to see yet, and just before leaving, he asked me to replace him as official correspondent for the Norwold region. After the initial surprise, I agreed - and there we are. I hope I can live up to Alasdhair's expectation - and offer you as interesting and complete description as he would have.

Alasdhair encouraged me to start this year with my own, petty barony. Though I find this somewhat pretentious, I shall simply do as he suggests; besides, that should help you know me better than with just this brief introduction.

## *The Land*

The Barony of Arcadia lies, to most eyes, in the middle of nowhere. It is an isolated dominion in the tall Icereach mountains, though it also encompasses part of Lake Gunaald. There is probably a map of the dominion borders in the king's library in Alpha, but I must admit that it is of no relevance to me. The fact is I rule only over the Tower of Arcadia, which is built on top of the highest peak of the dominion, and I do not try to enforce any law over the rest of the land that is nominally mine; hence I don't really know where it starts and where it ends.

Most of the land is thus high mountains. This does not mean it is a poor land, however: Though there is almost no vegetation and virtually no animals, the soil is rich in valuable minerals, mostly gold. A small clan of dwarves runs profitable gold mines a few miles north of the Tower of Arcadia. The highest peaks are covered with everlasting snowcapes, and cold winds from the north blow during most of the year.

The Tower of Arcadia is built on top of the highest peak, and is surrounded at all time by snow. Unless you are well-equipped, I do not advise you to go there by normal means; the best way to reach the tower is by air, or by magic. When the sky is clear, the tower can be seen from below, including by fishermen at work on the lake. Most of the time, though, clouds block the sight, as the peak's end stands above the cloud line.

A feature of note is Lake Gunaald, which is frozen during a good part of the year, typically from mid-fall to late spring or early summer. It is a freshwater lake, whose waters abound with delicious white fish called gunaald (the lake is named after the fish) that fetch high price on Leeha's, Alpha's and even Oceansend's markets. Several families live off the lake's bounties, fishing from small boats in the summer, and making holes through the frozen layer of ice the rest of the year. Most of those fishermen live in the sheltered valley stuck between the lake and the high mountains, because it is quite safe from the cold northern wind thanks to the mountain range.

One peculiarity of the barony that surprises many fellow nobles, especially King Ericall, is the fact that I do not enforce taxes of any kind on the few inhabitants of Arcadia, or even a single law. Truth is, the dwarves govern themselves, with their own regulations and justice, and that wouldn't be wise to meddle in their internal affairs. As for the fishermen, they are simple people who don't need any law to tell them how to live their lives. However, they both fear me and praise me for supposedly keeping any dragon attack on them at bay, and when they can afford it donate fish supplies or, more rarely, offer their services. The dwarves also accuse me of being an agent of the dragons that only want to steal their gold, but they trade with me anyway.

## ***The People***

Arcadia is sparsely populated at best, due to the fact that it is such a remote place and that I never actively tried to attract new settlers. In fact, I never even conducted a census and population numbers I give are estimates only.

The majority of Arcadia's population is made up of dwarves, a single clan of them, clan Takkras. This clan was established some 187 years ago, when the young Tark, youngest son of a clan from Oceansend, discovered how rich in gold the mountains west of Lake Gunaald were.

He brought with him some of his previous clan and was designed as clansmaster by his followers, and has since ruled his clan. The clan's main business is gold mining, of course, and all sorts of crafts related to the working of gold. The dwarves often buy tasty fish from the fishermen of the valley, which they pay in raw gold nuggets. The dwarves are quite paranoid about dragons, whom in their minds are all after their gold. They often accuse me of being in league with them, which I sort of am, not to mention that in their eyes wizards are not much better than dragons in the first place. Anyhow, since they have not suffered from any dragon raids since I settled in Arcadia, they grudgingly recognize that I may somehow protect them, and occasionally trade with me precious, beautifully crafted items that I use as vessels for my magical experimentations in exchange for magical items and commodities that I bring back from Alpha or Oceansend or beyond.

The rest of the population are native fishermen of Antalian descent who have been living off the bounty of the nearby lake for an unknown number of generations. They sell gunnaald they don't eat to the Takkras dwarves, or smoke it and carry it downriver and sell it to the Hins who are fond of it. And the leftover they give to me, hoping the dragons and I keep on leaving them alone...

## ***Recent History***

Dwarves and native humans have been living in the area for quite some time, since long before Arcadia herself was founded. Dwarves moved to those high mountains 187 years ago when they discovered gold veins, and will likely stay there as long as there is an ounce left to mine. The fishermen have been living by the lake for an unknown duration, as they don't keep any records. From their language I speculate that they have been living there in complete autarchy since the earlier days of the ancient Antalians, before Loark's horde brought the dark age of most of their people. In their secluded valley, the scattered fishermen probably went undiscovered and lost contact with other tribes. According to the Hins of Leeha, at one time they found about the fishermen and their wonderful gunnaald and began trading with them. Unfortunately those events, if they ever happened that way, are undated.

The Barony of Arcadia is fairly recent in comparison. I was appointed baronial status in AY 2002 [Editor's Note: AC 1002], and the erection of Tower Arcadia took until AY 2004 [AC 1004] because of its uneasily-accessed location. And yet I got help from the Dwarves - for a hefty price, but that was well worth it. Since Arcadia is so isolated from the rest of Norwold and since I do not levy an army, Arcadia has been unconcerned by the recent wars that have spread throughout the continent. With no taxes or troops coming from Arcadia, I am left pretty to my own devices by King Ericall.

The only exception to this concerns dragonkind. I am in permanent contact with the Kingdom of Dragons in the Wurmsteeth through Sandryth, a golden dragon. This is part of an agreement between the Council of Dragons and myself upon establishing my barony, which states they would agree to share some of the knowledge they have accumulated over the millennia with me - I hope to one day being allowed into their hidden city - in exchange for my help in having the humans and especially their lords not encroaching upon the draconic lands or slaying non-renegade dragons. Sandryth and I are diplomats of sorts between the two races.

On that matter, there is one event in recent history that I wish to clarify, concerning the dragons' assault on Heldannic Warbirds above Oceansend. King Ericall did ask me to petition the Council for such an action, but I was not surprised when Sandryth answered that the dragons would not get involved into human business and hereby violate an ancient treaty, unless the Heldanners actually attacked them first. However, Ericall was not satisfied with that decision and tried to find some more open-minded dragons - as he didn't need a full commitment from the dragons in the first places, just a

handful of them to keep the Warbirds in check. Thus he contacted a young, active red who was upset by the conservatism of the Council and decided to act, sure that the Council Elders would in time back the move.

### ***Don't Miss***

Two things: If you like good, freshly fished gunnaald, try fishing with the natives, and if you like beautiful landscapes, take a look at Tower Arcadia perched high in the mountains during a clear day from either the valley below or from the lake.

### ***Do Miss***

The renegade dragons that occasionally venture or make their lair in the vicinity.

## ***ARCH OF FIRE (geographical feature [and Efreet Kingdom? Ed.]***

**Location:** northeastern reaches of the Icereach Range, Norwold.

**Area:** app. 5,000 sq. mi. (11,250 km<sup>2</sup>); about 2,500 sq. mi. (5,625 km<sup>2</sup>) around each volcano.

**Population:** Believed to be 2,500 efreet, 1,000 fire elementals, and 400 sollux.

**Languages:** Unknown languages from elemental plane of fire.

**Coinage:** Unknown, if any at all.

**Taxes:** Unknown, if any at all.

**Government Type:** Unknown.

**Industries:** Unknown.

**Important Figures:** Feudelance (Brother of the Sun, sollux, male, F14).

**Flora and Fauna:** small plants and animals common in more southern regions than Norwold.

**Further Reading:** CM 1 - Test of the Warlords, GAZ - Dawn of the Emperors boxed Set.

### **Description: by Synthala of Aasla**

Those who've read the Mystaran Almanac for AC 1014 probably remember an entry describing the Arch of Fire. At the behest of the editors of the Almanac, I've returned to the region to verify reports of a war taking place at both Mount Cantrinus. It seems indeed a great battle is taking place. But first, let us take a look at the area.

### ***The Arch of Fire***

You can find the Arch of Fire approximately half-way between a large swamp along the clear White Bear River and the large, picturesque Icereach Mountains. For those not familiar with the wilderness regions of Norwold, it would be about 15 to 20 days travel west of the city of Leeha. You'll know you're on the right track soon enough as the Arch of Flames can easily be seen up to 5 days away during the darkness of night.

A large ribbon of flames leaps out of Northern Mount Cantrinus and lands a good four days walk to the south in Southern Mount Cantrinus. The arch created must reach a height of 4 to 6 miles (7 to 10 km) at the very least. It seems that the two volcanoes form some sort of planar conduit, creating a loop to and from the Elemental Plane of Fire. Because of this, sage believe that the Arch of Fire will be a permanent feature of the region.

### ***The Land***

The land around the volcanoes are wastelands of fire. This area is relatively flat considering how mountainous and jagged the rest of the Icereach Range is. The entire zone is crisscrossed with flowing streams of molten lava, which in turn melt all the snow on the mountain peaks and create rivers and lakes of meltwater. These rivers just as easily lead to

rivers or lakes of lava, plunging into the molten rock. Steam rises at these mixing points, creating dangerous patches of boiling vapor. The entire place is a deathtrap to those not experienced with the outdoors. Falling in any of the lakes is liable to cause you to freeze to death, while the lava flows will melt even your bones. Steam geysers are relatively common as well, creating hidden traps for those not paying attention to their surroundings.

The vegetation here is rather unusual for Norwold. Because of the intense heat in the areas directly around the volcanoes, species that are normally not present in the north are thriving here. Even small mammals that normally avoid the cold and snow can be found scurrying about. Despite this, vegetation and animals are very rare; it's just too dangerous to have a thriving ecosystem. Another problem is the fact that the rivers of lava often change course, burning up whatever is in the way. Most areas are also covered in solid rock, obviously of volcanic origin. There is therefore little soil for plants to grow or live on.

## ***The People***

As determined last year, the two volcanoes of the Arch of Fire are inhabited. Northern Mount Cantrinus has been transformed into a stronghold under the control of what appears to be two to three thousand efreet. Not much is known of their culture, but they definitely appear expansionist and tyrannical. It would be dangerous and foolish to approach and try to learn more about them.

Southern Mount Cantrinus is the home to about one thousand fire elementals. Although more friendly than the efreet, they still have no cares what-so-ever about the life here on the Prime Plane, and one can never be too sure what type of reception to expect from them. Sometimes they'll burn visitors, sometimes they won't. Those that aren't destroyed are either conscripted and forced to fight the efreet, or thrown out of their territory.

A new culture has arrived on the scene since last year. A camp of about 400 sollux [A full description of a sollux is available in the *Mystara Monstrous Compendium Appendix*.] have been created in the plains between the two volcanoes. These strange, red skinned humanoids are very war-like and disciplined. They are obviously trying to eliminate the efreet on Northern Mount Cantrinus, and have engaged in numerous battles with them.

Unlike the other creatures, the sollux are at least approachable by visitors. It seems that all the sollux here are members of a Brotherhood of the Sun, some sort of knightly order which has sworn to destroy all efreet found on Mystara. Their leader, Feudelance, invites everyone to join them on their holy mission. It seems this event is a first in the history of their people. Never have so many Sun Brothers united to face the efreet. Then again, they claim that never has there been this many efreet in any one place. Feudelance insists that this is merely the staging ground for the efreet and that they will try to invade all of Mystara from here. The Sun Brothers plan on stopping them well before then, however.

The sollux found here at the Arch of Fire are very militaristic and orderly. Still, they are also all Sun Brothers, therefore I have absolutely no idea whether their true communities behave in this matter, or whether this is just the way of life at their military camps. After all, one can't judge the Thyatians by the way their Legionnaires behave in their various camps.

## ***Recent History***

From what I've managed to learn from Feudelance, it seems that the Arch of Fire has been the home to several thousand fire elementals until about 5 years ago. At that point in time, the efreet conquered the Northern Mount Cantrinus and started creating their stronghold. Blocked off from reinforcements from the Plane of Fire, the elemental population has slowly dwindled over the years (some fled back to the Plane of Fire, others were killed by the efreet). And so it would have continued until last year.

That is when the Brotherhood of the Sun learned of the efreet city. They have been trying to destroy it ever since. At first, a small group of three Sun Brothers arrived, but when they saw their opposition, they made the historical call to amass an army of Sun Brothers. This army is still in the process of being built [Apparently the Sun Brothers have been scattered throughout Mystara until this gathering. It will take much time for all of them to arrive or even receive the word of the forming of an army. Ed.], but so far 400 sollux have responded.

Feudelance wishes to thank the writers and editors of the Almanac, as it was through their description of the Arch of Fire that they learned of the presence of the efreet. Now the battle rages on, and Feudelance insists it will continue until every last efreet is destroyed.

The fire elementals, which have been saved by the arrival of the sollux, do not participate in the war. They merely watch the two groups fight it out. If thankful for their rescue, they have yet to show it.

## ***Don't Miss***

There is really no way to describe it beyond what was mentioned by Alasdhair MacCallum last year: "Well, the Arch itself is one of the wonders of the world, a beautiful sight that is definitely not to be missed if one has the occasion to visit."

But as I've mentioned, this is not a journey for someone who does not have any wilderness skills. For those who do, even the trip here from Leeha will be filled with beautiful sights and scenery that is not to be missed by any nature lover.

Still, the Arch of Fire is best viewed from far. If you get too close, you will more than likely get caught up in the interplanar war that is transpiring. And unless you happen to be immune to fire, it is definitely not something you want to see or do.

## ***DENAGOTH (Kingdom of)***

**Location:** Southwestern reaches of Norwold, just west of the Heldannic Territories. It is also just north of Wendar, a nation of the Old World.

**Area:** 125,000 sq. mi. (281,250 km<sup>2</sup>)

**Population:** 280,000, roughly 25% human and 75% goblinoid; estimated demihuman (elf) population: 500.

**Languages:** Denagothian, Orcish, Gnoll, Goblin, Heldannic, Elvish (Geffronell dialect).

**Coinage:** Gold (gp), Silver (sp); barter common.

**Taxes:** 30% income tax, collected yearly.

**Government Type:** Dictatorship in which the ruler calls himself King.

**Industries:** Hunting, Raiding, Mining, Agriculture (grows barely enough for its own use)

**Important Figures:** Landryn Teriak, the Shadowlord (vassalich, male, M14).

**Flora and Fauna:** The area known as Denagoth comprises one great oak forest to the east that dates back to the old Blackmoor era and another forested region to the west mostly made of dead trees. Throughout the whole region the terrain is rocky and difficult to cultivate, if not impossible.

The Avien Plains, in the central southern part of Denagoth, is the only area where the soil is somewhat able to produce crops and where cattle can be tended without particular problems. The northern zone is basically a rocky waste that gives way to swamps and to the frozen tundra at the highest latitudes. The animals commonly encountered in Denagoth are moose, elks, bears (all species, especially grizzlies), wolves (even dire wolves), wild boars, snakes and mountain lions.

The land is a heaven for goblinoid races, and many tribes of orcs, hobgoblins, goblins, bugbears, gnolls and some ogres live in the foothills and on the highest peaks of the mountains, as well as in the forests.

The Mengul Mountains are home of a vast variety of monstrous species, such as: snow apes, white apes, giant bats, dragons (white), harpies, giant ferrets, sasquatches, and unicorns. Black dragons abound in the swamps and forests of the entire region, unchallenged masters of the draconic race inhabiting Denagoth.

**Further Reading:** X11 - Saga of the Shadowlord, AC1011 - Poor Wizard's Almanac 2 and AC1012 - Poor Wizard's Almanac 3.

## **Description: by Cristopher Dove**

Once a venerable wendarian elf told me: "Denagoth be the place where Evil abides, for nobody could stand its filth but Cursed Beings". I must say I was eager to see this accursed place with my very eyes, and this is the reason I joined the Elven Army in their Crusade. Now I have seen and I have lived to tell of it, but still in my dreams I am haunted by... by the malign spirit that impregnates this place, I dare say. Denagoth is an ancient land dominated by savage folks which have nothing in common with us humans.



Denagoth is a land where only the fiercest can survive, where every day you've lived on you know it's a day wrestled away from death's grasp. I strongly believe Denagoth is a land of fiends and monsters, and no matter what the elves will do to conquer and to claim it as their own, they will never tame the beastly soul of this region.

In this report to the Almanac I will only detail the south-western part of Denagoth, that is the only region so far explored by the Elven Army. If things go well as planned, I will be able to see the western part next year, and maybe then I'll send my next account (if I'm lucky enough to be still alive). There is however the possibility I go with a secret expedition to the northern uncharted lands for a very important mission, because they seem to require someone who is experienced with ancient history and dead languages. Either way, dear readers, you will have to wait until next year for the rest of my report about Denagoth and its inhabitants.

## ***The Land***

North of Wendar and beyond the Mengul Mountains lies a huge plateau about 7,000 feet (2,000-2,500 meters) high. On the top of this plateau sits most of the land commonly referred as Denagoth, which nowadays someone has begun calling "Kingdom". At the feet of this imposing plateau, just past the Mengul Range and the Naga river, lies a small village named Geron, which is technically part of the Kingdom of Denagoth... or better to say "it was" until the Elven Crusaders conquered it in the recent war waged against the Shadowlord, rumored to rule over all of Denagoth. The Naga river, a rather narrow but dangerous and insidious river that flows down the Mengul Mountains into Heldann, is the natural border between Wendar and Denagoth. The only two known ways of crossing it are the rope bridge that lies about 10 miles north of the main trail, and the Geron Bridge, a wooden bridge at the end of the major trail that leads directly to Geron and that used to be heavily patrolled by Denagothian pikemen.

Geron itself is a rather small village inhabited by humans only, the kind of stock you can find only in Denagoth. Tall, muscular and hairy people with rather dark complexion with the love for war and hunt: this is the portrait of the common Denagothian human male (and female), and he doesn't seem so much different from the humanoids that live above the plateau. Before the war Geron counted about 150-200 souls, along with a standing Denagothian contingent of 100 pikemen (all humans). Now they've been reduced to only 50 people, mostly teenagers and women, while the soldiers have all been killed.

Another feature of this village was the Temple of Idris, a small building dedicated to the worship of this ancient and obscure deity which seems to be at the center of every denagothian community. After the siege of Geron, the temple was burned down by the elves and its priests left inside to suffer the same fate [Author's note: the elves almost seemed to enjoy the sight of those humans screaming in pain while burning alive. This was the first of many atrocities I had to witness in this war from both parts, and this has led me to draw some conclusions on Denagoth I will expose fully at the end of this chapter].

Once you leave Geron, you have to face the climb to the top of the plateau, which means about one or two days marching on steep trails, exposed to chilling winds, landslides (or avalanches, depending on the period of the year) and fierce predators both terrestrial and aerial. Once arrived at the top of the plateau, the traveler finds himself in a cold grassland bordered to the east by a marvelous thick green forest of oaks, whereas another forest can be seen (in the days of clear weather) far ahead to the north.

The Elven Army chose to explore the eastern forest, called Great Forest of Geffron, because this was the place where the previous expedition was being held prisoner along with some native elves. The Great Forest of Geffron is a breathtaking place, especially if you love nature in all its wild beauty. It is doubtless the most ancient forest I've ever seen or heard of, and I've myself seen many Alfhaimers sigh of astonishment and of joy while they began exploring its trees and paths. The oaks are so high that even the elves were afraid of climbing up to the top branches to take a look of the surrounding area, so that many times the sergeants of each squadron had to threaten the lookouts to make them accomplish their duty. Yet, the stunning beauty of the place is somehow dulled by the constant threat posed by the humanoids and the monsters dwelling here. The animals living inside Geffron must have been seriously reduced in number by these monsters, for we have encountered very few of them, and the elves have also reported no sign of fairy folk presence inside the woods, which is quite alarming in such a silvan environment. Along the common pathways found inside the forest, remains of burned down elven villages can be found, with dozen skeletons still dotting the grass in most cases. These are, according to the elves of the first expedition, what remains of the Geffronell elves who lived in the forest, exterminated some decades ago by the forces of the Shadowlord who now rule over this region.

As a final note about Denagoth, I have a consideration to make that arose from my observation of the facts occurring in this war. I know that every war is a sad and dramatic event that can often transform soldiers into cold killers, but this consideration doesn't help to explain the mutation I'm witnessing in the elves engaged in this conflict. They are not fighting for their homeland, nor for their close relatives and they have no past grudge against the Denagothians, save the common hatred of elves towards goblinoids. And yet they have many times showed such a contempt and a fury

towards both human and humanoids that have led them performing inhuman deeds. The burning of the Idris Temple in Geron was a good thing, but the way they assassinated the priests (by letting them burn inside it) was a sadistic act the elves normally would have condemned. Also, the ruthless slaughtering of villages of goblinoids has been a common practice since our entry into the Geffron Forest, and when I say slaughtering I don't mean killing of goblinoid warriors, but mass murder of females (even pregnant ones), elders and whelps. Sure, I know they could have posed a problem later on, but something still mystifies me about this whole thing. The elves are somehow becoming more feral and much more similar to the goblinoids they fight, and I suspect this has something to do with this land. Denagoth is a cursed land in the very sense of the term, and whoever walks on this soil seems bound to become prey of his darker instincts. I don't know what or who bestowed this curse upon Denagoth, but I suspect the Shadowlord is somehow connected to it.

Whichever the truth, the evil that permeates this place has a nasty effect on those who live here, enhancing their chaotic and beastly nature: I only hope for the elves' sake they manage to win this war before they are turned into the same enemy they're trying to defeat.

## ***The People***

As I've previously said, the Denagothian human people are not really that much different from the goblinoids they live alongside. They are much stronger, tougher and more resistant to the harsh climate than the common northmen (such as the inhabitants of Norwold or the Northern Reaches), yet their complexion is strangely darker, more similar to the Thyatian stock than to the classic northmen. Also a strange fire seem to burn in their eyes, a light that sometimes makes them look very similar to hairy humanoid brutes: I suspect they actually accept the beast that dwells within them, instead of trying to dominate it like civilized people do. All considered, the Denagothians are a proud and fierce folk, much like the Heldanners to the east, but they somehow retain some physical and above all behavioral traits that always stress the link they still share with the animals... or even with the goblinoids. They live for the hunt, and the war, being the greatest of hunts, is highly regarded. But I can sense they also have a deep love for peace, which for some mysterious reasons they have been taught to hide away. I suspect the Idris Church of Denagoth is responsible for this...

And of course there are the goblinoids of Denagoth, who along with the humans share the status of "citizens" of this brutal kingdom. Orcs are the most common species, followed by goblins, hobgoblins, gnolls and bugbears (so far the races we've met during our exploration/conquest of the Denagothian plateau). However, these creatures seem much more proud and intelligent than the common goblinoid found in the Broken Lands, even though I must admit that the recent events in Glantri have aroused many doubts regarding my factual knowledge of the humanoid race. Anyway, all the goblinoids the elves have captured and interrogated after each battle were surprisingly stubborn and even heroic, refusing to give away but the smallest detail on their strategy or tactical disposition. Whether they did it because they didn't know anything or because they didn't want to betray their comrades I don't know. The only thing I can say for sure is that they didn't seem to be afraid of the elves nor of their torture methods (and I can testify they are some of the most unpleasant I've ever witnessed). I can only hypothesize that they were probably afraid of upsetting a far more dangerous power had they confessed what they knew: probably their leader, the Shadowlord, or maybe the goddess Idris... These humanoids make up most of the Shadow Army, as they call it, and many actually hold high positions in its ranks, and this only reinforces my idea that the goblinoids living here are far more intelligent and strong willed (and thus more dangerous) than their southern "cousins." It seems like they have been somehow instructed and trained by their master, for their tactics are really well planned and extremely deadly. I suppose we shall learn more about them only by going far deeper into their territory, either to the west or north, where it is said their cities lie.

Finally, talking about the inhabitants of Denagoth I cannot avoid to mention the Geffronell elves who still live here. They are the only survivors to the complete extermination of a whole race ordered by the Shadowlord and happily carried on by his minions. According to the tales of the few survivors we found in the keep of Drax Tallen, there are currently in Denagoth no more than 500 elves, whereas about 200 years ago they numbered about 100 000, counting also the elves of the now dead Lothenar Forest to the west. This thoroughly planned massacre left a deep scar on the survivors, and I think that not even a whole elven lifespan will help to heal it. These elves are now only ghosts, faint shadows of their former selves who don't seem to have anything more to live for. The Alfheimers and the Genalleth elves have many times offered them help and a new place where to take refuge, but they stubbornly refuse to leave their forest and insist on being let alone to mourn for their dead and their tragic fate. Sometimes I pass by one of them in the halls of Drax Tallen without even noticing his presence, like a shadow of a long forgotten past. Yet I can see the fire of rage and the need for vengeance burning inside of them, but the question is if this fire will be strong enough to heat their now frozen-to-death heart.

## **Recent History**

It seems that in the recent years the Shadowlord army has been training for this war, as if it expected it. Surprisingly enough, the recent history of the region is a peaceful one. The folk living here is resigned to live under the Shadowlord's tight grip and so there have been only a handful of rebellions led by human Denagothian leaders against him, all crushed in a matter of days by something called the Special Security Squadrons (a sort of secret army of spies). The oldest history is still a mystery, and an intriguing one, which I am resolute to unlock in the following months.

## **Don't Miss**

There is one place in the Great Forest of Geffron that really deserves a visit, and this is Enoreth Shrine. I don't know much about its history because the Geffronells are very reserved and currently distrust humans (who could blame them for this after what the Denagothians did them?), but it seems this is the burying place of some very important elven sage of the remote past. The whole hill atop where the shrine lies is surrounded by an aura of peace and calmness which is very similar to that found in the temples of Koryis in Darokin. Whoever enters there is suddenly becalmed and strangely begins to experience reminiscences of his past, remembrances that bring him happiness and satisfaction, washing off anger and fear. It is a veritable place of inspiration for everyone, and some Geffronells told me that the most beautiful elven works of art have been accomplished while their authors lived near this shrine. I can say for myself that only during the time we spent up there I was able to forget that I was accompanying an army into the enemy territory filled with malevolent beings. The Enoreth Shrine must be preserved at all costs, for it is the only area of the forest that still retains the feelings that once the whole forest could inspire in its inhabitants.

Another rather interesting and mystic place to be found inside the Great Forest of Geffron is Sylarkh's Rest, also known as the Dragon's Tomb. About a mile eastward of Drax Tallen there is a huge mound that constantly radiates a golden aura: this is believed to be the tomb of Sylarkh, one of the two gold dragons that accompanied a hero of the past called Henadin. The elves speak highly of this Henadin, giving him a big role in the fall of the Essurian Kingdom that occurred about two hundred years ago. According to their legend, Henadin led a group of tribes from the north to conquer Essuria, and at the end of the war he laid siege to Drax Tallen and defeated the last of the Essurian Kings, Landryn Teriak. During the final battle one of the two gold dragons who accompanied him, Sylarkh, was slain by Landryn, and after avenging her death, he built the mound to hold the mortal remains of the wyrm. That was the last time Henadin was ever seen in Essuria and in the whole Denagoth, as he vanished from the battlefield together with his other dragon companion. But this is not the end of the story. Some elven sages speculate that Sylarkh was none other than the daughter of Henadin and that the other gold dragon was his mother and Henadin's wife. Many Geffronells also affirm that every year the ghost of Henadin visits the tomb where he can be seen playing around with a small blonde haired child: Sylarkh in her human form. The place radiates indeed an atmosphere of grief and loneliness, but it can also be immensely cozy and warm, especially during the long winter nights. The temperature around the mound is always the same (about 15 C), and even the wind and the weather seem to be particularly mild in that point of the forest. Many elves and myself experienced strange dreams while resting near the mound, but none of them were at all frightening. On the contrary, they seemed to be some kind of omens, predictions of future events that would have befallen the dreaming person. They obviously need to be interpreted, but many can be surprisingly clear, I assure you. A place to go if you need advice from Destiny or from the Immortals (for those who believe in them).

## **Do Miss**

Two things to miss if you'll ever venture in the Great Forest of Geffron: Drax Tallen and Aeleris Pits.

I've made many references to Drax Tallen throughout this report, but this is the first time I have the opportunity to describe it properly and I have only one word for it: oppressing. Drax Tallen is a huge keep built atop the remains of an ancient city, as I've had the chance to verify. It was the headquarters of the Shadow Army stationed in the Great Forest of Geffron, and it probably hosted more than 2000 soldiers before the elves' overtook it. However, when the Elven Army finally broke in, no more than two dozen goblinoids were found inside its walls: the body of the Shadow Army had apparently vanished without any logic explanation. After a long search of the keep, some elven scouts discovered a vast network of tunnels in the citadel dungeons: the elves had finally found the explanation for the sudden disappearance of the enemies. Drax Tallen is made up of four main buildings: the Armory, the Guards' Tower, the so called House of the Kings and Drax Tallen itself, a round imposing keep. A huge catacomb complex links the four aforementioned buildings and nasty creatures patrol it, especially undead that the elves are planning to dispose of. The overall atmosphere you get when inside Drax Tallen is of a filthy and oppressing building, built only to remind those who live there or who look at it that they are living only because some higher being allows it. One almost feels enslaved while walking among those once magnificent halls, and I myself have sometimes looked behind my back with the strange eerie feeling that somebody or something was following me... or was about to touch me. I think this is a haunted place

that the elves will be better to destroy after the winter has passed, in order to avoid strange incidents or diseases befall their troops.

And the Aeleris Pits are not that different from Drax Tallen, only more dangerous. While I am not completely sure that Drax Tallen is inhabited by evil spirits, I know for a fact that the Pits teem with undead monsters. The area is named after the first unlucky scout who found them, and it is basically a huge unholy graveyard. The whole area is dotted with open graves, and at the very heart of this big patch of trees lies a grim gap where the legend says the Shadowlord threw all the corpses of the elves he used as guinea pigs for his experiments or for torture. It seems that he cast on them a curse which prevented all those poor souls to achieve true death only because he wanted to torment them also in the afterlife. Now this part of the forest near the southern border is teeming with undead entities who roam the woods looking for eternal rest. Some of them are harmless, but most of them have been driven insane by the years of undeath and are nothing more than scavenging monsters whose only purpose is now to suck life out of the living people. Some elves speculate that there must be an evil mastermind that controls all of these undead, but the truth has yet to be discovered (and the Alheimers don't seem that eager to learn it).

## ***HELDLAND (New Heldannic Territory of)***

**Location:** South-eastern portion of Norwold; south of Oceansend and North of the Heldannic Territories.

**Area:** 150,000 sq. mi. (337,500 km<sup>2</sup>) are claimed.

**Population:** 25,000 (10,000 in Landfall, 5,000 in Forton).

**Languages:** Heldannic, Thyatian Common (Hattian dialect), Alpathian Common (Alpha dialect). Thyatian is the official language.

**Coinage:** Groschen (5 gp), gelder (gp), erzer (ep), markschen (sp), fenneg (cp).

**Taxes:** 15% income tax collected 4 times a year. 10% tithe to the Heldannic Knights, collected once a year. Poll tax of 1 gp per year on those who refuse military service. Taxes are waived for the first 2 years for new immigrants.

There is also a 5% sales tax on all items but food and clothing (these taxes are not waived).

**Government Type:** Military theocracy.

**Industries:** Hunting, mining, lumber.

**Important Figures:** Governor-General Helga Schonberg (human, female, P12 of Vanya).

**Flora and Fauna:** One can commonly encounter animal herds such as sheep and moose, bears, giants (mountain, hill, stone, and the rare frost), goblinoids, lycanthropes, sasquatches, and wolves. Dragons also venture into the territory from the northern mountains.

**Further Reading:** CM1 - Test of the Warlords, Dawn of the Emperors boxes set, AC1010 - Poor Wizard's Almanac to AC 1012 - Poor Wizard's Almanac 3, Joshuan's Almanac.

## **Description: by Sir Hendrik Gultzer, servant of the Glorious Lady Vanya.**

It is with pride and pleasure that I describe to the readers about the glory and valor of the people of Heldland, the New Heldannic Territory. I hope that this factual documentation will also prove to the readers that all the evil and tyrannical stories heard back in the Old World are nothing more than that: stories.

So learn about the wondrous life in Heldland. Perhaps you too will be one of the brave new colonist who will carve out a home in these wild lands. Be assured, all who do will be remembered always for their help in spreading the true Glory of Vanya.

## ***The Land***

The area of Heldland stretches from the northern borders of the righteous Heldannic Territories all the way up to the foothills of the Final Range in central Norwold. The western border is marked by the impenetrable Mengul Mountains, while the eastern borders fall within the Alpathian Sea.

The land is covered with forests ripe for wood cutting, and many mines have been discovered in the numerous hills and mountains dotting the land. Although many beasts still inhabit the sparsely human populated areas, the brave Heldannic Knights constantly patrol the area, slaying any foul monster they see in the name of Vanya.

To date, only two towns can be found within Heldland. The first is Landfall, also known as the City of Thieves by the inhabitants of Norwold. Let me be the first to say that this is no longer the case; we, the Heldannic Knights, have captured and slain all thieves in the land, enforcing true laws and stability. This has only been accomplished by the divine guidance of Vanya. So those fearing this “City of Thieves” title should consider it nothing but evil rumors spread by those jealous of Vanya’s happiness. [Still, plenty of other correspondents inform us that corruption in the government is still present, and that thievery is very active in Landfall. The truth is probably somewhere in between. Ed.]

The second city is our wonderful capital known as Forton, the City of Knights. A map of the fortress and town can be found in Joshuan’s Almanac [p.122, Ed.], and as you can see, there is plenty of room for the hardworking farmers. City walls have been built as you read this, and soon no army will be able to defeat the Knights stationed there. Forton has already reached a population of 5000 in its first year, and we expect it to continue to prosper into the economical power of the region.

Six other towns are planned for the region, and their construction is expected to start in the next couple of years. If you speak to officials before construction begins, they may even be able to make modifications to the plan to suit your needs. All in all, Heldland is a place that is built for the people, as Vanya truly cares for her worshipers.

## ***The People***

Heldland is currently expanding, as we wish to see this proud nation become as glorious as it truly deserves. Hence, all new immigrants are given a tax break for the first couple of years.

All cultures are welcome in Heldland, although we do expect immigrants to have the courtesy to learn to speak, read, and write Thyatian. Heldannic is also common among the farmers and peasants, so learning it would be handy as well. Also, known criminals are advised not to apply for citizenship. We deal harshly with lawbreakers. The Heldannic Territories do not, nor will it ever accept or permit any crimes within their borders.

Most people here in Heldland are the simple farmers who are glad to have the Heldannic Knights to protect them from wandering monsters and roving goblinoids. Their everyday lives are without stress and completely carefree as they know in their hearts that Vanya watches over them with her champion Knights [Somehow, I doubt this. Ed.].

Of course, other religious beliefs are permitted, but we ask that you be respectful to those who follow Vanya and keep your own beliefs within your own household.

## ***Recent History***

Heldland was founded last year (AC 1014) when Oberherr Wulf von Klagendorf determined that the nation was too large to rule for just one man. Hence, the Heldannic Territories were truly divided into several territories. The heart of the nation in the Old World, with the capital of Freiburg, is now the Heldannic Territory of Heldann. The area in Norwold was entitled the New Heldannic Territory of Heldland. Another territory under the beneficial rulership of the Knights on Davania is called the Heldannic Territory of Vanya’s Rest.

Before our arrival, the land was barely populated with farmers fearful of the wilderness around them. But we brought them civilization and protection, and now they are prospering. Yet we desire for Heldland to continue to grow, so we again invite all brave souls ready to carve out their own land to seek permission to establish themselves here in the territories.

Of course, last year we had a few setbacks. Due to a few minor problems within the ranks of the Heldannic Knights [Ed’s Note: they call the loss of all their priestly spells a minor problem.], several renegades and villains inspired revolts and rebellions, causing Heldland to lose over half its territory. But there is no need to worry about such events again. The Heldannic Knights have solved their internal strife and are now ready to reclaim their lands. Let all those false kings such as Yarrvikson [of Oceansend. Ed.] beware.

## ***Don’t Miss***

An impressive sight to see is Castle Forton, located within the capital. Here, the Heldannic Knights proudly parade and march each day before spreading out into the countryside to protect and serve the weak. It is from this constant parading that Forton has earned the nick-name City of Knights.

Castle Forton itself is also a sight to see. The resplendent black lion can be seen almost everywhere, indicating clearly that the place is blessed by Vanya. In fact, the high priests claim she even walks the parapets herself every night just to witness the splendid fortress blessed in her name. And it is truly blessed. Forton has been equipped with all the latest artillery and anti-siege fortifications produced by the best gadgeteers and engineers of the Old World. I cannot describe any more for fear of revealing too much to potential enemies, but Forton is guaranteed to withstand any siege conceivable by mortals. Only Vanya herself could breach these walls, and she is on our side.

## ***IRONWOOD (Elven Barony of)***

**Location:** South-east of Alpha facing the New Alphatian Sea.

**Area:** 3,500 sq. mi. (7,875 km<sup>2</sup>)

**Population:** 4,000, roughly 74% elves, 20% humans and 5% other demi-humans (in Laran only), 1% intelligent woodland creatures.

**Languages:** Elvish (Callarii, Shiye, Alfheim, Vyalia dialect), Thyatian Common, Alphatian Common (Alpha dialect), Fairy Tongue.

**Coinage:** Crown (gp), Mirror (sp); barter common.

**Taxes:** Gifts of the trees (special: see under Land).

**Government Type:** Feudal barony, although the Baron is strongly influenced by the various Clanmasters.

**Industries:** Hunting, Crafts (woodworking, leatherworking, goldcraft).

**Important Figures:** Baron Elariathas Blackblade (elf, male, F10/M15), Thyandros (Blackblade Clanmaster, elf, male, F9/M9), Taragin Oakbranch (Lightseeker Clanmaster, elf, male, F10/M10), Renshiye (Shalidyne Clanmaster, elf, male, R10/T8), Sythandria (Mythuinn Clanmistress, elf, female, M7/P7), and Clanholder Shelingar (elf, male, F4/M3).

**Flora and Fauna:** The land consists mostly of a large evergreen ancient forest and comprises also a narrow area of plains near the coast of the New Alphatian Sea. The elves don't cultivate the land extensively, but rely on the fruits and the products of the forest and on the game that lives inside it; small kitchen gardens can be found near the coastline. The animals commonly encountered in Ironwood are bears, deers, elks, moose, wild boars and wolves. The land is a heaven for sylvan races and has been totally purged of the humanoid tribes that once lived here (though they continue to live on the nearby mountains and hills in the north). A clan of treants and centaurs also live here in a special protected zone of the forest, as well as some unicorns, fairy people, hsiao and metamorphs.

Creatures such as basilisks, gorgons, chimeras, decapus and vegetal monsters have been spotted throughout the dominion.

## **Description: by Alasdhair MacCallum**

If only a few months ago somebody had told me I had to pose as an elf just to visit a forest I would have made a fool of him. But you can never know what life reserves you, that's the most important lesson I've learned during my rather adventuresome existence. However, that's how things turned out, more or less. I was here in Alpha ready to set sail for Oceansend (I planned to visit that land before returning to my beloved Klantyre) when I stumbled into an elf in one of the alleyways of the city. [Editor's Note: Readers of last year's Mystaran Almanac will realize that these events took place between Alasdhair's description of Alpha and Oceansend. This article was not included last year because the Almanac did not have as much interest in the area at the time. Now, we are adding Ironwood in our ever-growing hopes to describe all the lands of Norwold.]

Apparently, he was having some "financial problems" with a couple of shady "tax collectors", as he put it: so I offered to help him solving his troubles and I lent him a hand. You know, I've never liked tax collectors, especially those who go about armed to their teeth.

Less than an hour after our meeting, we were drinking in one of Alpha's best taverns and he was telling me of the important duty he was accomplishing in the city. He was here on behalf of his Lord, Elarianthas Blackblade, to hire engineers to worked on the "Great Project". So, after helping him find the right people, I decided to accompany him in

his trip back to Ironwood (which was on the course to Oceansend, after all), to find out more about this elven paradise he had told me about so passionately.

## ***The Land***

The Barony of Ironwood lies some 280 miles (440 Km) to the south-east of Alpha, nestled under the northernmost tip of the Final Range. The dominion itself is very small and not widely known, but it seems it's a heaven for the elves living in Norwold. Only about one sixth of the entire area is not covered by forest: in this zone lies a city that closely resembles the human towns. This is the city of Laran, where the Baron is building a great port which he hopes will help increase trade with other countries. However, this is not the capital of the barony. The capital, located deep inside the forest, is Persimmon - a town built in a more typical elven style.

Laran is the only place of the entire barony where non-elves are free to roam and live. It reminds me much of the old Alfheim Town. The buildings have been built by and for humans. Also, the Baron has provided the city with a complicate system of running water of gnomish design that makes everyone happy and above all clean. Yes, cleanness is the first word that comes to my mind in describing the town of Laran and the Barony of Ironwood as a whole.

The forest which covers the land almost extensively is made of huge evergreen trees, from sequoias to firs, that tower magnificently to the sky like ancient colossi. The woods are teeming with natural and animal life, and the elves take great care in protecting the natural refuge their Baron is trying to create here. Packs of deers and moose roam freely in the Forest of Persimmon, and flocks of sparrows, woodpeckers and skylarks make their nest in the highest limbs of the tree trunks. You can also find fresh streams of sparkling water flowing through the forest. Elven gatherers and hunters move around so silently that it's difficult to discern them from the common sounds of the woods. However, to witness such a wonderful show you must have pointy ears, a slender figure and speak the elven tongue.

"It is forbidden to any non-elf to venture into the forest": this is the exact text of the most important law issued by the Baron more than eight years ago. This step has been taken to prevent the destruction or the upsetting of the ecosystem the Ironwood elves are slowly and patiently trying to build and protect, and all the elves living here support and enforce it.

And so, to overcome this fastidious rule your intrepid correspondent has had to polymorph into an elf and to travel disguised like this among the sylvan folk that I encountered during my exploration of Ironwood. The risk was high, but it was worth trying (and I did meet other individuals who had the same idea during my wanderings, though if they were humans like me or other kind of beings I could not always tell). But in spite of my precautions, there was a place I was not really able to explore like I wanted, this being what the elves simply call the Reserve, of which I will speak later in this letter.

One last feature of the land I'd like to detail in this report regards its economy. The elves here don't pay any taxes to their lord, or better, they don't pay taxes the way we humans do. In fact, each year they give their lord the "gifts of the forest". The Baron therefore receives a share of the products the elves gather and hunt in the woods, plus some of the byproducts of hunting, craftworks and a few mineral resources that some elves extract from the soil or the rivers. Aside from these, the elves are not obliged to pay anything else to their clan, even though they must be always ready to work for the community should it be needed. As for the people living in Laran, a tax of 10% of their annual income is collected once a year, and all the imported or exported products are duty free (a real economic paradise). Laran is also the only place where coins are minted and have a value inside the Barony: in all the other parts barter is the rule (although the elves are known to barter not only products of the woods but also finely crafted items and jewels).

## ***The People***

The majority of the population of Ironwood are elves, with a few humans and other demi-humans living in the town of Laran. The elves of Ironwood however do not belong to one single stock or clan. A third are Callarii elves from Karameikos who came here with the Baron when he founded the dominion around ten years ago. The rest are the Shiyes - also called the Norwold elves - who already lived here when Lord Blackblade arrived. The two elven races have successfully integrated with each other. [Ed.'s Note: Since Alasdair has written this report, there is now a large group of newly arrived Alfheimers equaling the number of elves already in Ironwood. Some Vyalia elves of Thyatis are rumored to also be on their way of joining those in Ironwood.]

The elves are just like any other member of their race found in the Old World, even though the influx of the Shiye culture has made them a bit more suspicious and haughty than the common high elves. They view themselves as the new example of the true elven race, being the result of a multi-cultural elven society that has taken the better features of its members. These elves therefore consider themselves as the guardians of the Old Way, a way of life and of thinking that they believe has now been lost by modern elves. Lord Blackblade is trying to recreate the elven land of the myths,

Evergrun, where all the elves lived in peace with one another and with their forest brethren, the animals and the wood spirits. And then there is also the Great Project.

Lord Blackblade is trying to unify all the elves of Norwold under the same banner, in order to create the first Elven Empire of the world. An impossible project if you ask me, considering how the northern Shiye are fond of their secrecy and independency from one another, but who knows. Since Lord Blackblade has an elven lifetime to accomplish it, maybe his dream will come true in the distant future. Until then, he is content of establishing friendly relationships with the other elven communities living in Norwold and I don't believe he will make any political attempts before he has obtained the full support and loyalty of the newly arrived Alfheimers (which may prove a bit more difficult than he thinks).

During the past three years Lord Blackblade has created a new elven religion called the Faith of the Ancestors, where he included all the Immortals worshiped by his people without choosing anyone particular Immortal as head of the pantheon. The common belief that unify all believers is that these deities have all worked to protect the elven race and that they all gave the elves the gifts of the forest. For this reason they must all be revered with the same extent as they are all Immortals of the Elves. With this religion he is trying to prevent the religious disputes that might arise among the various priests and gives the elves the possibility to revere their own patron without angering followers of other Immortals. The pantheon of the Faith of the Ancestors so far comprises Ilsundal, Mealiden, Ordana, Eyrindul and Calitha Starbrow. However, since he only started this project during the last years, it has not been widely accepted yet. There are a few followers, but they are only a small fraction of the population. Elves need a long time to change their ways.

## ***Recent History***

Ironwood was founded only eleven years ago [That would be AC 1013 when this was written. Ed.], yet it is already remarkably stable for a frontier's land and enjoys friendly relationships with its neighboring states. Lord Elariathas Blackblade is the ruler of this land, but like most elven nations he must also answer for his decisions to the Clanmaster of the various clans. Lord Blackblade received his title when he swore fealty to Ericall of Alpha. The Baron then persuaded many of his old clanmates to join him up in Norwold and created clan Blackblade with the blessings of the Callarii leaders of Karamaikos. In the ensuing years he remained loyal to Ericall and Norwold, but was seldom involved in the power plays that erupted among the other barons. Rather he was content with his small isolated dominion and worked steadily to make it a paradise for his race.

During all his years as baron he has worked to integrate the Shiye and Callarii cultures together, but it was only at the end of year AC 1006 that the Shiye that lived in his territory finally swore open allegiance to him and acknowledged to be part of his clan. With their help he began contacting all the other Shiye communities of Norwold and establishing friendly relationship with the druids of Norwold. He hopes to one day obtain their support and unify them, creating a great elven empire. The foundation of the Faith of the Ancestors is the last step in his path to unification and dates back to AC 1012.

It was only after the fall of Alfheim that he also began to work at the Project Evergrun: turning his dominion into a center of elven lore and magical research and creating a natural park where samples of all the vegetal and animal species of the continent could live and be protected.

During the war known as The Wrath of the Immortals that ravaged the continent, Lord Blackblade was able to draw a small number of members of the Fairy Court and other woodland beings such as treants to his dominion. He created a protected territory where they could live in peace called the Reserve. The Reserve is now one of the most protected and inaccessible place in Norwold, rumored to host many more inhabitants than one could presume from its rather small size (8 miles diameter area). I suspect Lord Blackblade is not really "in control" of this part of the forest; the fey folk probably consider him as a friend but they'll never answer his commands. They have their own rules and rulers, as we all know from the old fairy tales.

Not all the other elven communities of Norwold have established contact with Ironwood (Shiye are really proud of their independency), and according to some rumors I've heard the northern Foresthomes may present an obstacle to Lord Blackblade's dreams of glory. In fact, there is a human Treekeeper named Zoltan in that region who has a considerable influence on those elves but who has so far rejected Lord Blackblade's proposals, obviously irritating the elf. There is also a religious issue going on between the two, and from what I've been able to hear it seems it won't be resolved so soon.

Around AC 1010 some Shadow Elves came to Norwold to ask for the elves' help. Unfortunately there were already a few Alfheimers living in Ironwood by that time (minor clans) and tensions erupted. A few native elves were found murdered and after a brief inspection a shadow elf was discovered while trying to penetrate the Tree of Magic to obtain magical knowledge. The shadow elves were exiled and ordered never to return.



## ***Don't Miss***

There are at least two places to see if you're allowed to travel through Ironwood: Persimmon and the Tree of Magic.

Persimmon is the Stronghold of the Blackblade clan, a mighty fortress built atop the giant trees of the Forest of Persimmon. Lord Blackblade copied the Alfheim clan strongholds when he built it, with narrow catwalks and roped bridges swinging at an altitude of more than 80 meters, deeply concealed by lower tree branches always covered with thick foliage. In most cases, the living quarters themselves have been carved out the trees themselves. A few other structures have been built by the elves atop the tree branches (lookout places, fortified gates and laboratories being the most common). In fact this is not only the capital of the nation but also the center for all the magical studies sponsored by the Baron, and it boasts two of the main features of this land.

The first one, which rises proudly at the center of the stronghold, is the fabled Tree of Life of the clan, a daughter tree of the Callarii clan, well tended and constantly guarded by its Treekeeper and his assistants.

The second impressive feature of Persimmon is the repository of all the magical secrets of the barony: the Tree of Magic, an ancient sequoia not very tall (about 70-80 meters high) but incredibly broad (diameter of 60 meters). Many elves claim that Lord Blackblade used magic to enhance the tree's natural diameter. The elves told me that the Tree of Magic is divided into ten different levels, nine for each level of power of the spells researched, and another subterranean one for the research and experimentation in all kind of elemental and nature-related magic. I have not been able to visit it because I feared being discovered by their scrying devices: there are guards who magically inspect every new visitor to the tree in order to prevent thieves stealing precious information.

Some elves told me that many powerful human mages visit the Tree from time to time, all of them trusted and invited by Lord Blackblade. Even visitors from other planes of existence sometimes enter the laboratories, attracted by the magical energy released inside them. It is also said that once a year the Tree of Magic is visited by none others than the spirits of the Elven Immortals, who roam about it and talk with the Higher Elf-Mages about the secrets of the universe and the lost lore of the elven race. Since I have not witnessed these events, I don't know if this is truth or legend.

If you're lucky or powerful enough you could also be allowed to enter the Reserve, that secluded patch of forest where the fairy folk and the sylvan races dwell unmolested. Only the druids and the clanleaders of the barony are permitted to enter thanks to a pact between those beings and Lord Blackblade. It seems that if you're not invited by the inhabitants, you won't be able to access it in any way; once you walk inside you'll simply find yourself exiting at the other side of the area (I experienced the phenomenon myself!). Whatever it is, the Reserve surely contains many marvels to those who are allowed to visit, and if you think of trying to do it during the Day of Dread, well forget it! In that day that part of the forest simply doesn't exist. As far as I could discern, the night before it vanishes, leaving a big empty valley in the middle of the forest, and at dawn of the new year it reappears!

## ***Do Miss***

Well, if you're a dwarf or a shadow elf it's better not to walk this land altogether. And this applies to all the troublemakers of any other race, of course. But there's one place in the dominion I would advise one not to approach. That would be the Dragon's Spur. It lies at the western edge of the dominion and, although slightly outside the borders (about a kilometer), it is a constant threat. The Dragon's Spur is a jagged mountain that belongs to the foothills of the Final Range. It is home to a small number of orcs who serve a local clan of mountain giants, who in turn follow an ancient black dragon by the name of S'hastarl. No elf has ever ventured there and the few adventurers who tried have never returned. Lord Blackblade himself once tried to eradicate this menace by finding out the dragon's lair and killing him, but he wasn't able to locate it and ended up roasting only a clan of orcs. S'hastarl has not been spotted for a hundred years and the goblinoids have not ventured inside Ironwood so far, but the lord of the western dominion has had frequent problems with them in the last months, and this is no good news for Ironwood either. Some elven sages in fact have speculated that the dragon might be awakening from a decades long slumber and will soon be eager to restate his predominance over the region.

## ***LEEHA (City-State of)***

**Location:** Western edge of the Great Bay, west of Alpha.

**Area:** 998 sq. mi. (2,245 km<sup>2</sup>)

**Population:** 6,500 halflings.

**Languages:** Halfling (Lalor dialect). Some speak Alphetian and Thyatian Common.

**Coinage:** None. The halflings rely mostly on barter, although foreign coins are usually accepted.

**Taxes:** None. At the end of each year, the clanleaders get together and decide how much money/labor they need to improve their town. The people then voluntarily chip in according to how much they can spare. This usually rounds off to about 2-5% of their yearly income.

**Government Type:** An elected Sheriff runs the city of Leeha.

**Industries:** farming.

**Important Figures:** none known.

**Flora and Fauna:** Standard for its climate.

**Further Reading:** CM1 - Test of the Warlords, Dawn of the Emperors boxed set, AC1010 - Poor Wizard's Almanac to AC 1012 - Poor Wizard's Almanac 3.

### Description: by Synthala of Aasla.

There's a quaint little town run by little people known throughout the region as halflings. These merry folk prefer to call themselves Hin, and their home is called Leeha, City of the Halflings.

Unfortunately, I did not have time to visit the friendly town this year, but I promise to give you the best description ever in next year's Almanac.

## ***OCEANSEND (Kingdom of)***

**Location:** Known World, continent of Brun, northeastern reaches, area of Norwold.

**Area:** 9,977 sq. mi.

**Population:** 43,000, including 4,000 halflings, 3,500 dwarves, and 1,200 elves.

**Languages:** Thyatian Common, Alphetian Common (Alpha dialect), Elvish (Shiye-Lawr dialect), Halfling (Lalor dialect).

**Coinage:** Heart (gp), blade (sp), and wall (cp). Heldannic coins will not be accepted by any locals.

**Taxes:** 20% income tax, 5% sales tax.

**Government Type:** Independent monarchy.

**Industries:** Agriculture (grows just enough for its own use), trade (by sea), fishing, mining, and trapping.

**Important Figures:** King Olaf Yarrvikson (human, male, F10), Hermann Adalard (former governor-general, now prisoner, human, male, P(cr)9 of Vanya).

**Flora and Fauna:** The animals and plants one would expect in a northern area. There are also several goblinoids in the Final Range to the west.

**Further Reading:** CM 1 - Test of the Warlords, GAZ - Dawn of the Emperors boxed Set, AC1010 - Poor Wizard's Almanac to AC1012 - Poor Wizard's Almanac 3, and Joshuan's Almanac.

### Description: by Synthala of Aasla.

As I approached Oceansend, the City of the Sea, I could feel the excitement in the air. The locals have just recently won their freedom from the Heldannic Knights, breaking their slavery to the New Heldannic Territories.

## ***The Land***

Oceansend is rather large, with sturdy walls surrounding the entire city. It is situated along a beautiful deep-water beach into the Alphetian Sea, making it an ideal port. Oceansend is the largest and best equipped port of all of Norwold. The water is remarkably clear for a sea port, and many of the locals make a profitable living fishing its bounties.

When compared to Alpha, there are no fancy buildings or statues or such boasting the wealth of the city. Instead, King Yarrvikson prefers for his residence to be a functional fortress rather than a palace. Like many other cities here in the wildlands of Norwold, Oceansend is well fortified. Siege weapons can be seen along the walls and various towers. The wall guards have also earned a well-deserved reputation with the crossbow, which they've no doubtfully shown the Heldannic Knights during their revolution.

The fields around Oceansend are dotted with farms and small villages. They are blessed by Zirchev with fertile crops and plenty of game animals to hunt. Some of the best inns and taverns "in town" are actually found in these surrounding villages, and many an Oceansender travels outside the city walls to find his entertainment.

A few days hike inland lies the mountain base of the Final Range. This land is the home to the now famous Rocktooth Dwarves of Kildorkak. The dwarves apparently played a pivotal role in the overthrow of the tyrannical Knights.

## ***The People***

The people of Oceansend now live with joy and happiness, still celebrating the overthrow of the priests of Vanya. Everywhere one goes, you can easily see the black lion banners been desecrated and vandalized. In fact, it's probably the only reason they are still here, otherwise, I'm sure the king would have had them all burned.

Except for this, the people are proud of their small little kingdom. They are starting to become renown sea merchants in the area, although I suspect it will be some time before they can rival the Merchant Princes of Minrothad.

Now, they Oceansenders are content with trying to make their town the greatest in Norwold. And they are intent on remaining completely independent; the citizens have voted a forced conscription of all men and women. Many voluntarily go to the military training lessons given by the king's men. Their goal is to have everyone in Oceansend be able to fight in case of another invasion. I believe this is still the aftereffects of the Heldannic Occupation, and this spur to action will probably die down with time.

On a final note about the people, it seems that Yarrvikson has released all thieves from the city dungeons. This was the king's reward to the Dark Masks, the local thief's guild, for their help in the defeat of the Heldannic Knights. Most commoners viewed this reward with mixed blessings; they are indeed grateful of the thieves' help, but also fearful that, now free, their houses will be robbed. It seems that the local guards are also somewhat more lenient toward members of the Dark Masks that they apprehend.

## ***Recent History***

Oceansend has always been an independent kingdom. Around AC 990, King Ericall of Alpha claimed all of Norwold, including Oceansend, but the Oceansenders simply ignored this. Ericall never sent any military forces to conquer the city, instead opting to peacefully convince them to join his kingdom. In AC 1004, a civil war bloomed in the nation of Alpha, and most of Ericall's lords claimed independence, creating the anarchy we find in Norwold today. Oceansend simply kept on living as usual since they have always considered themselves independent. On the downside, with all the other nearby cities warring among themselves, Oceansend suffered problems with their trade industry.

About two years ago, however, it all changed with the arrival of the Heldannic Knights. Unlike Ericall, the priests of Vanya conquered the city by force, and so it remained until late this year. Now Oceansend is once more trying to regain its glory and trade of a decade ago.