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Dungeon Crawl Classics #35 Gazetteer of the Known Realms

A COMPLETE CAMPAIGN SETTING
by Mike Ferguson, Jeff LaSala, and Harley Stroh



DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS #35

GAZETTEER OF THE KNOWN REALMS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
CHAPTER 1: THE NORTHLANDS	3
CHAPTER 2: THE SOUTHLANDS	43
CHAPTER 3: THE LOSTLANDS	64
CHAPTER 4: GEOGRAPHIC FEATURES	81
CHAPTER 5: ORGANIZATIONS	100
CHAPTER 6: BEYOND THE KNOWN REALMS	111
CHAPTER 7: HISTORY OF THE NORTHLANDS	113



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INTRODUCTION

The grimoire you hold in your hands first surfaced in America more than one hundred years ago. Discovered in the ruins of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, the tome made its way from collector to collector and finally to the good Doctor S_____ W____, who—knowing my interest in bibliotic obscurities—entrusted the tome to me for translation.

Upon inspection, the first thing one notices about the tome is its smell: musty incense, wood smoke, and oiled steel. Bound in splitting leather and scarred with runes, the cover conjures visions of the ceaseless march of the ages.

Between those thick covers are several hundred handwritten pages, each inked and illuminated in dyes and pigments that bear little resemblance to any known by modern bibliophiles. Sadly, the bulk of the tome has been damaged beyond recognition or is simply untranslatable. But from the scattered passages, a determined researcher may infer this much:

The codex is the work of a handful of unidentified scribes or monks, living during what might be termed a Dark Age—a time of marauding savages, unknown powers, and desperate heroes. By collecting the sum of their knowledge into a single work, the tome, these scribes hoped to stave off the press of darkness and barbarism.

Whether or not their gambit was successful, and if they accomplished with pen and ink what sword and spear could not, will likely never be known.

The codex is seventh in a work of twenty-one volumes,

and serves as catalog for the later volumes and a brief gazetteer of what the scribes refers to as the *Umbris Mundus*. The first term, “shadow,” certainly refers to the threats that plagued their civilization. The second translates to “world,” but whether the scribes intended “world” as we understand it, or “continent,” or simply “the lands of our lord-liege,” remains unclear.

Similarly, a thousand other priceless historical details, deemed too trivial or universally understood to record, remain lost, waiting for future scholars to coax them from the mists of antiquity. Given the absence of accurate maps, it remains for the reader to decide if the codex is a pre-history of our world, or an inexplicable shadow-echo of another, unnamed realm.

We have done our best to present this translation of the tome in its original context, without attempting to conceal its flaws. I encourage the good readers to fill in the gaps with their own reasoning and logic, so that the world of the scribes might live on in their imaginations—and perhaps stave off the darkness a bit longer.

Harley Stroh
Curator of Esoteric Collections
Chicago, 2006



CHAPTER I

THE NORTHLANDS

The nations of the Northlands are steeped in eldritch history, and are often—quite literally—built upon the ruins of those that came before them. The mightiest citadels stand on the ruins of dwarfholds, holy sanctums are built atop fallen rings of druidic stones, and loggers harvest timber from fae-haunted glades. Every spring a farmer uncovers new ruins beneath his fields, often warded in dead languages unknown to modern sages. The past is the North's constant companion, dark-cowled and mysterious, revealing tales of high sorcery, heroism, and slumbering horrors at her leisure.

A careful study of these ruins, and of the scrolls and tomes brought back by explorers, reveals that the kings of men are not the first to rule the Northlands. Some legends speak of ancient races and gods familiar to scholars, while others whisper of foul cults and forbidden powers.

Sages debate these epochs endlessly, but all can agree that the current age is rightly called the Reign of Man. Whether by mortal ambition or some mystic turning of the cosmos, the power of the Gods has waned, permitting the rise of heroes, and granting men, elves, dwarves, and the wee-folk the freedom to fashion their own destinies.

This waning has also ushered in a new host of threats and dangers. The marauding armies of the Scourgelands threaten the heart of the civilized world, barbarians raid with greater frequency each spring thaw, and shrieking comets tumble from the night sky; witches, seers, and astrologers alike presage a time of coming darkness.

It remains to be seen whether this is a prelude to an age of prosperity and peace, or an end to humanity's reign.

CLIMATE AND SEASONS

The Northlands encompass ecologies ranging from the temperate grasslands and vales of Crieste to the inhospitable wastes of the north. Climates and seasons are dependent largely on latitude and precipitation, with certain marked exceptions due to geographic and magical anomalies.

The Criestine Empire and the other nations adjacent to the Lirean Sea enjoy mild summers, brief winters, and long springs and autumns. Dense stands of deciduous hardwoods offer sturdy beams for shipbuilding, while fertile soils provide abundant crops and grasslands for cattle and sheep.

Moving north, the climate grows steadily cooler, reflected by a marked hardness in the people and beasts. The Warlands, renowned for their wealth of natural resources, expect deep winters with heavy snowfall and months of isolation. The summers, unmitigated by the cooling Lirean Sea, can be equally severe, and times of hardship force farmers to augment their crops and herds with wild game. The deciduous forests slowly give way to primeval coniferous stands and the mighty Ashwood groves.

East, across the vast ranges of the Ul Dominor Mountains, are the Mirdar-Luminar Steppes. The little moisture that reaches the steppes is brought by raging storms that sweep down from Hoarfrost Bay. In years of drought, the steppes become a vast tinderbox, and wildfires rage up and down the high prairie, tainting the air for hundreds of leagues in every direction and shading the sunsets the color of spilled blood.

North of both the Mirdar-Luminar Steppes and the Warlands are endless swaths of high tundra, gnarled oak, and icy wastes. Here the temperature retreats below freezing every night of the year, and savage beasts swarm the land. While hunters, outlaws, and hermits choose to make their home in the forbidding wastes, they are the exception, not the rule.

TIMEKEEPING AND CELESTIAL BODIES

The Emperor of Crieste, in his divine wisdom, determines all units of measurement, including the span of the days, months, and years. Following the end of the Interregnum, the empire adopted a sidereal calendar of 365 days, but many of the smaller nations hold to the older lunar calendar.





Every nation and religion celebrates a host of holy days throughout the year, and travelers can expect to encounter any number of festivals and feasts as they travel the North. While universal celebrations are rare, the following holidays are common to all cultures:

Swordfall: Spring in the Northlands is the season of war. Foes abound, and even nations of common cause have reason to settle border disputes with blade and lance. Swordfall is observed on the Spring Equinox, marking the customary beginning of the war season, when roads are passable and the weather tenable. Swordfall is traditionally celebrated with martial tournaments and tests of courage, but just as often the holiday heralds a full-scale invasion, presaging a season of rapine, fire, and death.

Day of Fates: Celebrated on Summer Solstice, the Day of Fates is the culmination of a weeklong celebration honoring patron deities and local saints. On the last day of the week, newborns are named, couples renew their vows of love, and oaths to lord and liege are declared anew. It is a common practice for knights to embark on quests on this holiday, and it is deemed a blessed day for

wizards to choose apprentices. Adventuring companies often choose this day to make their first vows of brotherhood.

Harvestmoon: Falling on the full moon closest to the Autumn Equinox, Harvestmoon is a celebration of thanksgiving and preparation for the winter ahead. The dead are honored with tributes of wine and sweetmeats, and priests go from house to house offering blessings in return for the same. The revels stretch from moonrise to moonfall and lively celebrations are believed to ward off winter's chill.

Forge Feast: Observed on the Winter Solstice, Forge Feast celebrates the rebirth of the year, when hearth fires are relit from the forges of village smithies; woe is the smith who has let his forge fire die. The day culminates in an exchange of gifts, and a single enormous feast with every member of the community bringing an offering to the table.



EMPIRES, KINGDOMS, FIEFS, AND CITY-STATES

What follows is a catalog of the empires, kingdoms, free-states, and principalities of the Northlands. The noted populations are only rough estimates; the actual figures fluctuate wildly with the seasonal depredations of war, plagues, and other acts of the Gods. This catalog is by necessity incomplete: towns, hamlets, and even some cities were passed over due to incomplete records and cartographical disputes. Local lords and elders should be always consulted before the beginning of any journey.

At first glance, the Known Realms might appear to be a patchwork of nations covering every league of Áereth, but veteran explorers know better. Each nation's borders extend only as far as its lord's ability to enforce his rule, leaving vast swaths of borderlands given over to roaming bands of escaped slaves and serfs, violent outlaws, monstrous humanoids, and far worse. Passage between nations without armed escort is attempted only by the bold or desperate.

The majority of Northlanders live in simple villages and hamlets, earning their livelihood by farming, herding, and hunting. The average farmer passes his entire life without traveling more than twenty miles from his homestead. Cities and towns are essential hubs of trade, defense, and religion. Any time a city is sacked by marauding hordes, the surrounding lands suffer.

Similarly, the cities rely on outlying farms to provide the enormous amounts of grain, vegetables, fruits, and meats necessary to support their swollen populations. A prince that punishes his people with high taxes and refuses to defend them in times of distress quickly discovers how difficult it is to maintain a cavalry without grain, or arm his knights without iron.

Exceptions to this rule are plentiful, and benign despots are few and far between. In the hostile realms of the North, civilization is best thought of as a curious anomaly in a long history of savagery and barbarism.

CINAI

(VALE OF THE BLOOD HUNT)

THANE OF THE BLOODED, ASHIR THE MAUL

Population: 569,601 (humans 75%, dwarves 10%, half-elves 4%, gnomes 3%, halflings 4%, elves 2%, other 2%)

Resources: Furs, mercenaries, raw wool, leather, timber

Capital: Marzakol

The wind-scoured hills and dark forests of the Cinai Highlands breed fierce warriors and deadly monsters. With the constant threat of the Scourge and the fierce hill trolls that are native to the Highlands, life in the Vale is often short and always violent.

The people of Cinai are forged in the fire of violence and tempered in the blood of their foes, hence their chosen name, the Blooded. Centuries of conflict have made them hardy in battle, quick to fight and slow to forgive insult. Dark and coarse of hair, their sun-weathered skin runs from olive to rich brown. Commoners dress in rough homespun cloth, while warriors and priests wear the pelts of the mighty northern great cats and dire wolves.

While considered savages by most civilized people, the Blooded's most valued possession is their honor—as anyone accusing them of deceit quickly learns. The folk of Cinai believe that life is a fleeting experience, but that the legends and stories told after death are eternal.

War is a way of life for the Blooded. Every boy and girl learns to use a sling by the age of five, and the study of sword and bow are quick to follow. While most warriors are unkempt barbarians, the most esteemed warriors gather in one of three Orders, the warrior fellowships that give the Vale its fierce reputation.

The Order of the Lion is comprised of holy warriors who charge into battle atop the shaggy steppe ponies; the Lions are renowned for fighting with lances, shortbows, and wickedly curved axes feared for their razor edges and lethal blows.

The warriors of the Raven are recognized as fearless rangers and scouts, fighting in the rocky highlands and dense forests with ease, striking from the shadows like ghosts.

Last of all is the Order of the Wolf: a collection of tireless foot soldiers sworn to victory or death. Tales hold that, in the course of a single night, a troop of Wolves can run dozens of miles in full armor and fight in the morn-





ing, as if they had spent the night sleeping in their homes.

Warriors of the Blooded record their victories in blued, runic tattoos. After years of battle, the tattoos evolve into sprawling works of art that cover a warrior's entire torso. The hordes of Blooded—dirty, wild-eyed and tattooed—inspire terror in the bravest knight, and send lesser men scattering to the four winds.

Fortunately for the civilized lands, the Blooded's favored enemies are the monstrous humanoids of the Scourgelands. Every spring the Orders can be found on the Mirdar-Luminar Steppes, frothing at the mouth, beating their axes against their wooden shields, calling the orcs and ogres to battle.

The armies of the Cinai follow a fearsome warrior of near-divine might: Ashir the Maul. A legend amongst his people, Ashir embodies all the virtues of a Cinai warrior. Strong, brave, and cunning, the Maul is fearless in battle and terrible in his wrath. Ashir's throne is found in the primitive city of Marzakol, but he holds court on the field of battle. Like the warriors serving in his hordes, the master of the Blooded is most at home in the heat of combat, howling in triumph as he cuts a swathe of death and destruction through his foes.

The majority of the Cinai people live in simple sod huts scattered about the lonely highlands, and spend their days herding shaggy sheep and the highland cattle. The nation's cities, if they can be called such, are often no more than haphazard collections of tents and crude cabins and lodges.

Marzakol: (Large town, pop. 4,299) The capital of Cinai is built atop the ruins of an ancient dwarven city. Granite blocks form crude walls, raven-picked ogre skulls adorn tall pikes, and smoky fires from the town's many forges are visible for miles in every direction. Despite its simple defenses and coveted location, it has never fallen to foreign armies.

Ashir the Maul, Thane of the Cinai, rules the highlands from atop a low hill in the center of the city. Numerous trophies of fallen foes adorn his feasting hall and surround his throne: broken shields from fallen knights, shattered skulls from every sort of beast and demon, sun-dered swords and splintered lances. From here he plots new ways to bring terror to his foes, and honor to his people. Such plans invariably include battle.

The city is also home to dozens of smithies. The forge fires burn at every hour of the day, transforming the dark dwarven ore into razor-tipped spears and bright shields. Arms and armor forged in Marzakol bear distinctive markings, a blue-gray patina visible only in starlight. The origin of these markings is a mystery to even the smiths, but sages are quick to note that Marzakol is dwarven for *Starfall*.

Iderag: (Small city, pop. 6,902) It is fitting that Cinai's greatest city exists only one season out of the year. At the end of summer, merchants brave the fierce highlands, bringing a year's worth of trade goods, dried fruit, and coveted foreign spices. The merchants flock to the Fartrader River, and raise a city of tents, bringing trade goods to the Cinai herdsman and hunters.

With the southern merchants come a host of southern vices. Thievery is rife, as are fights over foreign women. Quick-tongued merchants can make a fortune over the course of a few weeks, but at the first hint of winter's chill, the merchants flee south, and Iderag vanishes as quickly as it appeared.

Namana: (Village, pop. 640) Namana is home to the Order of Lions, the fierce war band that serves as Cinai's medium cavalry. At first glance, the village is unassuming; for all the legends attributed to the Lions, the village is deceptively small. This is because at any time the bulk of the Order is roaming the highlands, patrolling the border or watching the herds of shaggy steppe ponies.

Those riding into the small village will find only aging men and women and young babes in arms. The men and women are the band's elders and shamans, while the babes are those too young to ride on their own. The elders nourish the children on pony milk and war stories, and as soon as children can ride they rejoin their parents on the high steppe.

Hali: (Small town, pop. 1,372) Concealed in a glacier



valley, high in the southern Ul Dominor Mountains, the fastness of Hali is the home to the Order of the Ravens. Like its scouts and rangers, the stronghold is difficult to find and harder to reach. A visitor to the mountain fastness is met with an entourage of solemn warriors long before he draws within a dozen miles of the valley. The sight of silent watchers silhouetted atop the sheer canyon walls unnerves even the stoutest soldier.

Those passing the tests of the Ravens meet with a quiet woman of undeterminable age. If rumors are to be believed, this nameless woman is one of the most accomplished assassins in all of the Northlands. Such tales are surely nothing more than idle speculation, the spurious work of feeble minds.

Kursan, Chanshi, and Qumarli: (Small castles, pop. averaging 1,000) The leadership of the Order of the Wolf is divided between three nearly identical citadels. Easily recognized by their colossal central tower and concentric rings of ditches and simple wooden walls, each fastness is capable of disgorging a roaring horde of Wolf warriors. The three fortresses are spaced evenly across the highlands, shouldering the responsibility of the nation's defense.

Each citadel is governed by a council of thanes drawn from the highest echelons of the Order. Their roundtable decisions, made by howling warriors bearing terrible weapons, are things of legend. But once a consensus is reached, and the Wolves are mobilized, little can stand in their path.

CRIESTE, EMPIRE OF

HIS DIVINE EMINENCE, THE RAMPAGING LION, IMMORTAL EMPEROR OF CRIESTE

Population: 3,209,000 (humans 59%, half-elves 11%, halflings 7%, dwarves 7%, elves 5%, half-orcs 5%, gnomes 4%, other 2%)

Resources: Silver, foodstuffs, trade goods, livestock

Capital: Archbridge (during Summer Court), Kassantia (during Winter Court)

Oldest of the western nations, and arguably the most powerful, the Empire of Crieste once dominated the North. Its vast holdings, built atop the moss-covered ruins of the Nimorian Empire, have themselves fallen into ruin; once again fierce monsters roam the wild, travel between the towns and cities is seldom undertaken without escort, and sellswords and warcasters are in great demand.

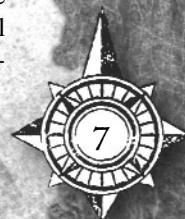
The reach of Crieste once extended from the Mirdar Forest, east to Hoarfrost Bay, and south past the golden sands of the Ghetrian Desert. But with the disappearance of Emperor Oststad, the empire passed into the Interregnum: three hundred years of internal feuding that culminated in the secession of the Southern Province. Other kingdoms and principalities were quick to follow, eagerly making their bids for freedom.

Hoping to stem the tide of seceding states, the lord-barons displayed a rare moment of consensus and elected a seven-year-old boy to sit upon the Dragonskull Throne. Now ten years of age, the Child-Emperor rules according to the dictates of his vizier, Lady Mortiana, who ensures that the child remains "untroubled" by the onus of empire. The child will assume full powers upon his fifteenth birthday, but until that day it is Mortiana and her coterie of power-hungry barons who direct decadent Crieste.

Thankfully, the Child-Emperor is served by Captain Senti, Master of the Sable March and General of the Seven Armies. Senti embodies all the virtues of chivalry, swearing loyalty to the Emperor while spurning the lord-barons. This often places the captain in the dangerous role of commanding the armies to obey the Vizier's orders, while sending agents of the Sable March on missions to counter the same. Thus far the captain has successfully countered the worst of Mortiana's schemes, but as the Emperor draws nearer to his Rite of Ascendancy, Senti's gambit grows steadily more dangerous.

Crieste is celebrated for the honor and nobility of its knights, and no knighthood captures the spirit of galantry better than the Order of the Sable March. Stories of the knights defending mountain passes against the press of giants, single-handedly defeating hordes of demons, and sacrificing their lives for the common man are almost too improbable to be true, but this doesn't stop the younger squires from striving to emulate the tales. Many squires die in the pursuit of impossible ideals, but those who survive go on to become legendary warriors without peer. The Knights of the Sable March can be recognized by their coat of arms: a black background pierced by three silver stars. The background signifies the darkness that threatens humanity and Crieste; the stars signify the three tenets of the order: honor, duty and courage. The Knights of the Sable March are quartered in the fortress known as the Citadel, in the city of Archbridge, but can be seen regularly patrolling the farthest reaches of the empire and its neighbors, fighting injustice and carrying out secret missions on behalf of Captain Senti and the throne.

Even more secretive than their armored brothers are the wizards and sorcerers belonging to the shadowy cabal known as the Ordo Arcana. Rumor holds that the spell-





casters meet on every full moon, wearing elaborate masks to conceal their identities. The aims of the Ordo Arcana, and the reasons for their intense secrecy, remain unknown, but a masked sorceress has been spotted leaving a clandestine meeting with Captain Sentri on more than one occasion. It comes as no surprise that the Ordo Arcana makes its headquarters in the magic-laden city of Kassantia, but seekers would do well to inquire discreetly before attempting to enter the tower known as the Howling Fane.

Despite the chaos of the Interregnum and the greed of its lord-barons, the Criestine Empire retains much of its former greatness. Until the secession of the Southern Province, all trade passing through the Lirean Sea had to stop at a Crieste port, filling the empire's coffers to bursting. Crieste maintains strong ties with the Steel Overlord (see *Holdfast of the Steel Overlord*) and benefits greatly from trade with its dwarf allies. Relations with the Fae Lords are much cooler; during the Interregnum, northern kingdoms aggressively expanded their domains, sparking conflicts between human foresters and elven scouts. Abroad, the empire's colonies continue to offer their annual tribute, and none dare to challenge the Imperial Navy.

At present, both the Empire of Crieste and the Southern Province lay claim to the Dragonskull Throne of Kassantia, and the scions of both nations aver to be the true Son of Heaven. So long as the two emperors fight for the same throne, the empire's outlying kingdoms will continue to exercise their independence, growing stronger with each passing season. Within one hundred years, the mightiest human empire the world has ever known may be nothing but a memory.

The empire recognizes nearly a thousand settlements, ranging from small hamlets to the greatest cities of the north. Following is a brief list of Crieste's more notable towns and cities:

Archbridge: (Metropolis, pop. 48,250) Also known as "Summerhold," Archbridge is home to the summer imperial court. The city also houses the Imperial Army and their chief rivals, the Order of the Sable March. One of the great cities of the Northlands, Archbridge is governed by Crieste's warrior class, men and women famed for their honor and martial pride. Status in the Imperial Army is determined by nobility of birth, while in the Sable March, rank is accorded by honor and bravery in the defense of good. It follows then that the Army and the Knights of the Sable March are bitter rivals, each striving to outdo the other on the field of battle. Too often these tensions boil over, resulting in deadly back-alley duels and running street battles. Officially, the generals of the Army and the Sable March refuse to condone the duels, but high-level commanders can be often seen returning to their barracks late at night, sporting bloody wounds and ferocious grins.

Many aspiring young warriors make pilgrimages to the city, hoping to join the ranks of the fabled March or the Imperial Army. Those that fail quickly find their way to the city's taverns and gambling dens, where they nurse their wounded pride with liquor and brawling. It is said that Archbridge is a city of warrior-lords, but this only partially true; for every true knight, there are a dozen pretenders hoping to catch the Emperor's eye.

The majestic city is built atop the ruins of a previous acropolis, and Archbridge's vast undercity is notorious for its ancient passageways, forgotten tombs, and secret corridors. The Imperial Army sends regular expeditions into the undercity, but few return.

Axebury: (Hamlet, pop. 125) A sleepy hamlet founded on the southern edge of Mosswood, the folk of Axebury make their living harvesting timber for the dark glades. Recent expeditions into the heart of the wood have uncovered peculiar standing stones of ancient origin. Whether the stones are baleful or blessed has yet to be discovered.

Blihai: (Small town, pop. 16,801) A vibrant fishing town with a deep natural harbor and easy access to old growth forests, Blihai also serves as the western staging area for the Imperial Navy. Seamen are highly regarded in Blihai, and those with little or no deck experience are often dismissed as "greens." With a rotating pool of over one thousand sailors and marines, Blihai has grown notorious for its rollicking nightlife, and—in times of war—its sea captains' practice of "enlisting" drunks into the Emperor's navy.



Carnelloe: (Large thorp, pop. 86) Isolated from major trade routes and battered by frequent storms, this lonely costal hamlet is often dismissed by imperial mapmakers. Carnelloe (Elvish for “desolate place”) is noteworthy only for its proximity to Gurnard’s Head, a rocky spire that served as a strategic landmark in the early days of Crieste. The solemn tower atop the spire was hard put during the Siege of Sorrows, and has since fallen into ruin.

Dhavosin: (Large town, pop. 4,014) Known to merchant lords as the Crossroads of the Empire, Dhavosin hosts a steady stream of caravans and traveling traders. In the peak of autumn the town hosts Candlemeet, a festival and bazaar drawing farmers and craftsfolk from across the empire. The population swells to over 10,000 souls, the tent city spilling past the town walls and onto the outlying grasslands. During the heady, month-long festival, people of every creed and color meet to drink, gamble, and barter, and entire fortunes are won or lost overnight. Swarthy southern merchants mingle with dwarf traders offering crates of gleaming weapons fresh from Holdfast forges, while Kassantian mages shop for exotic spell components and trade secrets with the elves.

Dundrville: (Village, pop. 452) Overlooking the shores of Lake Dundrae, Dundrville is a sleepy village of fishermen and farmers. Local features of geographic note include a ring of druidic standing stones, and a peculiar rock formation known as Skulltop Hillock.

The Graves: (Small city, pop. 11,901) Officially known as Siraël Citadel, the prison island of Crieste is better known as the Isle of Many Graves, or simply the Graves. When Criestine criminals are judged too vile to be redeemed, they are placed on a ship and sent to Siraël Citadel. Few ever return.

The prison is administrated by a grim warlock known as the Maelidoch. It is whispered that the Maelidoch is guilty of his own crimes and that his service as master of the island is part of a cruel sentence. It is also rumored that the dark wizard performs experiments on his wards; those few who do return from the Graves report tormented screams ringing from the prison dungeons, screams that resemble the screech of metal on metal more than the cries of flesh-and-blood humans.

In the years since its creation, Siraël Citadel has grown to encompass the entire island. Prisoners constantly labor on the citadel, building its towers ever higher and digging its dungeons ever deeper. The currently citadel is a maze of old and new construction, with half-finished towers and passageways leading nowhere; the purpose of the completed citadel—and *if* it is even intended to be completed—is known only to the Maelidoch.

Hadler’s Gap: (Hamlet, pop. 253) The northernmost

reach of the fallen empire, Hadler’s Gap is a collection of small farms nestled amongst the Urkallan Hills. To the west, a forbidding, craggy mountain rises from the grassy hills. Local legend holds that the mountain was the fantastic result of an ancient duel between warring arcanists, and passing merchants aver to the unnatural aura that haunts those living in the shadow of the mountain.

High Cross: (Small castle, pop. 910) Raised at the juncture of two royal tradeways, and overlooking the sparkling waters of the Blade Reach, the stronghold of High Cross wards the empire from monsters making their way up from the Great Swamp and southern Ul Dominor Mountains. On occasion, beasts threaten the castle itself, and many prominent weaponsmiths and armorers work forges inside the castle walls. Captains of the watch constantly seek to recruit would-be-heroes, as the stronghold’s outriders suffer high casualties in their defense of the empire.

Kassantia: (Metropolis, pop. 62,870) In all of the Northlands, the city of Kassantia is second in size only to Punjar, and second to none in eldritch grandeur. Home to the Winter Palace of the Emperor, the prestigious Royal Academy of Sorcery, and the mysterious Ordo Arcana, the city is rightly said to be the Gem of Crieste. Wondrous sights and sounds abound in the city’s shops, archmages can be seen arriving astride pegasi and enormous rocs, and the brightly armored knights of the Sable March patrol the well-cobbled streets.

Kassantia is also the home and destination of the imperial tribute fleet. Twice each year the fleet sails into port, bearing gold and exotic wonders tithed by the empire’s far-flung colonies. While the fleet generally takes six months to complete one circuit, the precise timing and arrival of the fleet is one of the empire’s most carefully guarded secrets. Only once has a treasure ship ever fallen to piracy: to the fell pirate Bloody Jack. Jack’s success has inspired many a knave to dream of cutting galleys from the gold-laden fleet, and the shipping lanes leading to Kassantia are littered with sunken pirate vessels.

Sainfoin: (Village, pop. 620) Hidden deep within the Warderwood, the village of Sainfoin is renowned for its rangers and woodsmen. Ruled—if such a word could be used—by an ancient druid, the citizens of Sainfoin refuse to swear fealty to the Criestine Empire. The dense groves of Warderwood are highly prized by shipbuilders, and the woodsmen of Sainfoin often find themselves in skirmishes with lumberjacks sent by the Imperial Navy. Elves and half-elves are common in Sainfoin, and respected as equals by the humans.

Silverton: (Large thorp, pop. 76) A small mining village perched high in the mountains north of the Fangs, Silverton’s livelihood depends entirely upon the plentiful



silver mines that dot the rocky hillsides. Regular Miner's Guild caravans make their way through the deep canyons to Archbridge, and caravan guards are always in high demand.

Sparport Watch: (Small town, pop. 1,380) A towering citadel straddling a rocky ridge, Sparport surveys the land and sea for miles in every direction. The lord-baron, Izod the Shark, has been tasked with taming the pirates of the Wreckers. And yet—to the Emperor's disappointment and Izod's bitter chagrin—for every pirate crew he hangs, another two ships seem to spring from the sea itself. Responding to veiled threats from the court, Izod has redoubled his efforts, swearing to hang the crew of any ship, pirate or otherwise, that he finds sailing the Wreckers.

Soulgrave: While squarely within Cieste territory, the city of Soulgrave is claimed by no nation. See *Soulgrave, Free City of* for more information.

Tarrasine: (Large city, pop. 24,021) The city of Tarrasine is Cieste's chief port on the Lirean Sea. Built atop a low-lying swamp, the city has grown into a chaotic sprawl of docks, taverns, sinking towers, and smugglers' dives. While such a rowdy city might seem impossible to rule, Lord-Baron and Harbormaster Deor Cuthwulf thrives on the chaos. An iron-fisted ox, Lord Cuthwulf can be found on the docks nearly every day, meeting with ship captains and merchant princes. Those who cross him are quick to feel his wrath, and many captains pay tithes directly to Cuthwulf to stay in his good graces. Tarrasine smugglers are likewise expected to tithe, and the city walls are ringed with crow cages holding the skeletons of those who failed to pay. Lord Cuthwulf retains the Crimson Hawks, a small army of depraved thugs and henchmen, to enforce his rule. Well armed and universally feared, the Hawks enjoy unquestioned authority in the city streets.

Vaquerea: (Small city, pop. 8,110) Vaquerea is famous for its horse breeders and trainers, and is home to the fabled warhorses of Parelor. Intelligent, fearless, and unmatched in battle, the mighty warhorses are the exclusive steeds of the Knights of the Sable March. The citizens of Vaquerea are friendly but proud folk, with an obscene love of bargaining.

Vernaut: (Small city, pop. 11,680) A city of craftspeople and silversmiths, Vernaut is unusual for its high population of gnomes and half-elves. Ruled by Lady Imaril, a benevolent and fair governess, Vernaut enjoys the prosperity and peace that eludes much of the Northlands. In recent years, that peace has been troubled by savage raids from the Isle of Nos Caen. The raiders push ashore in the dark of night, sacking and pillaging with animal fury, before hauling women and children back to their savage isle. The people of Vernaut have pled their case before

the Emperor, but his eminence has yet to commit a force capable of quelling the raiders.

Wicheath: (Village, pop. 460) Isolated from much of the empire, Wicheath is a lonely whaling village, ruled by a circle of matriarchs informally known as the Council of Crones. For reasons unknown to sages and scholars, the young girls of Wicheath are often highly talented sorceresses. Moreover, every seventh year a truly gifted child is born, one with the power to warp magic as weavers pull thread. These girls are quickly ushered away to the ancestral caves that dot the barren coastline, and tutored in the ancient ways of the crones. The crones of Wicheath have no tolerance for explorers and adventurers eager to plumb the depths of this mystery, and between their hardy menfolk and the formidable magics of the crones themselves, interlopers seldom stay long.

ELRAYDIA

THE SESTET

Population: 27,643 (humans 56%, half-elves 13%, elves 10%, halflings 5%, dwarves 4%, half-orcs 3%, maenads 3%, monstrous humanoids 3%, dromites 3%)

Resources: ?

Capital: The City of Elraydia

In a world prolific with magic, the less understood arts are often beheld with fear and mistrust. Those possessing psionic talent usually hide their powers from public view or disguise them as magic. In many lands, organized witch hunts, usually led by paranoid spellcasters unwilling to tolerate what they cannot understand or control, slaughter and imprison psionic-using people. For millennia, the persecution of their talents drove such individuals and even entire bloodlines into isolation or constant flight. Existing on the fringes of society, or hidden within it, these psychic people could find no enduring solace.

A mere two hundred years ago, six powerful human psions shared the dream of a haven for their "kind." These men and women, each a master of one of the six psionic disciplines, went to extraordinary lengths to realize this dream. Committing great acts of good and evil, they became notorious outlaws across the Northlands, wanted by kings, high priests, and archwizards for their crimes. Yet their efforts were not in vain, for at last they found a remote, barren valley in the Nyfall Mountains and there made their home, laying the first stones of Elraydia for the generations to come. Having erased all knowledge of the vale from records across the nations and assassinating all those who could reveal it, they had secured their new home.

