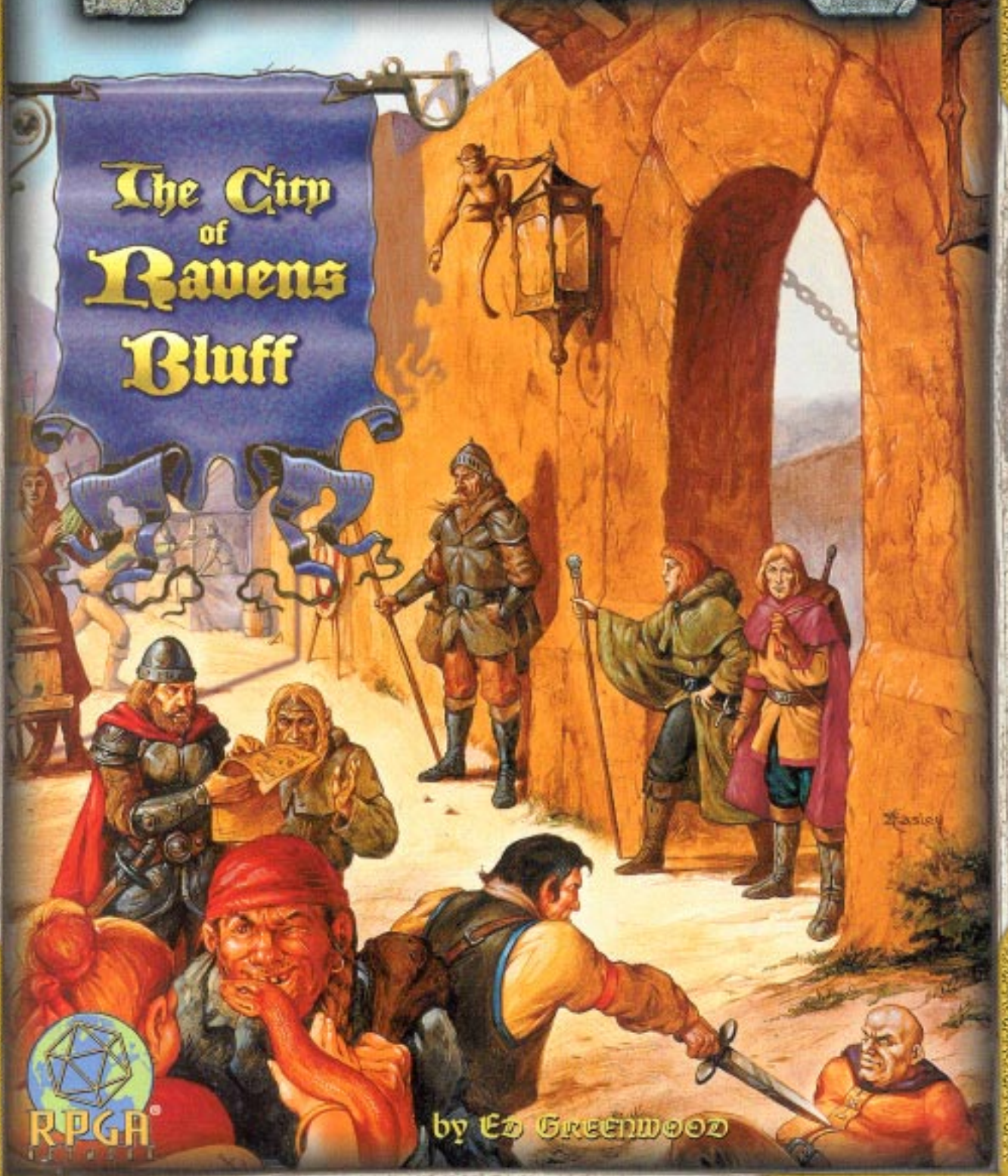


FORGOTTEN REALMS

CAMPAIGN EXPANSION

The City of Ravens Bluff



by Ed Greenwood



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Dedication

To all who have played in LIVING CITY™ events, roleplaying or live, and otherwise helped breathe life into this most shared corner of the shared world I began so long ago.

To those scribes and supporters of things Ravenaar who have gone before me, including (but not limited to, as Charles Oliver O'Kane would say) the following:

George Aber, James Alan, David Carl Argall, Tim Beach, Eric L. Boyd, Laura Braslow, James Buchanan, Brian Burr, David "Zeb" Cook, Richard Dold, Barbara Donnelly, Tia Doran, Scott Douglas, Rollin Ehlenfeldt, Errol Farstad, David Feest, Jr., Dr. Edward R. Friedlander, Vince Garcia, Dave Gross, Peter Hague, John A. Harnes, Byron Heim, Claire Hoffman, Keith Hoffman, Mechele Hunt, Harold Johnson, Angelos Kaldis, Daniel Kramarsky, Jim Lowder, Jeff Martin, Catherine McClurkin, Lee McClurkin, Kevin Melka, Robert Nichols, Wes Nicholson, Tom Nolan, Steve Null, Rembert Parker, Hubert Phillips II, Francis Poulin, Tom Prusa, Jean Rabe, John Rateliff, Nicky Rea, Rita Rivera, Richard Rydberg, Todd Smart, Ed Sollers, Gail Straiton, Wayne Straiton, Keith Francis Strohm, John Terra, Jay Tummelson, Jim Ward (*the* Charles Oliver O'Kane), Don Weatherbee (a stalwart), Shannon Whitworth, Robert Wiese (a workhorse for us all in dark times), Skip Williams, Malcolm Wood, Lew Wright.

To Dan Donnelly, who kept the torch burning.

And most of all, to Steve Glimpse, whose heart was as big as all Ravens Bluff.

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The Living City



In many folktales of Faerûn there is mention of a City of Adventurers, where every citizen is a mighty and famous delver, monster-slayer, explorer, or smiter of foes, from the bread-bakers to the roofers, the dung-sweepers to the high judges. The very cobbles of the streets are gold, they say; handfuls of gems serve as small change, and the humblest houses crammed with valuables of gleaming beauty and glowing enchantment. Folktales are like that.

Most cities are grubby, crowded, dangerous places, where coins are hard won and easily lost, and few folk are mighty or famous. Reality is like that.

Reality in Faerûn, however, does hold a City of Adventurers. A young and vigorous city, where magic does dazzle and wealth is heaped in plenty—for some. Danger lurks there, too, never far from the elbow of the visitor. A stranger here will share crowded streets with more than the usual share of adventurers, eyes sharp and alert, swords swinging ready, and deadly spells just a mutter and gesture away. It's a city of watchful black ravens; a port often raided of old by orcs and hobgoblins and worse, that still lurk not so far away in the frowning mountains; a place where pirates walk the streets in the thinnest of disguises. A city of the bold and the grasping, of the youthful and daring. Home of the reckless and the wild-spirited, where a dragon lies atop heaps of gold in the city coffers, and so much magic crackles and sparkles in the very stones underfoot that disenchanters are drawn to it from around the world . . .

A real place, not a folktale. A place called Ravens Bluff, where adventurers are at home and wonders almost commonplace. A place where Faerûnian eyes that crave excitement are looking over even now. A place that is truly alive. This book is a campaign introduction to the Living City made famous in the tournament adventures of the ROLE-PLAYING GAME ASSOCIATION™ (the RPGA® Network). Over more than a decade, hundreds of gamers have designed little bits and pieces of Ravens Bluff for the love of the game. This book can't do more than skate over the surface of the ice their hard work laid down, but it pulls together much of it into organized form. The sharp-eyed will note that not every secret is revealed nor every alleyway explored; these deliberate omissions of lore are done to avoid pre-empting future Living City revelations, to keep tournament play exciting, and to allow every Dungeon Master "elbow room" to make Ravens Bluff more easily fit into his or her individual ongoing campaign. No book can ever hope to comprehensively detail a whole city, but this one sets forth the bones of the Bluff, from nobles to city government to guild intrigues. Adventurers will find a home—and adventures galore—here. Welcome to Ravens Bluff.

The City

Ravens Bluff straddles the mouth of the Fire River on the eastern shore of the Dragon Reach, that most northerly arm of the Sea of Fallen Stars (the Inner Sea). Ravens Bluff stands just north of the Earthfast Mountains, on the site of the onetime dwarven city of Sarbreen. It commands access to the rich agricultural coastlands known as the Vast, its only rivals in this role being the cities of Tantras and Calaunt. All too close to the rich lands of Sembia, Ravens Bluff has always walked a delicate line between the interests of that rich Realm of Merchants across the Reach, the greed of Mulmaster to

the north, the desires of the pirates of the Fallen Stars to control a secure mainland port, and the more subtle menaces of the Zhentarim, the Red Wizards of Thay, and even the Lords of Westgate. Only recently the city fought off a devastating attack by a combined army of humanoids and mercenaries under the command of a shadowy figure known as Warlord Myrkysa Jelan; the reason for the attack, and her current whereabouts, are alike unknown.

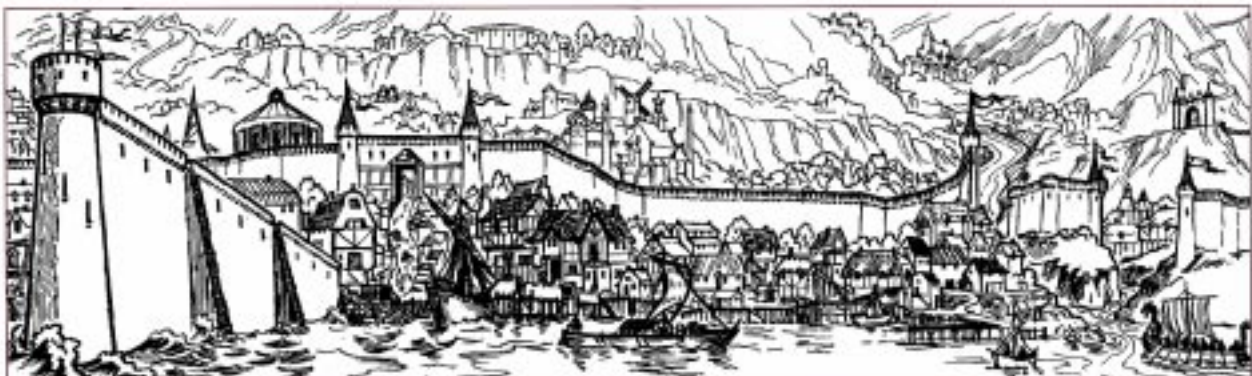
Folk of all races and origins rub shoulders in Ravens Bluff; an annual average of about forty thousand of them. The city boasts a good and very busy harbor, defensive walls, and bustling commerce. This book goes into all matters Ravenian in detail, but the first-time visitor should know that rich, semi-wooded agricultural lands surround the city on its landward sides. These are home to rich estates, many of them belonging to nobles and to successful adventurers with an eye towards eventual ennoblement. The Vast's major coastal road crosses the Fire River near the Bluff. The city walls enclose several distinct major districts: Southside (that part of the city south of the river), Crow's End (a rundown but thriving area on both banks of the river), Harbor (the dock area on the Dragon Reach itself), and the sprawling Uptown district (which encloses the Temple and Market districts). A small seaward area, with its own walls, houses the Foreign Section, given over to embassies and consulates of outland realms and cities. Ravens Bluff even has its own monthly broadsheet newspaper, the Ravens Bluff Trumpeter, edited by Fred Faber. Its staff includes the society beauty and gossip Jacinth ("Jackie") Moonspring, Tomaldi Everspring, the highborn Silva Sinaran, and the earthy man of the streets Guido.

Adventurers are more a part of everyday life in Ravens Bluff than they are in any other city of the Realms. In many ways, they are the safety valve standing between the entrenched interests of the established nobility and the aggressive, fast-rising power of the merchant class. Magic abounds in this city—and one would think the explosive mixture of spells galore, swords aplenty, and opposed powers battling for control of this city in transition would make for total war and the destruction of the city. Some folk do think that way and think those who willingly head for Ravens Bluff are dangerous fools. Others, of course, already define adventurers as dangerous fools, even "walking dead fools." So far, Ravenians have proven them wrong, and their town has thrived on what looks from afar like chaos. So far . . .

Local History



The city of Ravens Bluff stands on the site of the lost dwarven city of Sarbreen, City of the Hammer, begun sometime around the Year of the Normir (611 DR) and completed in the Year of the Ensorcelled Kings (616 DR). Sarbreen was a large stone city of squat, fortress-like keeps and very thick, labyrinthine city walls, situated so as to enclose a series of connected courtyards and paddock-areas in concentric defensive rings. There were no streets as humans know them, and much of the city was underground (with an elaborate series of pumps and sluices to keep water in one place and the dryness needed for storage and living space in another). The dwarves who built and dwelt in Sarbreen were chiefly of the Boldenbar and Shattershields clans, among the richest of the Stout Folk to call the Realm of Glimmering Swords home. Sarbreen made them richer. Built as a secure trading center, here dwar-





ven gems and trade-metals could be exchanged for cloth, livestock, and exotic foods—Glimmering Sword dwarves are known to have developed a great fondness for honeyed dates and the various spiced, ruby-red liqueurs popular of old in Unther and Mulhorand.

For an all too brief time, Sarbreen flourished. It stood on an ideal site, commanding a small but sheltered natural harbor at the mouth of the Fire River. The river could carry goods inland by barge or float logs from the tall forests down to mills at “the Prow” (the litter of dwellings just east of the fortress-like City of the Hammer). Ships came calling from all over the Sea of Fallen Stars, and Sarbreen became “the Gate to the Vast.” The thriving timber industry cleared mile upon mile of forests, and the dwarves (accompanied by opportunistic gnomes and halflings) tried their hand at farming in a big way.

Orcs attacking on the surface and drow striking in the depths put a sudden and brutal end to dwarven rule in the Year of the Bloody Crown (649 DR). The Realm of Glimmering Swords fell, and Sarbreen was abandoned. Orcs promptly pillaged and burned the fallen city, and its ruins became the haunt of monsters, pirates, and brigands; heaps of stone rubble aboveground and a maze of abandoned dwarven tunnels and chambers below. For more on hidden dwarven caches and unfound traps that remain to this day, see the chapter on “Lost Sarbreen” (pages 8-10).

From The Ashes

Dwarven dreams may have lain in ruins, but the site of Sarbreen was still important for the very reasons the city had flourished: the meeting place of a good harbor, the Fire River offering a water-way into the interior, and a surviving bridge a few miles upriver carrying the coastal road across the river. As humans wrestled the Vast out of orc domination and settled along its coasts, local merchants and farmers gathered to trade their goods at the Fire River Bridge (today called Mossbridges). The nearby ruins remained dangerous, but they crumbled year by year and the everpresent, squawking ravens made ambushes and stealthy stalkings almost impossible. Pirates and other mariners began to put in, anchoring alongside the rubble-strewn docks. Folk would materialize out of the lands around, bringing carts of their farm produce, hides, and woodcarvings to trade in earnest.

The possibilities offered by shattered Sarbreen—now reduced to low mossy, rocky hills-caught the eyes of several folk who passed through, particularly after clergy of Chauntea settled south of the river, bringing a fresh wave of human farmers with them. Among the folk who saw a bright future in settling at the raven-haunted mouth of the Fire River were adventurers from Murann (who’d worn out their welcome up and down the Sword Coast), ambitious war-captains from the Vilhon Reach who despaired of ever owning land in the crowded countries along the southern shores of the Sea of Fallen Stars, and weary homesteaders from the Sword Coast who were in search of a land where foes were fewer, sick of fighting barbarians as well as orcs. Enter the Daefihlars (later “DeVillars”), Moorlands, and Therogeons, respectively. They mustered armed companies who could build and defend homesteads, arriving in the spring of the Year of the Horn (1222 DR). Settling at the mouth of the river, a few miles downstream of the old bridge but much closer to shipborne supplies, they struggled against harsh winters, marauding monsters, and orc raids for three seasons. Their mere survival inspired others, and in the Year of the Black Buck (1226 DR) over a dozen new families arrived, each with a small army of hired bodyguards, servants, and farmers to work the land. Suddenly the river-mouth settlement became a community rather than three beleaguered steadings. Trails and patrols were established, boundary disputes settled, and an inn and stockyards built out of the riverside wreckage to serve the traders. The inn was Lusker’s Ravensgate, named after its owner, the ravens, and the feeling that this fledgling community had become “the Gate to the Vast.” A primitive bridge, often replaced, was even thrown up between the village and the will o’ wisp-haunted dwarven ruins on the river’s northern shore.

More settlers came, most finding employ on the estates of the founding families. As the generations passed, these wealthy and long-settled founder-families began to style themselves lords and ladies, in the manner of petty barons everywhere (the Border Kingdoms provide a good present-day example of such self-proclaimed titles), passing their own laws and jostling for supremacy as the settled wealth of the Vast grew and trade quickened. Things even grew civilized enough that mages began to settle in the area—few enough, but wizards nonetheless. Folk both high and low watched them warily but found no trace of dark brotherhoods or schemes to rule the land.

In the Year of the Wandering Waves (1292 DR), the first pirate raid struck the harbor of Ravens Bluff. Hastily-mustered local forces drove back raiders who dared to try plundering ashore, but one visiting merchant ship was seized.

Another, the *Glartaree* out of Hlath, was left blazing; it burned to the waterline and sank, scattering its cargo of stone bowls across the harbor bottom (nearly eighty years later, smooth dark gray bowls still turn up from time to time in nets dredging the river ooze).

The shocked Ravenaar (the term “Ravenians” didn’t come into use until about the time of the Champions Games, and the older term for the citizens of Ravens Bluff is still heard, particularly among the poorest folk and the most long-established nobles) spent many nights shouting in meetings about what to do “when the pirates come again!” The orcs of the Earthfast Mountains didn’t wait for them to reach any conclusions: that winter, they came down from the mountains by night to slash and hack, emptying outlying steadings of livestock and people alike to fill their cooking-fires.

Ravens Bluff became a grim, embattled place. The farmers turned to their self-styled lords and demanded protection, and the summer of the Year of the Talking Skull (1293 DR), and throughout the decade that followed, those lords spent coins like falling rainwater to import mercenaries and equip and train all their farmhands for the pirate and orc raids that kept coming. At the same time, a small but steady trickle of folk began to steal away from the twin dangers of coast and mountains, moving north and east into the interior in search of safer lands to farm in. Meeting in a grim council in the autumn of the Year of the Stag (1304 DR), the lords could see a future ahead of them that looked all too much like their not-too-distant-past: a few beleaguered homesteads, beset by wolves, orcs, and brigands in the winter, and all three plus pirates the rest of the year. And yet the Bluff was their home now; the graves of their parents and grandparents who’d founded the now-sprawling estates stood like silent, reproachful reminders of lifework that would be thrown away by those who left for the safety of walled cities elsewhere.

Walled cities . . . That was what was needed, both for defense and to shore up the crumbling power of the founding families! Ravens Bluff needed a wall, and grand houses, and secure warehouses, and a bridge across the river within the town, and chains across the river, and gates to prevent anyone using either river or bridges without paying tolls. The deep passages of Sarbreen could serve as sewers, draining away filth; the river could provide clean water; nearby abandoned dwarven quarries in the Earthfasts would yield building stone—it was all so simple!

Well, simple to say, yes. Fired by the idea (which seemed good to almost everyone except those who’d recently moved from corrupt, crime-ridden cities





such as Westgate and Arrabar), the lords set to work building a great encircling wall. While the original settlement had been based south of the river, this area was hemmed in by the surrounding mountains and fully two-thirds of the settlement was now to be found on the northern bank. Fired by the project, the lords made the new wall much larger than the existing town so that some crop land fell inside the walls in case of siege. Folk high and low could live within the walls, in houses as grand as they desired, safe from marauders at last. Work continued through the year, and the folk of the city became skilled in the use of crossbows, using every height raised by the builders to fire down on wolves, orcs, and brigands. Fearful that brigands and pirates (or indeed one of their own number) might move in and seize control once the walls were complete, several of the lords quietly began the first undercover spy force Ravens Bluff had ever known: the Vigilant, whom some say still exist, so well-hidden and covert in their actions that they've left no trace in public for decades.

When Coins Were King

Throughout this period the Bluff remained open to the sea, defended against pirates only by a lone seatawer on Ladyrock Isle that lacked any catapult or ballista. That changed in the Year of the Catacombs (1308 DR), when the landwards walls were completed. The nobility promptly hired a "Lord Protector" and a "Lord Treasurer" to see to the defense of their new city and to ensure that it swiftly repaid the crippling expenditures its creation had made necessary. These officials were puppets of the lords, who did not hesitate to murder (for embezzlement or disobedience) or dismiss (for incompetence or "willful nature") city officials and any members of their staff throughout the decade that followed; in the Year of the Fallen Throne (1319 DR, referred to locally as "the Year of Rolling Heads"), there were no less than fourteen Lords Protector and three Lord Treasurers—though the last one fled (burdened only by some thousands of gold pieces) months before the end of the year, leaving the city effectively without a tax collector until the next spring.

Not that the lords were overly concerned. People were flocking to the new city, and revenues from the businesses owned by the noble families (notably builders, shippers, and bodyguards-for-hire) poured into their coffers. Emboldened, they plunged once more into their games of oneupmanship that barely masked the underlying private battles for true supremacy in the Bluff.

When old Ravenaar families use the phrase "When coins were king," this is the time they're speaking of; when the lords openly named and dismissed city governments on a whim, pirates used the harbor as a safe haven and openly raided other ships in port (in return for not-so-secret payments to the lords), and the city Watch were in reality only bands of private warriors in service to this lord or that, often fighting in the alleys at the behest of their masters. The law in Ravens Bluff was what any lord said it was, and a well-organized Thieves Guild, initially the champion of the people against the lawlessness of the lords, became a power unto itself. A black market sprang up, in which increasingly desperate citizens sold objects stolen in order to get money enough to eat and to replace whatever had been stolen from them in turn. Press gangs openly walked the streets, and pirates took unwilling wives as they pleased or else carried off pretty girls who refused them to either ransom or sell as slaves elsewhere. Angry citizens mounted raiding expeditions of their own, sometimes preying on outlying farms when food ran short or sacking temples, set up by priests who dared not enter the city, carrying off whatever temple furnishings they could to sell off in order to ransom their daughters, pay their ever-increasing taxes, or simply feed their families. To top things off, orc, goblin, and hobgoblin raids began in earnest again, slaughtering hundreds of citizens in 1321 DR (the Year of Chains) and the years that followed.

Merchant shippers began to avoid Ravens Bluff as a known trouble spot, trading with Tantras or Procampur instead. As revenues began to drop off, the lords looked for fresh solutions. Amandas Blerune hit upon the idea of hiring gnolls (from a band dispossessed and on the move north of the Moonsea, who'd been seen by one of his trade agents) to defend the city against the orcs, by promising them free and unmolested ownership of the foothills between Ravens Bluff and the mountains. The cold-blooded scheme worked like a charm: for two years gnolls and orcs slaughtered each other until no gnolls were left, and orc bones littered the fields south of the city. Yet even the most cynical and self-interested of the lords could see that there was no fresh supply of gnolls—and that things couldn't go on like this, with no common law, no leadership, and no comfort or protection for anyone who couldn't buy it. The parties held by the nobles took on a desperate edge, and many lords were overheard arguing and plotting feverishly

to find some sort of hope for their city, at times being moved to tears or to draw daggers on each other. When fear overmastered greed or miserliness, this or that noble would break down and hire mercenaries in Sembia, Cormyr, Westgate, or along the Vilhon Reach, buying another season of safety for the city until the surviving mercenaries fled for less perilous territory, leaving the Bluff unprotected once more.

A Champion, A Mayor

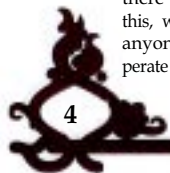
In the Year of the Gate (1341 DR), someone found hope—or rather, reached out and made hope with her own two hands. Lady Lauren DeVillars, one of the wealthiest and most civic-minded of the lords, convinced her fellow peers to hold a grand tourney, a Champions Games. The winner would become Lord Mayor of the city, given a personal salary that would free him of the need to work at anything else, and charged with making Ravens Bluff great.

It was a desperate gamble; many of the lords quietly moved moneys to other lands, and arranged ships and packing to make swift escapes, if need be. Some bitterly opposed the plan; there were real fears that the city could end up under the boot-heel of a ruthless pirate lord or some adventurer sponsored by evil mages such as the infamous Red Wizards of Thay. In the event, the Games went forward, and a charismatic swordsman named Charles Oliver O'Kane won—and the gods smiled: the gamble paid off. O'Kane rolled up his sleeves and set about the task of transforming the Bluff into a prosperous economic power. Lacking the funds to do what he saw was necessary, he went to the lords to beg for coins—and to the people to share his dreams. Any lords who were reluctant to part with their moneys heard the excitement of the citizens—and the dark looks directed at the lords when money seemed unavailable—and thought better of it. O'Kane promised them ways of getting rich along the way, by strategic investments and preferred business positions, and forged ahead. His bold schemes continued to work, he won popular support by encouraging the founding of guilds to prevent the exploitation of citizens by charlatans and by the lords, and the Bluff prospered. As the winds of bright change blew, support for O'Kane flared up in houses both high and low across the city.

Along the way, O'Kane received unintended help from an unlikely source: Lord Lashan Aumersair of Scardale. Planning his conquest of all the Dales, the proud and ruthless Lashan purged his forces and court of all officers and advisors he deemed disloyal, exiling them to the lands east of the Dragon Reach in the Year of the Worm (1356 DR). Some found their way to Ravens Bluff, where they willingly placed themselves at O'Kane's disposal. With these able subordinates behind him, the Mayor's next action was to restructure the government. He began rooting out corruption, removing from power those accepting bribes from known criminal organizations. He divided the government's work into several branches, appointing trusted and capable men to fill the new posts. One of those posts was the Chancellery, which was charged with stabilizing trade conditions in the city. Merchants and craftsmen were organized into guilds, each regulating its own particular craft or service. The Lord Chancellor was entrusted with insuring that all trade and tax laws were obeyed, that the currency and exchange rates were stable, and that harbor traffic was managed. A strong City Watch was organized under the Lord Marshal to rid the city of criminal elements, a task they continue to this day.

With the government strengthened, O'Kane began using his influence to bring peace and stability to the surrounding area. He offered to extend the resources and protection of the city to nearby lords if they'd commit troops to him and place their lands under the jurisdiction of the city courts. He guaranteed that these courts would have no say in their internal affairs, only to settle disputes between lords. O'Kane would recognize the lords' boundaries and would swiftly bring the city's forces to the defense of any lord's lands. The lords, the weakest ones in particular, quickly saw the advantages of working with the Mayor and soon adopted his plan. This system has developed into a mutual protection pact among the lords: only four of the thirty-six noble families in the region (the Ampters, Hawkdragons, Liontowers, and Yavandars) still hold themselves aloof.

The harbor also underwent dramatic changes. Its greatest attraction had long been the natural protection it provided from the savage storms that claw the eastern shore of the Reach (and from crushing winter ice). O'Kane realized it had to offer protection from pirates as well. O'Kane charged his sages and engineers with implementing a plan to make the necessary changes. Their efforts resulted in one of the most ambitious sea construction projects Faerûn had ever witnessed. Two large and well-armed towers





were built in the water at the eastern entrance, and all ships were required to pass between these towers. Breakwaters were built from the towers to the land, effectively ringing the harbor with a man-made reef. Finally, a huge chain was strung between each of these towers and a third tower on Lady-rock Isle; at need, great winches can raise these chains to block access into the harbor. Three years went into the project, but the result was a safe harbor and a decrease in pirate activity.

Finally, the Lord Mayor turned to deal with the constant raids from the mountains. He learned from symbols and idols found in the camps of defeated raiders that they were divided into two factions, one following Auril the Frostmaiden and the other Talos the Destroyer. Each warred both against the folk of the Vast and each other. Putting the combined lords' troops under the Lord Marshal's command, O'Kane instructed them to patrol the hills and eliminate all raider camps they might find. They concentrated first on the more organized followers of Auril, much to the delight of the Talos worshipers, who joined in the fun and slaughtered many of their fellows. The Lord Marshal's forces then re-armed and fell upon the weakened Talos camps in turn. The survivors were driven back into the mountains, and humanoid raids are now rare, although those responsible for the defense of Ravens Bluff watch the mountains carefully for any signs of new activity.

O'Kane's many improvements allowed new prosperity to blossom in the Bluff. Safer trade routes have brought more goods into the city, and new folk and new ideas with them, increasing the scope and skills of local crafters. The arts have flourished under the new peace and stability. From a cradle of crime staggering on the verge of collapse, Ravens Bluff has become a boom town of historic proportions. The last ten years have seen an almost meteoric rise in the city's wealth, fame, and prosperity. Adventurers have come from all over the Realms to settle in the self-proclaimed Gateway to the Vast, strengthening the city. The Bluff may suffer more than its share of dangers and calamities, but its people have always rallied to confront whatever ill wind is blowing.

Today the city has plans to establish a regional government, bringing several surrounding towns and villages under its wing. Mossbridges and the new halfling settlement at New Hope are the first two to have been incorporated into what is rapidly becoming a city-state, and Tantras is known to have vehemently rejected the idea (Procampur took a more neutral, wait-and-see approach). Some of the lords are uncomfortable with the prospect of placing their country estates directly under civic jurisdiction, as it would mean a decrease in their own power, and many of the neighbors resent the idea of annexation, but the merchants and most other citizens believe it would bring only greater prosperity to all.

War and Winds of Change

It seems Ravens Bluff will always face threats from criminal elements, power-hungry lords and politicians, ambitious neighbors, and other as-yet-unseen foes. Yet Charles Oliver O'Kane built fire and heart into the city, leaving its folk proud and fierce.

Such strength was needed just earlier this year (1370 DR, the Year of the Tankard). First a surprise pirate attack on the harbor of Ravens Bluff—and naval reverses that followed—wiped out the formidable Ravenian navy, leaving the city open to pirate depredations. That same night, a mysterious woman who called herself Myrkyssa Jelan appeared out of the backlands of the Vast and hurled an army of mercenary human troops, orcs, giants, and worse against Ravens Bluff. This self-styled Warlord, for reasons that are still unknown, could not be seen by scrying magics and seemed immune to spells hurled at her in battle (though troops surrounding her suffered and died from the spellblasts in the usual way). Many mages and monsters—even dread tanar'i from the Lower Planes—served Myrkyssa Jelan. Some of these fiends swooped down on the city and captured Lord Mayor O'Kane early in the hostilities. Her reach even extended into the ranks of Ravenian officials, into the very seats of the Ministry of Art and perhaps even the office of Deputy Mayor. Glora Varro, the Minister of Wild Magic, is known to have fought for the Warlord and may well have caused the disappearance of her cousin, Lord Marshal Gaius Varro. To add to the chaos, Acting Mayor Belanor Fenmarel, the missing O'Kane's deputy, was arrested by Lord Chancellor Kothonos's men during the war on charges of conspiring with the enemy and kept prisoner until his somewhat mysterious death in his cell months later; Myrkyssa's sole surviving general, interrogated after the defeat of her army, readily identified images of Belanor as either Myrkyssa's chief battle confidant or his identical double.

The war raged on for half a year, during which the power and wealth of many of the long-established noble families of the Bluff were shattered as battles raged back and forth over their estates outside the city walls, destroying buildings and devastating the very land. The city gathered what forces it could—and had it not been a cradle for all too many adventurers, Ravens Bluff must surely have fallen to a foe who commanded more magic, more monsters, and more mercenaries than the increasingly-hungry city she was besieging could muster. Had new heroes, both scions of old noble families, not stepped into the breach, things might have gone very ill for the Ravenian in the street; the sack of the city was a very real threat. Lord Charles Frederik LaVerne Blacktree IV, hitherto dismissed by all as a lazy, cowardly, foppish braggart, suddenly rose to the occasion and grew into a Field General of almost reckless bravery. The long-absent daughter of Lord Thoden, Lady Amber Lynn—grown into a woman as capable as she was beautiful and bold-spirited—stepped from the shadows “as gracefully as a dancer arriving at a revel” (as the minstrel Tappetran Boadelmer put it) to inspire the citizenry, buy food and the means to import it into the beleaguered city, and negotiate the master-stroke that many believe turned the tide at the last moment and gave Ravens Bluff the victory.

Only after the war was over did Lady Thoden reveal, in a proclamation to the city, that before the final battle she had negotiated a deal with Hathmar Blademark, a drow mercenary serving on the other side. Sacrificing the bulk of her family fortune, she not only obtained Hathmar's apparent neutrality by “exercising an option in his contract” but also arranged for an attack on the enemy's rear in the form of a great black dragon, trapping them between gouts of acid and Field Marshal Blacktree's counterattack. Caught by surprise by this two-prong attack, the Warlord's army disintegrated and scattered. The city had been saved in the eleventh hour.

The Six-Day Battle

To better understand how close Ravens Bluff came to defeat and destruction, an abbreviated account follows of the final struggle, one continuous battle that lasted six days. Almost every unit saw combat each day, and some were wiped out altogether, making a clear account very difficult to put together. Here is a rough outline of what befell.





Day One: Retreat to Elmond's Field:

The initial day of fighting saw the forces of Ravens Bluff pushed back on all fronts. Numerous enemy ogres and giants pressed forward to win a great victory, almost shattering the Ravenian forces. Field General Lord Blacktree led his Raven Lancers into the heart of the enemy forces, blunting their advance and rallying the Ravenians until daylight failed. As night fell, a defeated army of Ravens Bluff prepared for the next day.

Day Two: First Battle of Fire River:

With the Fire River on the defenders' right flank, the enemy advance was finally halted not more than a half-mile from the city walls by dint of sheer ferocity on the part of the defenders. The attacks launched by the enemy army were like probing swordthrusts: short in duration but many in number, continuing throughout the day, as the exhausted defenders sagged, rallied, and held.

Day Three: Battle of Murky Confusion:

The full magical forces on both sides joined battle for a final time: a random wild surge created a black, rolling cloud laden with magical discharges and drifting dead magic, making further battlemagic ineffective. The darkness was complete—and within it, the enemy used drow bands to push back the Ravenian defenders to within a quarter-mile of the city walls.

Day Four: Day of the Leader:

The continuing complete lack of visibility handed the day into the gauntlets of individual unit commanders. Personal, localized efforts were launched here and there on both sides, with many small, gallant local victories and defeats. Among the Ravenian defenders, many good knights died on this day. Surprisingly, units led by the remaining Knights of the Golden Rooster held their morale high and won some of the largest gains of the day.

Day Five: Blacktree's Charge:

Field General Lord Blacktree again led a personal charge, attempting to force the enemy to retreat in disarray—into the waiting bulk of the

Ravenian army. Enemy resolve thickened, and a large group of ogre magi entered the fray to halt the advancing Ravens Bluff cavalry. As the armies locked together, swaying to and fro, a black dragon swooped into the enemy's rear, breathing acid and shattering their ranks. The former attackers began to retreat.

Day Six: Victory on the River:

The rout was complete and enemy troop order disintegrated as they tried to save themselves from the trap laid by Lord Blacktree. Very few large battles occurred, as enemy units attacked without coordination or fled in random directions. Lord Blacktree, wounded with a blow from a large club and a stab from either a lance or spear, refused to leave the battle, leading the final charge of his remaining cavalry to drive the last remnants of Myrkyssa Jelan's dark army into the Fire River.

Aftermath

The morning of the seventh day was glorious, and the news even better. Lord Blacktree had delivered the victory he'd promised, crushing the enemy army against the banks of the Fire River within sight of the city walls. Over six thousand enemy humanoids had been slain by his armies, but the price of their blood was steep: approximately a quarter of Ravens Bluff's able-bodied soldiers and adventurers were either killed or wounded during what will hereafter forevermore be known as The Battle of Fire River.

News of the Warlord herself was not as good. Even as General Blacktree was accepting the accolades of the city and the first Knightly Honor of the newest city knighthood, The Knights of the Lady (sponsored by Lady Amber Lynn Thoden, the other hero of the hour), his agents were scouring the battlefield for the body or evidence of the whereabouts of the defeated Warlord. Captured mercenary officers, when interrogated by Knights of the Mystic Flame, could not describe the enemy leader in any detail, claiming that she'd kept her face hidden and often used an elven wizard (whose description exactly matched that of Deputy Mayor Belanor) as her spokesman. Neither this elf nor Myrkyssa herself was ever found among the enemy dead; the assumption was that she slipped away from Ravens Bluff on the eve of her



army's destruction. Since that time she has surfaced only once, appearing before the gates of Tantras with yet another humanoid army (presumably either regrouped survivors from the one dispersed at the Battle of Fire River or reserves who didn't make it to that battlefield in time). She demanded that the city either surrender or be burned to the group, but after a short conference with the city's rulers she withdrew. It's not known what concessions the Tantras might have granted; by the time the aid they'd requested at the first news of her approach had arrived from Ravens Bluff and Procampur her troops had melted into the mountains and she has not been heard from since.

Political Turmoil

Ravens Bluff may have won a battlefield victory, but the damage it had suffered was severe. Many thousands lay dead, the surrounding countryside was filled with the smoke of burning farms, and life in the city was changed forever. Lord Mayor O'Kane, the man who symbolized the city, had been held captive for over nine months and tortured throughout; his right arm had been torn out by the roots. Almost dead when rescued, he recovered with amazing rapidity from his severe mental and physical wounds thanks to the care he received from the clergy of Lliira. But during his absence he lost favor with the nobles and merchants who stand always as the powers behind the office for having neither foreseen or prevailed against the crisis. If this were not enough, O'Kane's chosen right-hand-man, Deputy Mayor Belanor Fenmarel, still languished in prison, the evidence against him not strong enough to hang him but too compelling to allow him to be set free. Chancellor Kothonos, the Acting Mayor, seem reluctant to exceed his authority now that the crisis had passed. Many of the city's most trusted leaders, including the head of the Clerical Circle and Judge Rupert T. Hangman, were dead. Meanwhile, others had risen to prominence in this power vacuum, most notably Field Marshal Blacktree (for his victory in the field) and Lady Thoden (for her successes in feeding and enheartening the populace).

Taking advantage of the obvious decline in power of the land-owning Lords (many of whom lost their lives or saw their estates shattered during the war) and the evident disarray in the government, the merchant houses pushed for more say in the ruling of the city. In the end, they announced what was in effect a quiet coup, informing Acting Mayor Kothonos of the formation of a Merchant Council: a new governing body in which each of the city's sixteen major merchant houses would receive one vote. Furthermore, they decreed that henceforth both the existing Council of Lords and the Merchant Council must agree on a resolution or course of action before it becomes law in Ravens Bluff.

News of the merchants' action spread across the city like wildfire, and folk turned out on the streets, obviously expecting to see pitched battles between the City Watch and the merchants' guards and supporters. Disaster was averted when Torden Sureblade, the Lord Magistrate, visited each of the sixteen merchant representatives and gravely invited them to the first joint session of the Council of Lords and the Council of Merchants. The meeting that followed has been much embroidered by bardic gossip. What is clear is that civic officials alternately begged and bullied members of both Councils back to the meetings whenever they stormed out (usually telling the furious Councilor that to stay away meant conceding government to the other, rival Council). A full tendar passed before matters finally came to a head when Charles Oliver O'Kane appeared and confronted Lady Thoden, accusing her of manipulating the situation to serve her own ends. What followed differs according to who reports it: the Knight Commander of Lady Thoden's new order of knighthood, Sir Lucky Whitewolf, claims that an apoplectic O'Kane screamed and shouted and actually tried to strike Lady Amber, Sir Lucky interposing himself and taking the blow instead. O'Kane denies that he would ever try to strike a lady but refuses to say any more about the incident; most of his supporters claim that Sir Lucky's story is a complete fabrication.

In the deadlock that followed, the assembled leaders agreed on two points. It was obvious that to avoid further bloodshed, with armed citizens of all social ranks clashing in the war-weary city, Ravens Bluff needed a leader supported by both merchants and lords. It was also obvious that money—a lot of money—was needed to repair and rebuild the shattered city. Therefore, the individual who could best support the needs of the city would become the new mayor of Ravens Bluff. In a rather mercenary equivalent of the Champions Games, the assembly agreed that each mayoralty candidate would demonstrate the support of

the people through pledges and donations.

Perhaps the strangest campaign in Realms history followed. Among those who ran for the post were Charles Oliver O'Kane himself (supported by Lady Lauren DeVillars and the "old guard" who had run the city for the last thirty years), the imprisoned Belanor Fenmarel (still accused of treason), Lady Amber Lynn Thoden (strongly supported by the merchants), Field Marshall Lord Charles Blacktree IV (the army's choice), Sir Lorien Darkarrow, Knight of the Golden Rooster (the adventurer's candidate), and General Dandelion (the army's other choice, preferred by the average soldier because of his presence throughout shoulder-to-shoulder with them in the thick of the fighting). Some powerful organizations, like the Clerical Circle and Wizards Guild, stood aloof from the politicking, while adventurers, merchants, nobles, and craft guilds joined in with enthusiasm.

When the final gold piece was counted, it was clear that a new age had begun in Ravens Bluff, with a new mayor: Lady Mayor Amber Lynn Thoden. Promising to work closely with both the merchants and her fellow lords, Mayor Thoden, "the merchant's friend," immediately undertook the vast task of healing a war-torn city and guiding a new form of government. Even before the winner was announced, the success of the new arrangement was demonstrated when the new council passed their first joint law in the wake of a disastrous fire (see the "Lawgiver Changes" section at the end of the "Law & Order" chapter). O'Kane himself took the defeat in good grace and announced his intention to retire and enjoy the city he'd done so much to build up over the years.

Into The Future

Ravens Bluff is rebuilding with a speed and a vigor seldom seen in Faerûn. Many folk seem to see the destruction wrought by the war as a shining new opportunity to make their own fortunes. Yet, as Lord Blacktree among others is quick to remind folk flocking to the City of Ravens, a shadow lies across the bright promise of the years just ahead: the city now stands defenseless against the next attacking army. To those who scoff, pointing out the slim likelihood of anyone gathering an army to attack Ravens Bluff, Lord Blacktree asks two blunt questions: "Ever hear of orcs in these mountains? And had you ever heard of Myrkyssa





Jelan, before she showed up at our walls with an army that could have rolled over some kingdoms I know of?"

Whatever the future holds, Ravens Bluff now has no official navy—an unnerving thought, given its long-standing problem with pirates. The army is a shattered shell, and Ravenians mistrust overmuch reliance on mercenaries (having seen it vividly demonstrated that for enough gold the mercenary guarding your back will just as happily slip his or her blade between your ribs). Upon the advice of Blacktree, O’Kane, and others, Lady Thoden has offered a deal to adventurers resident in the city: serve as troops for one month (under the discipline of city officers, with drills, training, and both guard and patrol duty); then have two months off to adventure, conduct personal business, or simply lounge about; then serve for one month again; and so on. With a pool of thousands of adventurers to draw on, she feels confident that having a third of those willing to serve bolster the city’s defenses at any one time will deter any future attacks. To sweeten the deal, the city offers a pay rate of 100 gold pieces a month; adventurers receive free room and board, mounts, weapons, and gear while serving and are paid for their months off as well (in a lump sum handed them upon their return to service). At least seventy capable adventurers have accepted such work thus far, the first trickle of what she confidently predicts will soon be a torrent of volunteers. Mindful of the peril of foreign agents infiltrating the rebuilding army of Ravens Bluff, she has asked the Ministry of Art to begin to magically interrogate returning adventurers (discreetly, of course) to ensure their loyalty. Meanwhile, the city seems to thrive, the power of the merchants continues to grow, and no one knows what plan the Lady Mayor will come up with next to revitalize the Bluff. For now the city seems to be holding its breath, awaiting the next big crisis that’ll “set the ravens to talking” . . .

Lost Sarbreen



The dark and dripping sewers beneath present-day Ravens Bluff display strange engravings scattered here and there in the dank corridors, relics of the lost dwarven kingdom. Even today, hollows in the hearts of massive pillars constructed by the lone-dead dwarves of Sarbreen sometimes yield up mighty treasures—and deadly perils. Minstrels sing of magic and jewelry stolen from Myth Drannor in its dying days and hidden somewhere in the vicinity; dwarves whisper of “magic enough to shatter our people,” left behind in the cellars and underways. Any old ruin wears a cloak of such tales, but Sarbreen’s is studded with jewels of truth. The City of the Hammer was awash in magic, even more so than Ravens Bluff is today.

Sarbreen never had a ruling king, lord, or mayor, though it was in theory under the authority of King Tuir Stonebeard. But the dwarven court was comfortably far off, allowing Sarbreen to serve as a neutral site for all dwarves, not just those of a particular clan. For this reason, the opportunity and riches it offered attracted ambitious and lonely Stout Folk from all over Faerûn.

The Ruling Ring

The City of the Hammer was governed by those who built it: a “Ruling Ring” of eight Master Masons, each of whom engraved the parts of the city he built with his own mark. Some of these runes and boundary-marks can still be seen today. These Masters were all dwarves of good age and great skill, and their word (seldom uttered) was law—there is still an old dwarven expression dating from those days which translates as “the iron word of the Master forges a blade to cleave all others.” Chief among them was Untieus Boldenbar, sometimes called “Stoneshoulders” for his massive build. The slow, incorruptible judgments and painstaking planning of Untieus and his friend Ghaulden the Rock were balanced by the more agile minds of Irtimarr Shattershields and Hobold the Keencarver. The other Masters—Kuldathen Duruth, Jalagalar Forkbeard, Marantos Goldthrone, and Narglar

Brightsword—were patient, close-mouthed master craftsmen content to let others take leading roles regarding the settlement as a whole while they guarded and guided the fortunes of their own followers.

When disaster struck, all of the Masters but Jalagalar and Marantos perished in the battles that shattered the Realm of Glimmering Swords. The final, doomed, heroic defense of Ghaulden the Rock bought enough time for these two to gather what dwarves they could and lead them by the deepest secret ways on a great exodus to safety. Both perished in ambushes along the way, but a remnant of their folk reached sanctuary in the southerly Deep Realm months later after a dark journey which none of the survivors would ever mention thereafter. Even the Boldenbar clan’s family heirloom, Untieus’s *hammer of thunderbolts* which had given “The City of the Hammer” its name, was lost on that terrible dark road in some unrecorded ambush. All that remains behind of the Masters are the legends and their personal marks, graven deep in stone throughout the tunnels and underground rooms that have become the sewers and buried cellars beneath Ravens Bluff. The Mark of a Master was usually placed to mark a boundary where one team of dwarven builders took over from the next. but they also served as cartouches to denote completed work. Persistent rumors would have it that certain marks point the way to hidden passages leading to escape routes, private shrines, and treasure caches, concealed behind walls that slide or tip or sink away due to counterweights, if only one knew how to trigger them.

Hidden Gold, Treasures Untold,

One famous dwarven cache was fortuitously found during the enlargement of a very surprised innkeeper’s storage cellar. Opening it required that two great stone pillars be moved from their usual locations to certain spots; the pillars seemed to support the roof but in fact were free to move along a concealed ceiling-track when stay-spikes disguised as decorations

were drawn forth from the pillars’ sides. Then, and only then, would a certain stone block in an adjacent passage move inwards, allowing access to a handle inside the wall. Pulling that handle caused another section of wall to swing open, revealing an armory crammed with enchanted armor.

Dozens of caches have been found (and looted) in the ruins of Sarbreen over the years, from modest coffers of coins to a flying, enspelled battering-ram that combined the offensive powers of several well-known sorts of wizards’ wands. . . but dwarves mutter that ten times as much remains to be found. Scarcely a season passes without fresh corpses being found under previously unknown falling-wall traps, just in the few mapped and patrolled passages that link dockside sewers to the back rooms of certain warehouses—and Sarbreen had twenty times as many passages as those few known tunnels (although none know how many survive, nor how many were looted at the time of the city’s fall). For a time, several fast-drawing and inventive mapmakers sold competing “Maps of the Known Underways” in the streets of Ravens Bluff, but the lords put a stop to this practice well before the city ever had a Lord Mayor to ban things by proclamation: too many bands of armed thugs were digging into nobles’ winecellars and basements “in search of dwarven treasure.” Few such maps can be found today outside the libraries of the nobles and guilds, but more than one common merchant of the city has a crumpled scrap of parchment hidden away between the pages of a dusty ledger, as “a family treasure . . . should we ever be reduced to needing it.” The best such maps, of course, include detailed (and almost certainly false) directions for finding and opening hidden storage areas—or locating even more wondrous things.

Ways To Elsewhere

When the City of the Hammer was in its heyday, it was full of wealth, haggling merchants of two dozen races, and any number of exotic things—but was strangely free of pirate raids. “Blacksail” ships did put into port but did so openly, as law-abiding traders. So long as they behaved like





honest merchants, they were treated as such. In other words, the folk of Sarbreen cared not a whit for the morals of merchant traders and the origins of their goods, so long as such merchants kept the peace while in town. Many pirates smuggled slaves into Sarbreen, bartering them for all manner of strange goods, from globes of clear crystal as large across as a man's chest to floatchimes to shimmersheen garments more lustrous than silk.

Strange creatures accompanied those goods—arcane, lillendi, illithids, and even the beholder-like beings known as observers. None saw them arrive, and few knew how they came to throng the bustling yards, tunnels, and galleries of Sarbreen. In truth, these strange visitors came and went through a dozen or more magical gates established long before, ere ever the City of the Hammer was delved, by mysterious and mighty mages (divine Savras himself among them, some say). Long sealed, these portals were now reopened by young Cormanthan elves eager to enrich themselves through trade with the myriad worlds beyond.

After the orcs burned and plundered Sarbreen, the elves feared that the increasingly numerous "Strange Ones" slipping through the gates, now unimpeded by any Faerûnian authorities or even observers, would found their own empires. To prevent this possible threat to elven interests, teams of elven warrior mages descended upon the settlements to slay or expel the strangers, seal the gates, and cast concealing magics on them. Not all the outlanders went willingly, and some brief bitter battles resulted from this outburst of elven xenophobia. At least one gate was destroyed at this time, in a spectacular explosion that considerably enlarged the natural harbor of Sarbreen and sent tom and flaming elven corpses high into the air. The other gates were either sealed or hidden (some by the elves, others by retreating offworlders). Most have since been truly lost and forgotten, their sites now buried in harbor ooze or beneath rock rubble, but several have been rediscovered in recent years . . . and at least one, Dreaming Moon Door, has been opened again. It is rumored that several old and noble Ravenian families owe some measure of their wealth to having exclusive access to gates hidden in their underpantries and coal-cellars, and there may well be as many as a dozen active gates in existence today. Ravens Bluff has again become a port of call for the merchants of other worlds.

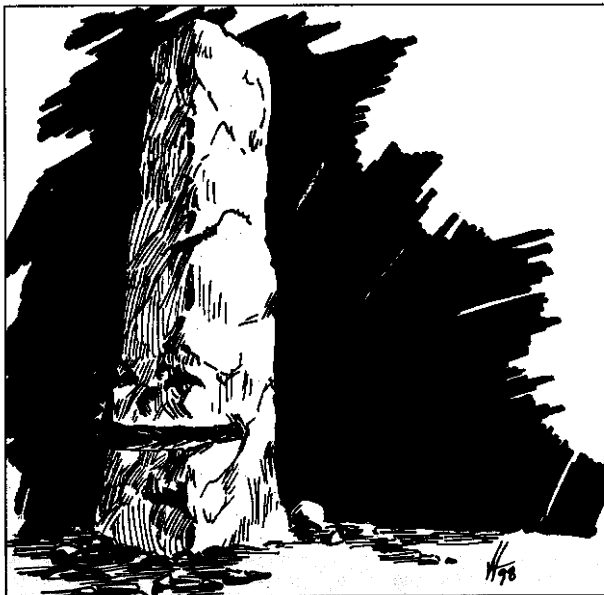
Dreaming Moon Door

The only gate known to "the public" (and even then via whispered rumor, not personal visits) is Dreaming Moon Door, named for the festhall that once stood atop it. The festhall itself collapsed one night when someone or something coming out of the gate entered into magical dispute with someone trying to get in. Left behind by that spell-duel is a permanent cloud of darkness that persists no matter what spells are hurled into it, hovering around an area of half-flooded sewers that the Watch no longer tries to patrol. Various private forces have also abandoned those tunnels after bloody attempts to control or mount guards over it.

Within this cloud (recently named "the Shunned Area" by some darkly humorous minstrel; the name seems to have caught on) stands a leaning stone pillar known as the Grinning Man. Its features haven't been seen since the cloud formed, some eight or so years back, but they can still be felt by the fingers of the intrepid: a sunken-nosed, hollow-eyed face whose broadly-grinning mouth is large enough to admit swords, coffers, and even shields.

The Door can only be opened by placing an enspelled item into that grin. Doing so causes the darkness twenty feet or so beyond the pillar to "catch fire," outlining in sudden cold grey radiance an upright doorway ten feet across and ten feet high. The space enclosed by this doorway acquires a swirling, winking appearance. The door flashes whenever a creature passes through the gate. Each such passage drains magic from the item in the carved mouth—all of the magic in a single-use item (such as a spell scroll or most potions) and one charge or power from multi-use or permanent items. These specifics are, of course, known to few and remain a matter of much rumor and furious debate. Various senior members of the Wizards' Guild and the Ministry of Art either know or have correctly guessed as much as is set down here; certain individuals in both groups are not above trying to get rid of dangerous citizens or visitors by speaking falsely of what the Door is and how it works.

The Door is rumored to lead to many places, from a cruel city known as Sigil to a kingdom of beholders, but desparate Ravenians fleeing justice are known to have fled through it and not returned. It's also certain that unexpected and unwelcome beings have appeared out of it, with no aid from Faerûnians. The Door can be reached by various ways, but the Watch tries to station observers so as to see the two most direct and well-known routes. As



Chief Constable Sunriver has been heard to mutter, "If, say, a beholder decides to visit the city, it's best we know about such things."

According to some historians, the existence of the Dreaming Moon Door and other gates provides the best explanation yet for the plethora of odd names (and odder folk bearing many of them) to be met with in Ravens Bluff today.

Whispered Tales of Sarbreen

When the hour is late enough that "tankard-down time" has begun (that time when drinkers either decide they've had enough or are unable to hold tankards aloft and steady any longer), some taverns in the Bluff resound with tales of adventure. There's talk of forays far afield or in the frowning mountains that wall in the Vast, yes, but also tales of perils lurking beneath the very streets of Ravens Bluff. Wild tales grow in the telling, and it's impossible to decide how much talk of mind flayer duels or of mating, dancing darktentacles is truth and how much has been added in countless retellings. The folks who know best say the least, of course, but officers of the Sewer Brigade and the Watch have recently let slip some things that concern them:

- On no less than six occasions, cellar enlargements have uncovered the heads of upright, human-shaped buried stone golems. In one such case, the golem awoke, shooting ruby rays of fiery destruction from its eyes. A hastily-summoned wizard transformed the stone overhead into mud, collapsing the room and completely burying the golem, whereupon he transformed the mud back into stone again. No signs have come of that golem stirring since its entombment, but the mere presence of such constructs alarms the authorities. Three of the discovered golems were enspelled to reflect spells back at their casters, and none has been traced to an owner or creator, despite the fact that several appear new.
- There have been signs—in one case, remains—that suggest drow patrols are ascending from the Realms Below to explore the deepest cellars and passages of Sarbreen. If they block enough of the numerous sluices that keep water out of some cellars and levels, entire buildings in the city could collapse—to say nothing of the loss of stored goods. Adventurers hired to explore the depths beneath the city reported the existence of extensive underways. One band vanished, but the others found no sign of drow, although one group found the debris of recent upward digging that might have come to the surface in the basement of the Silverhawk School (in Southside). The Watch had disturbance-alarm spells set over that area, but no further activity has been reported.





- Several patrols have seen beholders—or at least spherical flying creatures possessing eyestalks or tentacles—gliding swiftly through the sewers and underways of Ravens Bluff. These silently hurrying creatures ignored attacks and hails, and may be no more than illusions (one crossbow bolt was said to have passed through a “beholder” and crack off a stone wall beyond). Yet the nature, origin, and purpose of these phantom eye tyrants remain mysterious—real or not, why are they seen? If rumor is to be believed, the number of sightings is far higher than officially reported, many of the witnesses being smugglers and others who wish to keep their affairs private from prying eyes. One mage suggested they may be the visible manifestation of roving scrying magics, employed by someone in the city or in the Realms Below, but the authorities found that unsupported explanation hardly reassuring. Watch officers are forbidden to speak of such sightings outside their ranks, but somehow word has gotten out, and it’s suspected that now at least one mage is creating fanciful “beholder visions” out of pure mischief.
- Huge tuns of ale have always been unloaded on the docks, bringing the brews of Sembia, the Dales, Turmish, and Altumbel to thirsty Ravenaar throats. On a night last summer, one of the huge casks was chopped open from within, disgorging a heavily-armed band of lizard men who rampaged along the docks. When Harbor Patrol officers gave battle, some of the marauders plunged into the harbor, as expected—but others turned away from the docks, seemingly heading for a particular destination somewhere along Black Visor Drive. Even more surprisingly, the lizard men disappeared in what one Watch officer described as a “tentacled cloud that appeared up out of a sewer grate in the blink of an eye.” What this magic was, and who cast it, are mysteries the authorities are most anxious to solve—particularly since lizard men glistening with harbor water have been seen lurking in the vicinity on two widely-separated nights since, and a priest of Mystra visiting Ravens Bluff was jolted awake screaming by a vivid dream-vision of a dozen severed lizard-man heads tumbling down Black Visor Drive on a carpet of magical flames. Discreet inquiries of residents dwelling on the street have yielded nothing, and investigations continue—with some alacrity, since someone splashed the doors of the Uptown Watch barracks with a copious quantity of lizard-man blood.
- Galander Shraeyn, a Southside bottle-merchant (he bought, sold, cleaned, and recut bottles), was recently stabbed in a brawl—and shifted shape into a yuan-ti before he died, hissing “my kin ssshall avenge me!” He then hurled a small brass globe to the floor and perished with a dozen nearby citizens in the fierce explosion that followed. Shraeyn has no known kin, so Watch officers are assuming he meant other disguised yuan-ti residing in the city. Whom they are masquerading as, and what magic they’re using to shift shape, are matters of current interest. Sewer Brigade officers believe Shraeyn’s slayer (a “man in ragged leathers” who escaped the explosion) was either a rival yuan-ti or perhaps a doppelganger, part of a group opposing the yuan-ti infiltration: the bloated bodies of several hacked and burned snake-men were found in the sewers nearby a night later, on what looked like (according to Senior Watch Sergeant Stolo Mraethin) “quite a subterranean battlefield.”

Life in Ravens Bluff

In the wake of its war, word is spreading across Faerûn of the true nature of “that city of armed fools,” Ravens Bluff—as a sort of young, vigorous, not yet darkly corrupt Westgate. A growing, prosperous city: “the place to be” for the ambitious. A place where adventurers and magic abound, and where frontiers are close and fortunes are there for the making, not just for the taking.

Ravens Bluff doesn’t yet have official ambassadors stationed throughout the Inner Sea lands—nor, thanks to his wandering wits, do its officials dare encourage the venerable Ambassador Carraque to travel overmuch as a rep-

resentative of the city. There’s also a not unreasonable fear on the part of many Ravenian nobles that their power and prestige will be under intense attack from the moment Sembia, Cormyr, and other neighbors get too interested in the Living City. Yet what would an interested merchant in, say, an inn in Athkatla or Neverwinter learn about this “new city” from an informed and reasonably honest Ravenaar merchant? Probably something like this:

Daily Life in Ravens Bluff

The Bluff” is an adventurers’ dream: a city in the midst of an economic boom with wealth to spare, raw territory to explore within easy reach, and a tolerance for armed citizens. A place known for its concentration of magic and for inhabitants who live by their wits—40,000 of them, not counting those farmers who live nearby and use the city as their daily market. This number includes a considerable transient population (the number of year-round citizens is nearer 30,000). To illustrate the Bluff’s rapid growth, the resident population twenty years ago was only 17,000 and the adventuring population only about three thousand. About a quarter of these permanent citizens are the unlettered poor who hire out for short drudge jobs, beg, or steal for a living. This is less than in many cities—but the Bluff displays a far more striking imbalance of professions: almost a quarter of its citizenry are adventurers! Merchants, civic officials, and the nobility with their loyal servants and retainers make up the remaining population, with the merchants being the largest group by far.

Lodgings varies greatly by class. The poor dwell in the rundown buildings that stand along the docks or hug both banks of the river. Formerly many lived in the tent city that sprawled outside the city walls just beyond the north gate, but this was dispersed and demolished as a security measure during the war. Those with no place else to go sleep in alleys or on rooftops, with no roof or room with a door to call their own. One step up the social ladder, the gainfully employed live in boarding houses, which offer either single rooms (with and without meals) or suites at varying rates. The more prosperous dwell in two-story buildings, running a business on the street level and living upstairs. In some quarters (almost all south of the river), one-story houses still can be found, built before the current boom and owned by the better-paid working class. High (and rising!) land taxes often prevent struggling would-be property owners from holding land in the Bluff for more than a year. As for the wealthy, they tend to dwell in mansions or small estates in the Southside or Uptown districts, far from noise, stink, and crowding of the city center. Perimeter walls and solid construction affords these homes a high degree of comfort, besides displaying the owner’s wealth and incidentally providing room to house family, servants, and stables. Powerful nobles occupy the grandest of these when “in town” but also own extensive estates in the countryside around the city.

The city walls were built over a century ago, so the burgeoning population means that more and more people have to live in the same space. A growing trend in Ravens Bluff is to tear down old, sprawling, or single-story buildings, replacing them with tight ranks of tall, narrow townhouses that allow space for small shops at ground level, storage rooms underground, and four or five floors above, each entirely occupied with a small suite of rooms (usually an entryway, a sleeping chamber, and a main room with a cooking-hearth), linked by common chimneys and stairs. Some of these “stone spires” sport ornate balconies, rooftop gardens, and etched oval windows; others are spartan in the extreme. Residents of the most expensive stone spires employ guards at the street entries of their stairs to restrict unwanted intruders.

The World of Work

Almost everyone in the city works at a trade or is employed in some capacity; few have the wealth required to be indolent (and most of those are working hard to become richer yet). Most working people own or labor in shops or inns, or at a craft trade, forming many small, independent businesses (linked by guilds) rather than large concerns or networks of “branch” businesses. Most businesses employ eight or fewer citizens, but together they muster well over half of the Bluff’s employed population. The wealthiest Ravenian merchants and the more fiscally minded of the nobles tend to have investments in many of these smaller firms (often owning, and renting, them the premises in which they operate). The large commodity trading-firms which are the basis of the city’s wealth are usually owned and run by these same rich men and women. These magnates work from offices, sometimes employing hundreds of people in as many as a dozen warehouses to carry out the work of moving goods from place to place (that is, from the



place where people want to sell them to the place where people want to buy them for significantly more money).

Feeding so many energetic folk crowded together requires a lot of effort, and farmers are as respected as other craftfolk. Those who work the land tend to make less money than city-dwellers (competition keeps food low-priced), but landowners make sure their farmworkers have enough to live on; cruel or stingy farmers tend to lose their workers at harvest and planting time—forcing them to eventually sell or abandon their farms. The city's outlying farms suffered greatly during the recent war, with many farmers being killed or driven from their land. The resettlement process has already begun, but replacing the burnt barns, slain stock, plundered seeds-stores, and lost equipment will take time. Luckily, the arrival of a sizable contingent of half-ling colonists from the south should go far towards speeding up the recovery. In the meantime, food imports via ship will be critical to the population's survival over the current winter. As with any port, fishing is also a major occupation here; many a family boat puts out to sea each morning and returns with its catch each evening. After adventurers, sailors comprise the largest portion of the transient population, eager to blow their wages on food, drink, companionship, and baubles whenever they get leave to come ashore.

The recent and ongoing increase in the city's wealth and population has given rise to more and more businesses that provide services instead of goods: scribes, messengers, servants, guards, escorts, moneylenders, etc. Adventurers are eager customers for many such services, always seeking new ways to spend the money garnered from their last exploit. Once the money runs out, of course, the same adventurers tend to hire themselves out to provide some of the same services to others, an irony that has not escaped their sharp-eyed employers. Service firms don't tend to employ many people; they're almost always family-owned and operated.

As might be expected in such a mercantile city, the government of Ravens Bluff is a business just like any other, and prudent department heads run it as such. Over two hundred clerks and scribes work in various civic offices and departments, paid a wage just superior to the salaries offered by the best merchant employers. In the past the army was supported not from the city treasury but by having local nobles sponsor various units. The disparity in quality of equipment and the divided loyalties thus created caused former Mayor O'Kane to eliminate the practice very early in his term; today all soldiers in the Ravenian army and all officers in the City Watch are paid directly by the government.

Unfortunately, any city holds those who try to earn a living at the expense of others, and thieves (mainly of the cat burglar variety) are a common problem in Ravens Bluff. Chief Constable Sunriver estimates that at least one in every twenty residents of the Bluff is habitually involved in some sort of illegal activity, mainly smuggling. Nor does this tally include pirates who might be ashore, as they are assumed to be on their best behavior whenever in port, whatever their crimes elsewhere. Thankfully, few of the city's thieves seem to be part of large, organized gangs or secret organizations. There was once a powerful local Thieves Guild, the Four Ravens, but it was crushed decades ago (although some refuse to believe that it's vanished entirely; see pages 17-18). Whatever their other disagreements, the Watch and the various trade guilds agree that if the city is to remain a safe home, popular port, and enticing investment site, the last thing they can afford is for it to fall under the iron control of a sinister and overgreedy Thieves Guild.

Recreation and Leisure

When wealthy Ravenians seek relaxation and ease, they often engage in sports and games. Hunting and riding are popular among Ravenian landowners. Best of all, in their eyes, are pursuits that combine the two, such as boar-spearing from horseback, or various mock hunts. A particular favorite is "Riding Down the Maiden," wherein one mounted local lady is given a head start at eluding many mounted searchers in a given area of rolling, wooden country. Some say this sport derives from an old Malarite rite wherein a convicted criminal acted as quarry, earning freedom if he or she still lived at nightfall; others believe it dates back to a certain noble lady who promised her hand to whichever suitor could match her woodcraft. At any rate, as the contest is currently practiced the day ends with a grand revel, with the lady becoming the escort of whoever "captured" her. Should she elude all pursuers until sunset, she chooses her own escort from among the participants.

Racing is a popular sport here, often impromptu. Busy working Ravenaar citizens will take time out to watch small boats race up the Fire River every spring (the annual Fire River Race, object of much excited betting). On less formal occasions horses, dogs, and people will race through the streets to settle some boast or wager—although it's best to warn the City Watch first, as they sometimes place the wrong interpretation upon people dashing by at their top speeds. Exhibition wrestling bouts and performance sword-play matches are also in demand, especially if the current champions are willing to take on challengers from the crowd. More sedate sports like chess or "warfare-on-a-table" games are also popular in the city's many inns, taverns, and clubs. When all else fails, there are always games of chance (dice, cards, etc.). Whatever the sport, there's sure to be gambling involved on the outcome.

When less strenuous entertainment is desired, the Ravens Bluff Playhouse and the Stane Opera House are popular alternatives. The wealthiest patrons can, of course, hire actors to put on special performances in their homes; many noble children grow up with fond memories of favorite actors and actresses paying a call every year or so with a new play. Some of these nobles make a practice of putting favorite thespians on their payrolls, supporting them in their elderly years. More successful performers sometimes set up acting schools wherein they teach plays and techniques to younger actors, to carry on the delights for another generation of nobles and thereby all other Ravenians. A similar situation exists with the local bards: many have some wealthy sponsor to whom they dedicate their new works and whose revels they are expected to grace.

For those who can afford it, revels are the ultimate leisure activity. Such affairs feature dancing, entertainment, and sumptuous repasts; they sometimes last well into the morning hours. It is a true mark of social distinction in Ravens Bluff to host such gatherings or to be frequently invited to them. Much flirting and much behind-the-scenes political discussion and planning goes on at these events, making them de rigueur to the ambitious; there's nowhere else where one can find out so much about who's allied to whom. Between the city's thirty-six noble families and its many wealthy merchants, ambitious political leaders, and resident foreign ambassadors, there's a revel every few days (during the height of "the season"—midsummer—they occur almost nightly). Naturally all such gatherings are by invitation only, and the receiving of such an invitation signals that the recipient has "arrived" on the social scene.

Then, of course, there are always those citizens who decide to spend their spare time in the search for adventure. Some do so as a form of exercise; others dream of striking it rich with a lucky find or becoming wealthy and famous enough to leave their everyday jobs. Still others enjoy the romantic feel of galloping hither and yon in full armor—or the romantic success that can be enjoyed among countryfolk by treating them to the dashing appearance and even more dashing tales of the "seasoned adventurer." Would-be rakes are warned that some of the countryfolk are themselves seasoned predators, all too apt to make off with weapons, coins, and gear in the dead of night after a pleasurable evening of dalliance. For most who crave a little excitement but shy away from the dangers an adventuring life brings, there's "the Game of Masks," a pseudo-adventure staged within the city several times a year (see pages 91).

Finally, one of the biggest single sources of entertainment and fun in the Bluff is the Jack Mooney & Sons Circus, enjoyed by noble and peasant alike. The circus winters in Ravens Bluff, touring during the summer. "Mooney's Menagerie" is the only known circus in the Heartlands, and local citizens are very proud that it calls Ravens Bluff home. Mooney uses his wintering time to try out new acts and make repairs to tents and wagons. Performances in the Bluff are always warmups at the beginning of a season or "the last leaps of the lame" when weary, often injured troupers are settling in at home—so they are always moderately priced. Mooney makes sure that acts are staged to be especially popular with children; he knows where future performers come from. Many elderly or lamed former performers dwell in the city, training hopefuls to join the circus in years to come.

Education

To a Ravenian, the importance of education depends very much on wealth. Generally, the more wealth a family has, the more it values the education of its children and the broader in scope that education is likely to be. Children of poor families are not formally educated but instead taught at home to work at the family trade. Sometimes these poor children are apprenticed to friends or relatives in other trades (especially if there are



more children than the family trade can support). On rare occasions the family might pool all its funds and arrange for a lucky child to be apprenticed to an influential craftsman or merchant. Most adventurers spring from the ranks of the poor, simply because they have less to lose and are more willing to risk their lives for the chance of becoming famous some day. Very few of the poor are literate, unless their trade depends directly upon the ability to read and write (for example, scribes).

Middle- and upper-class children are educated either at home or at the temple of the family's religion (the Clerical Circle of the city ensures that most temples maintain schools for children). If a family chooses to educate a child at home, they hire a tutor (more than one, if music or a hand-skill is taught in addition to "general learning"). General learning includes reading and writing, history, logic and rhetoric, arithmetic, geography, and the basics of Faerûn's religions (focusing on the one followed by the temple where the child is enrolled or the faith embraced by the tutor, of course). Children usually begin their education at age eight and finish when they are twelve. From then on, young men and women are apprenticed into the family trade or into the trade of a close friend or ally. Some choose to embark on a life of adventure—usually those who hate the family trade or simply aren't any good at it—in which case supportive parents might arrange for schooling in, for example, warrior arts or priestly teachings; parents who are opposed might simply disown the rebellious youth.

The recently-established university of Ravens Bluff isn't an organized school but rather a collection of lectures sponsored by the Sages Guild. Students enroll, pay the high fees, and attend lectures on whatever topics interest them. The university does not confer any diplomas or degrees; courses of study can't be "completed." Students decide when to stop attending lectures in their chosen topic. Sages encourage promising pupils, but attendance depends on payment of fees, and the sages don't object when a student leaves to pursue other interests.

Another avenue of education is open to students who show promise and have wealth; members of the Wizards Guild take apprentices. Candidates must pass a verbal examination, which tests each student's knowledge in many areas; unless they have received superlative home tutoring, passage of the examination requires their university attendance for at least three years. The Guild is much enriched by the fees of these students who can gain, at the very least, a lofty vocabulary and manner that allows students to appear learned and cultured from one end of Faerûn to the other. Actual

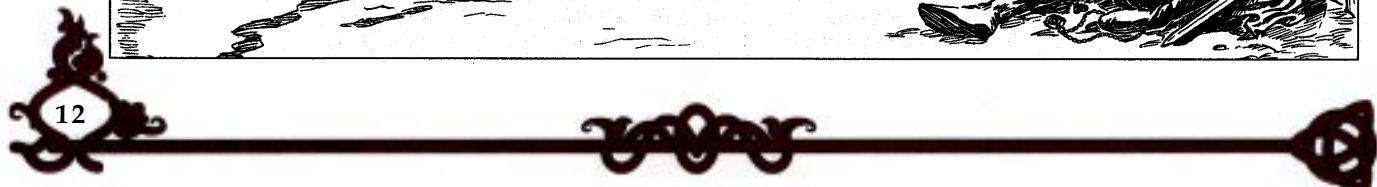
aptitude for magic is required to continue arcane studies beyond the grounding in basic worldview; if Guild teachers judge this natural aptitude to be great, payment of fees becomes much less important. The truly penniless are encouraged to join Guild-sponsored adventuring bands and earn their schooling fees through gaining booty (as well as acquiring spellcasting experience out in the real world).

ART AND CULTURE

Creativity has as free a rein in Ravens Bluff as in the wealthy centers of Sembia and Cormyr. The mercantile economy allows some citizens wealth and leisure enough to explore painting, sculpture, weaving, metal-smithing, and other artistic forms. Few, however, are talented enough to make a living with their art. Most artists must have patrons: wealthy collectors of beauty who pay the artist's expenses and buy his or her work. A fair number of Ravenian nobles regularly patronize the arts, but most do so only by commissioning specific pieces from the artist.

For those interested in performance, the Bluff can boast one of the finest theaters in the Realms: the Ravens Bluff Playhouse, run by the Bards Guild. The playhouse's excellence attracts performers from across Faerûn, and even the poor can afford bench seats at a weekly performance, making this another Ravens Bluff success story. For those with more rarefied tastes, the Stane Opera House puts on seasonal operas and abstract musical performances. Many of the operatic forms are experimental and the House enjoys only moderate success, but it is prestigious enough to have secured the backing (and bankrolling) of several noble families.

One of the true marks of culture in Ravens Bluff is an individual's personal library. There is no public library, but every noble and merchant has at least a few volumes, usually histories or epic stories. Several prominent nobles, Lord Blacktree included, employ a small army of scribes to copy tomes for their libraries. An old joke has a noble boasting that he's well educated because he has so many hundred books in his library—whereas the merchant he's hiring replies that she owns only one book, but at least she's read it. Many nobles (especially self-made nobles) lack the time and inclination to ever open the books they own; others are so protective of their volumes that the books live in locked and hidden chambers, and only copies—or even black-page false volumes—are out in rooms where revelers can reach. The Sages Guild and the Wizards Guild also maintain libraries,





but their collections are more scholarly and access is generally limited to Guild members. For those interested in acquiring books of their own, Ravens Bluff does offer both bookbinders and copying houses (scribes' collectives), something scarce in much larger cities.

MANNERS

As with any port trading city, and any settlement where armed folk walk the streets daily, tolerance of a wide variety of tastes, appearances, and customs—and the display of same—are the order of the day in Ravens Bluff. Even if a Ravenian is quick-tempered, holds grudges, and is quick to think others are offering him or her insults or slights, he or she won't be quick to show it. Those who can't control themselves don't survive unharmed, or with businesses thriving, for long.

Although elaborate courtesies are often admired, casual words and gestures are widely accepted; no one will be "cut dead" (i.e., ignored and ostracized) at social gatherings if he or she don't know the proper way to hold a glass or which fork to use at a dinner. There are no "hidden rules" waiting to pounce on the unschooled: those observant enough to take their cues from their hosts will fit in well. Although specific forms of address should be used when speaking to nobility (see page 46), only the oldest or most prissy nobles take offense when these courtesies are omitted or misused—unless an obvious insult is intended. And of course the common advice "Stand easy, smile or chuckle a lot, and keep your hands away from your knives" is as useful here as elsewhere when seeking to avoid alarming strangers.

Ravenians of both genders and all ages tend to be clear-spoken, even blunt, except when dealing with civic officials or nobility who outrank them. Opinions are often given and colorfully stated, and it's rare that anyone would take offense at another's differing views or candid judgment on someone's beauty, deeds, or beliefs. Someone who felt strongly about the matter would set out to prove the other person wrong rather than try to rearrange his or her features. Complements and insults tend to be taken in good humor and returned in kind; the snappy rejoinder is much admired. Even religion, the flashpoint of many a brawl across the Realms, is a matter for debate or dismissal in the Bluff—not for drawing swords in the streets (the alliance of ten different faiths into the Civic Religion is a good sign of the Bluff's religious tolerance). Destroying someone else's property, however, is another matter: pick up a vendor's food or wares to throw in a dispute, or hurl someone into said wares, and you'll see raised tempers on the instant. By the same token, Ravenians are relatively tolerant of thieves and pirates as a class yet frown upon shoplifting and all such petty thefts; their children's education always includes memorization of the simple city laws.

Naturally, different behavior is considered appropriate for different occasions; outrageous and colorful behavior is almost expected at revels, and of adventurers. But someone who clowns around during business negotiations will only irritate those he or she is dealing with; wasting a merchant's time is frowned upon in the Living City almost as if it were an unofficial crime that they've never found a way of making official. In this context, gambling counts as business negotiations; an outlander caught cheating in any game of chance will be lucky to escape the building in one piece and had better not stop till the city walls recede in the distance.

Ravens Bluff is cold in winter and often lashed by coastal storms; nudity is not only strongly disapproved of by most Ravenians but extremely uncomfortable. No one mocks another citizen for being poorly dressed if he or she is known to be a hard worker; in the Bluff, making coin is king, and producing things by working hard is the most respected way of getting wealthy and of being a good citizen. No one will react askance to an outlander accent, poor vocabulary, or unwashed or unlovely body if the owner is a good worker who puts effort into his or her job, whatever it is. The hard-luck-but-dogged-worker-rewarded theme is a favorite one in Ravenian plays, ballads, and folktales.

Where To Buy

The following sections deal not with the general run of goods that can be had at shops, if one looks energetically enough, but rather the special goods adventurers are often seeking (for the more general run of goods, see the sections on the Guilds and also the Walking Tour). Several enterprising young girls and boys (such as "Fast Rajavel" and "Wise

Walaera") hang about near the city gates or on the docks and specialize in speedily guiding visitors to specific sorts of shops for a silver piece a trip. The reader must of course remain aware that the delicate nature of some of the goods and services discussed below makes frequent relocations of venue (and changes of aliases) necessary; the information here is both incomplete and out of date almost before a scribe's ink dries.

Hirelings

Every guild headquarters and any tavern in Ravens Bluff can point interested patrons to folk desiring hire. The eclectic nature of the Bluff means that anyone determined enough is sure to find someone with the specific skill he or she is in need of, if only the search is determined (and well-funded) enough—even an obscure skill, such as recutting gems to alter their appearance or applying makeup to a corpse to make it look like someone else. Naturally, those who have such talents prefer not to have them shouted from the rooftops, making them difficult to find in some cases. The trick to doing so discreetly is to go to the guilds; unshakable guild confidentiality—even about inquiries or dealings that don't lead to business being done—is a Ravenian legend.

Someone who just needs brute muscle in a hurry should look for folk lounging at the docks or just inside any city gate. Here a potential employer who isn't particularly choosy can often find "copperheads" aplenty (a "copperhead" is a person so down on his or her luck that he or she will work for a copper piece an hour, doing anything, so long as the copper is paid up front. Astute agents look over such folk and then choose a few for whatever job they want done. A favorite way to get good work out of a lowlife is to feed him or her a good bowl of soup or stew before work starts, promising more—plus a coin and a loaf of bread—when the work is done. Promising such payments and then failing to deliver, on the other hand, is a good way to get in front of a furious mob intent on rearranging your skeleton into some interesting new design. Before the tent city outside the north gate was destroyed there was always something of a hiring fair going on there, but those who wished to hire discreetly avoided it because the Watch always had both officers and informants watching to keep slave-dealing to a minimum.

Slaves

It is unlawful to sell slaves in Ravens Bluff, and illegal for any resident to keep slaves within the city. In the past many ways were found of getting around these restrictions. For example, civic authorities preferred not to have slaves waved in their faces when they visited country estates but took no action if such slavery is not overt (serfdom, however, was and is perfectly legal, as is indentured servitude). Authorities ignored the keeping of slaves by visitors to the city so long as the visit lasted less than three months (longer was deemed "residency"), provided the slaves weren't disciplined or mistreated in public. To prevent the new settlement from gaining the taint of becoming known as a slave market, the law was laid down very early that slaves can't be exchanged within the city, even between visitors. Pirates and Sembians (some locals say the two groups are synonymous) quickly devised a way around the letter of the law by selling a plant or pet "with keeper," the keeper being a slave. Anyone not a resident of the Bluff could thus acquire slaves one at a time in this way; several lords and unscrupulous merchants established country estates where they did a suspiciously brisk year-round business in rare spotted newts, albino peacocks, bluenosed patterpaws, and even tailless sundcats.

All this changed when Charles Oliver O'Kane became mayor almost thirty years ago. O'Kane began to stringently enforce the anti-slavery laws, nutting enforcement into the hands of the local paladins and clerics of Tyr. He freed all the slaves currently in the city, changing their status to that of indentured servants with credit for time served. There are still Ravenian citizens who gather to quietly celebrate Manumission Day once a year and toast the man who gave them their freedom. In addition, the period in which visitors could keep slaves within the city was reduced to a single week; today any slave wishing to leave servitude finds sympathetic Ravenians willing to offer a runaway sanctuary.

No slaver dares openly operate in the Bluff these days, but this doesn't mean a fair number of people aren't kidnapped or spirited away. A favorite trick among pirates is to drug the drinks of sailors or dancers in taverns and then smuggle their victims out on sewer-rafts or in jollyboats, or simply walk them out under the cover of helping along a mate or date who's had "one too many." Such unwary souls tend to wake up a day later far out



sea, either to begin exciting new life of piracy or clapped in chains awaiting transport to some less-particular port. Those who please their captors with their looks or skills may be taken back to the pirates' base and become a favored slave, servant, or companion.

Fancy Dress and Disguises

The cellar of the Ravens Bluff Playhouse is the best place in town for flamboyant costumery (lion's heads, jesters' motley, and the like). The thespians of the Bards Guild are the best makeup artists in the city and earn a lot of private money doing makeup jobs on some of the vainer lords and ladies before important revels or public ceremonies. At need, they can also be trusted to keep their mouths shut as they subtly transform wrinkled or bruised faces into something more presentable, although such things have a way of eventually coming out (there are simply too many people coming and going about the Playhouse to keep regular visits secret forever).

Clients desiring absolute privacy—such as those who need to end up looking like someone else (a particular noble or city official, for instance) or who need such services performed on a corpse or bound and gagged prisoner—are directed to Mather Sagra or the one-eyed halfling who goes by the name “Blinky” Broklemar. Mather, formerly of the tent city, is a tall man whose huge beard has been plaited into eight pigtails, each adorned with a different-colored bow; his prices are reasonable—so much down, so much in blackmail afterwards. Those requiring Mather's services ask around for him, whereupon he sends word of some particular (oft-changing) alley where he meets his clients. By contrast, Broklemar's prices start at triple Mather's and go up from there, but he's that rarest of creatures, a halfling of few words, and can be trusted to keep any transaction he is involved in, however unsavory, entirely to himself. He works out of the Stars In Shadow nightclub on Ladyrock Isle, run by his friend, the equally laconic “Silent Cal” Kuiper.

Spell Components

Once the Lotions, Notions, & Potions shop closed, its entire stock donated to the war effort, the only reliable source of spell components became the famous Bendekar's Mercantile, headquarters of a chain of shops found in a dozen cities throughout the Realms. Recently relocated from Crow's End to Uptown, this shop sells anything imaginable that could be used as a spell or potion component; its stock changes constantly as adventurers passing through the city stop by the barter off curious bits and pieces garnered in their latest trip and alchemists and wizards make little purchases of items needed to complete their latest experiments. Anyone thinking of helping themselves to his stock should be warned that Bendekar is very friendly with most of the spellcasters in town (he offers Wizards Guild members a straight 10% discount on all purchases and does everything he can to fill special orders, even commissioning adventurers to collect some troll's blood or mummy's dust at need). Bendekar also has some agreement with the pirates of the Sea of Fallen Stars, who leave ships carrying his shipments alone; rumor has it that he pays an agreed-upon tithe at regular intervals to the more reliable pirate captains, who then make sure their unruly comrades don't mess up a good thing. The few who have been tempted to do so have found their ships spontaneously catching fire—as noted above, Bendekar has friends who want to insure a steady flow of quality components. Recently, however, Lotions, Notions, & Potions announced plans to reopen as an official outlet for the Wizards Guild. Considering the vast array of items that can be used as spell components in one way or another, there are also a score of shops where this or that substance is carried as a sideline to their main stock—herbs at an apothecary or cook-shop, bits of a particular wood or bark at a carpenter's, diverse metals in various forms at a smithy or jeweler's shop, and so forth.

Components are one thing; equipment another. An anonymous annex next door to the headquarters of the Wizards Guild (the High House of Magic) offers glassware and other exotic paraphernalia needed to brew potions. Interested parties should inquire at the High House; members have first pick, of course, and receive a healthy discount, but non-members are also welcome. Many find it helpful to be able to get all the basics in one place without having to specially commission glassblowers and the like to create the necessary items from scratch. If any item is currently out of stock, replacement stock has probably already been ordered and will be available within a month. Naturally, the guild keeps accurate records of all this annex's customers, recording their name, appearance, place of lodging, and stated reason for acquiring the equipment.

Magical Items

It's not possible to buy magical items in any shop within the city—the last business to do so, Chemcheaux: The Magic Shoppe for the Discriminating, is now a smoking hole in the ground (strangely enough, the neighboring buildings were unharmed in the conflagration that destroyed the shop). Nowadays, those who ask about purchasing magical items are referred to certain shops (those where old books are sold, for example), where the proprietors direct the inquirer to the staff or certain “regulars” at various taverns and inns scattered among the city. Among those whose names often get mentioned in such contexts are barmaid Hannath Pierre at the Crescent Moon Inn (on the Rhabie Promenade, in the Temple district); Dunstable “Old Sage” Neminrim, who holds forth at the Stardust Inn (at the corner of Falyern Way and O'Kane Court, Uptown); “Blind” Hari Mehlbrukh, barkeep at the Ship's Wheel Tavern near the harbor; and Helbuidrikh Malort, who often dines at the Posh Paladin hotel in Crow's End.

These good folk will in turn entertain your request, provided it's politely phrased and accompanied by a suitable gratuity, telling you to return a night or two later, whereupon they'll tell you to go to such-and-such a spot (usually an unobtrusive alley) and speak to someone who looks thus-and-so, bringing this much money or other remuneration. That person in turn directs the potential customer to run, as swiftly as he or she can travel, to another alley, to meet with “Ambrajak” or “Shaloondalar” (both famous false names used in many plays and ballads). The person hiding behind this pseudonym will have the item requested, provided it's available; the prospective customer should be warned that someone is probably lurking nearby with a ready *wand of paralyzation* all the time negotiations are taking place, just in case something goes wrong. The magically hungry should be aware that items purchased through these channels come without guarantees: they may be stolen, have secret curses, or be complete fakes disguised with *Nystul's magical aura* or some similar glamor. Even if genuine, only relatively common minor items—well-known wands with a few charges remaining, the simpler potions, daggers bearing minor enchantments, and the occasional ring—are likely to be available by such relatively straightforward means. Let the buyer beware, as the City Watch, Wizards Guild, and Four Ravens Thieves Guild have all been known to show a sudden interest in such proceedings.

Magical Advice and Recharging of Items

The Wizards Guild runs a shop (The Open Window on Brokenbit Lane in the Temple district) where a shopper who is alone, unarmed, and polite may win past the guard-mage with her stone golem and her two trained stirges in their pull-door boxes. Beyond lies a room full of learned-looking men and women wearing various impressive robes. Each is a scholarly expert on a particular magical topic, and each—for a stiff fee—will take a client to a curtained alcove and dispense whatever information he or she knows on a single topic chosen by the client. The wizard will answer questions to the best of his or her ability but work no actual spells beyond a simple detect magic.

Those who have items they wish to have identified can, after negotiation of a fee (usually 100 gp per item but double or even triple that during busy periods), leave the item with the expert and return for a later appointment to find out the results of the magical investigation. Persistent rumor (officially denied by the Guild) claims that from time to time adventurers have been able to get wands and similar items recharged here or even purchase certain simple potions (*healing*, *vitality*, and *water breathing*, but never any oils, *invisibility*, or control potion).

Healing

Magical healing can be obtained for any non-evil citizen at any temple belonging to the Civic Religion, regardless of the race or creed of the victim. The indigent and homeless are sometimes treated for free, but adventurers and all other able to pay for this service are expected to do so (and the temple staff have become very skilled, through long experience, of judging when someone is attempting to deceive them in this regard). Sufficient payment must be rendered before healing occurs—typically in coin, but the clergy will also accept gems, deeds, and magical items; they never take living creatures (e.g., livestock and riding mounts) in lieu



of payment. Items not immediately useful to that particular temple are either stored, traded to another temple, donated to the city government, or shipped to other branches of the faithful overseas. Items inimical to a particular faith are sometimes accepted by that temple in order to destroy the offending objects, but the person or persons bringing them in had better have a good explanation for being in possession of such abhorred items.

The price for a simple *cure light wounds* is 100 gold pieces. This rate applies for the first spell cast on each person; those who want two or three such spells at a time must pay double for the second spell, and double that for the third (the maximum a temple will be willing to cast on an individual in any one-week period). More potent healing magics are available but the cost is much, much more—a heal, for example, costs 60,000 gp and a *restoration* or *regeneration* costs 100,000 gp. If a person has died, procurement of a *raise dead* or *resurrection* spell requires case-by-case negotiations between clergy and the family or comrades of the deceased. If the temple approves the attempt, then the cost for a *raise dead* is 75,000 gp. A *resurrection* is even more costly, requiring an up-front payment of 125,000. The reason for these inflated prices is twofold: the fees for the higher-level spells are divided between the temple, the city, and the parent church, while the more modest fees for a simple *cure light wounds* goes straight into that particular temple's coffers. The second reason is the result of an agreement between the city and the temples to limit access to life-prolonging magics in response to an oracle who predicted dire consequences for the city if they tried to seriously disrupt the natural rhythms of life and death.

In the past, some wealthy merchants and nobles have negotiated special wills turning over significant portions of their wealth to a particular temple in return for that temple's clergy doing everything possible to raise them from the dead should they die from any other cause than extreme old age. A curious recent development is an innovation called "Life Insurance"—policies offered by a priest of Lathander named Cheesemore. In return for a stiff fee (100,000 gp), the temple of Lathander agrees to do whatever is necessary to restore the policy holder to life; furthermore, a group of people (for example, an adventuring band) can all contribute towards such a policy which can then be used on whichever one of them needs it first. While expensive, the "no questions asked" nature of the agreement has made it attractive with adventurers. It should be noted, however, that a number of streetwise citizens of the Bluff remember Cheesemore's earlier career as a thief before he "got religion" and began a new life as a priest; these skeptical souls firmly believe that the so-called "Life Insurance" policies are simply the latest of this fertile mind's many scams.

Under no circumstances will any Ravenian temple attempt to remove a *geas* or *quest* spell of any sort.

Dark & Deadly Secrets

As such a bustling young city, Ravens Bluff has certainly managed to accumulate a healthy pile of intrigues, secrets, and deceptions—almost equaling the notorious city of Westgate at times in the amount and scope of its corruption. To some extent, this is no doubt inevitable, given the connection to pirates and smuggling that's existed from the Bluff's earliest days. Moreover, every city has its intrigues, cabals, unwritten rules, and skeletons in closets (sometimes quite literally). Yet the city holds much goodness too, and its corrupt periods have never darkened the hearts of its people.

In many ways, Ravens Bluff is unique. Many residents, businesses, and items in Ravens Bluff seem different (in names, habits, fashions, and so on) from what can be found elsewhere in Faerûn. Part of this is due to adventurers arriving from around the Realms and taking on new names which they think will be appropriate to their new home. Naturally, they bring customs from their various homelands with them, giving the Bluff a surprisingly metropolitan culture for so small a place. It is also due in part to the existence in the city of magical gates to other worlds. From the earliest days, there have been tales of such plane-spanning portals hidden away in secret rooms, forgotten cellars, dark closets inside the mansions of certain nobles, etc.; adventurers should be warned that these tales, while exaggerated in the telling, are essentially true. Most were destroyed by elves in spectacular spell battles long ago (see the chapter "Lost Sarbreen"), but some still exist, their whereabouts cloaked in whispered rumor. Over the years natives

of other worlds have on occasion slipped through these portals for reasons of their own and done their best to blend in, adding to the eclectic mix.

Magic lies at the heart of many Ravenian secrets. The city holds countless smaller deceptions too, but most of those change with each passing day, being part of ongoing struggles for supremacy between the ambitious rising merchant concerns or political maneuvering among the city's officials. Other, less ephemeral concerns are described in the chapters on "Lost Sarbreen" and "Secret Societies" . . . the secrets that can get someone who talks about them too freely killed, swiftly and messily. But in the end the words of Lord Carlton De Sheers remain true: "Whoever controls the magic controls the Bluff." This chapter, therefore, focuses on the major sources of magical energy in the city.

The Confluence Arcane

Ravens Bluff stands in a particularly magic-strong locale on the magic-rich continent of Faerûn. The reasons behind this are unknown, but who work magic or who possess spell-like natural powers seem attracted to the mouth of the Fire River, and beings sensitive to magical radiations who visit the area become almost drunk purely from drawing in an unseen excitement in the air ("the surge and roil of restless magic," one bard called it). Only recently, the Wizards Guild became aware that the everpresent magical radiations that dominate Ravens Bluff have a curious effect on some beings. These lucky few have demonstrated an unreliable, intermittent ability to unleash blasts of magical energy. From preliminary investigations, it seems that this energy, which bathes the recipient in a halo or aura that resembles green-white flame, only manifests within the city walls (including the underground sewers and passageways). There is even one report, greeted with much skepticism, that it once appeared around a person who was within a dead magic zone at the time.

This "wildfire" should not be confused with "spellfire" or the divine "silver fire" of Mystra, but it does seem to be a spectacularly destructive magical force. It affects only non-living matter (metal, glass, wood, carrion); living beings can only be harmed by it indirectly (for example, if they are struck by debris or fall from a bridge destroyed by wildfire). Those gifted, or cursed, with wildfire's touch cannot control its power, which manifests only in times of great stress. The first recorded use was when a hangman's noose disintegrated in mid-drop, much to the relief of the condemned man; it is now believed that the prisoner unconsciously triggered the destruction of the rope upon which all his attention was riveted. The subsequent investigation suddenly made clear a number of puzzling cases where a prisoner was found to have escaped, the manacles or cell door mysteriously reduced to dust. There is even one case where a person was stabbed with a sword and the sword crumbled to powder, leaving her unharmed (whereupon her attackers very prudently fled). It now seems clear, following the Wizards Guild's confidential report to the Lady Mayor, that wildfire destroys only items in direct contact with the person who calls up the power, and only when he or she is concentrating all his or her attention upon it, usually in life-or-death situations.

Just why some people possessed this innate power and others did not was initially a mystery that baffled the best thaumaturgical minds in the Bluff. Eventually, however, enough cases were uncovered by the investigators that a clear pattern emerged. In all cases, the person who called up the power had been born in the Bluff, of parents who in turn had been born in the city. This led to the theory that wildfire might be a manifestation of ambient energies absorbed by citizens over long periods; no one who is not a third-generation Ravenaar has shown any trace of this power. Furthermore, it seems that heritage is not enough; long-term residence in the city is also required. This discovery in turn explained why it was so rare in adventurers, who often leave the Bluff for weeks or even months at a time, and nobles, who spend much of their time on their country estates. By the same token, it showed why it is most prevalent in ordinary citizens, some of whom never step beyond the city gates in their entire lives. The best estimation offered by the Wizards Guild investigators, based on the evidence they could gather, is that every day spent outside the city walls must be offset by a full month within them before the connection to the power source, whatever it is, returns.

It seems, therefore, that any intelligent being who fulfills all the conditions of heritage and residence should be able to summon up the power. Tests prove this is not the case, but so far no pattern has emerged to show why some have been singled out with this odd gift. It is possible, of course, that many who have the potential are unaware of it, either lacking the motivation or willpower necessary to trigger it. The Wizards Guild is currently engaged in further research to try to determine the chance or any given cit-





izen having this power (their best guess, based on the evidence gathered so far, is 1%). What is known is that the power exhausts its user, leaving him or her weak, pale, and shaking—in game terms, a successful wildfire manifestation reduces the character's physical attributes (Strength, Dexterity, Constitution) by half for a week, with appropriate adjustments to ability and skill checks; it also cuts his or her effective level by half for the same period, with all the attack, saving throw, and hit point reductions that implies. No magical means of recharging the drain is known, although a *strength* or *aid* spell can offset specific effects while their duration lasts. Only seven days of complete rest will restore the character to normal.

Wild Magic

An increasing problem in Ravens Bluff since the spell-duels of the war are invisible driftclouds that move randomly throughout the city, seeming to circle the Bluff rather than drifting away across the sea or into the Vast. Some of these clouds are dead magic areas (see below), but others simply twist any and all magic that comes into contact with them into some other random magical effect—which is why one seldom sees mages employing *fly* spells (or magic items that allow flight) above the city. Individual spells have no effect on wild magic clouds, save to move or activate it or (in the case of *dispel magic*) to decrease their size. To destroy a wild magic driftcloud, it must be caught between at least three *dispel magic* effects operating simultaneously from opposed directions (otherwise the cloud will simply move away from them, rather than collapse).

Certain mages claim that any ninth-level spells that cause a violent explosive effect or create large amounts of physical material can also be employed to destroy wild magic driftclouds. In theory, three such spells cast on opposing sides of the cloud at the same time will cause the wild magic cloud to explode into a single, intense, short-term wild magic effect of a random nature. The obvious danger makes this tactic a desperation measure; it's been accomplished only twice, by members of the Wizards Guild protecting the wards of the High House of Magic.

Wild magic clouds seem to avoid each other as if they had opposing magnetic charges, drifting off in opposite directions. Contact between a wild magic cloud and a dead magic cloud causes the two clouds to silently and peacefully negate each other. Mages who have seen a wild magic cloud (via detect invisibility or true seeing) describe it as a glittering cloud of pure magical energy.

Dead Magic

The very existence of small dead magic driftclouds in and around Ravens Bluff is denied by both the Wizards Guild and the Ministry of Art. To make matters worse, such clouds are invisible to the eye and undetectable by any sense except touch (contact with such a "cloud" makes the skin tingle slightly)—not can magical means reveal their presence, other than by the sudden failure of some persistent magical effect.

The only known ways to destroy a dead magic area are to persuade a divine being to magically vaporize it (Chosen of Mystra can do so by filling up a dead magic area with the silver fire of Mystra) or to somehow steer a drifting wild magic cloud into contact with the dead magic zone, obliterating both. As time passes, the driftclouds created by the war are becoming smaller and fewer (presumably as such collisions occur naturally), but their very existence makes magic use unreliable; who is to say when a defensive ward has silently and invisibly been brought down by a roving cloud, or one has tracelessly drifted into a particular room? "Magic can be awesome," say seasoned Ravenian adventurers, "but when in town, mages should make sure they have their daggers handy."

The Unsleeping

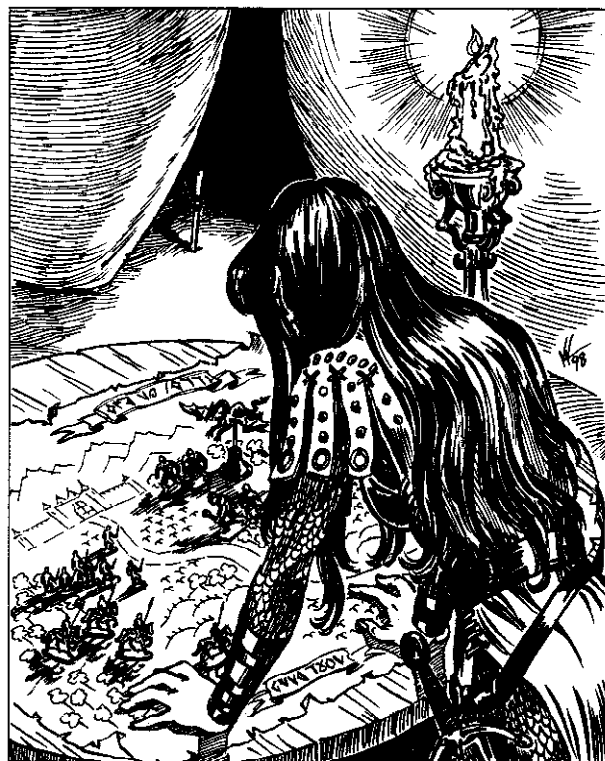
Certain Ravenians have been suspicious of the Thayvian embassy in Ravens Bluff for some time. Not just the usual "what are they up to? No good, I'll be bound" suspicions that dog Thayvians everywhere they go, but specific worries about Thayvian agents seeming immune to civic justice, or somehow not caught or even challenged when they race through the city in haste after dark (sometimes carrying squirming sacks that seem quite large enough to hold human bodies). It's curious, to be sure. Harpers and others who have cause to reflect on the stratagems of rulers in the Dragon Reach lands have from time to time wondered why Ravens Bluff—rich in wealth and magic-strong but often riven by internal debate or weakened by war or

orc and pirate raids—has never been conquered or even attacked in earnest by the forces of Calaut, Mulmaster, Sembia, or the Zhentarim.

Both of these curiosities are rooted in the same cause, known as a certainty only by Ambassador Carrague and former mayor O'Kane (and presumably now by Lady Mayor Thoden) but suspected by certain nobles and civic officials: Ravens Bluff is home to a hidden resident garrison of Red Wizards who chose not to become embroiled in the struggles for power that prevail in their homeland, nor to reveal themselves in their adopted home. The City of Ravens affords these mages, who call themselves "the Unsleeping," a golden opportunity to study much strange magic as it passes by, hire adventurers more or less at will to fetch fascinating magics or investigate sites or beings of interest, and dabble in the pleasures of manipulating Sembian, Ravenian, and Dales politics from hiding.

When the war came, certain of these mages aided its defense with their spells. One revealed herself in the closing days of the war in a bid to seize open control of the riven city. She was destroyed in frantic battle by nearby adventurers, who let fly with all the magic they could muster, draining long-held enchanted items and creating both wild magic and dead magic driftclouds and a "chain lightning" wild magic effect. This effect leapt from enchanted item to enchanted item all over the city, changing the powers of some, draining most or all of the charges from others, deactivating a few (until means of reawakening them can be found), and leaving others untouched. The idea that there may easily be a dozen or more Thayvians of such potency resident in the city under various guises would be profoundly disturbing to most of its citizens, who remain blissfully ignorant of the fact.

The chain effect itself has fascinated some of the Unsleeping, who are trying to decide how to reproduce it so that it can be studied in detail as it lashes out. Others of this hidden pocket of Thay—by no means an organized group answering to any central command or chain of authority, merely a collection of self-exiles—dismiss such study as "a dreamheaded waste of time" when there are folk to be manipulated, fortunes to be made, and pleasures to be enjoyed. One Thayvian recently enthralled an inexperienced silver dragon who was posing as a young adventuress in her visit to Ravens Bluff; he believes her to be a weredragon, despite her protestations to the contrary, and is trying to learn how to turn himself into such a creature with the transformations wholly under personal control. In the meantime, she is gaining a remarkable insight into the human capacity for self-deception.





Myrkyssa Jelan and The Eaeraedia

No, this isn't the name of an act from the Mooney & Sons Circus, but an admittedly fragmentary account of speculations as to why a mysterious invisible-to-magic Warlord attacked Ravens Bluff with an army of evil creatures. All that is known for certain, from statements she made in her own demands for the city's surrender, is that she sought some great magic which she believed to be hidden somewhere in the Bluff.

As for Myrkyssa Jelan herself, some humanoids she was recruiting (if they can be believed) said that she came from "east beyond Thay." So far as the best efforts of the Wizards Guild and the Ministry of Art have been able to determine, no spell seems to detect her, damage her, or affect her in any way. How she can have such powers is unknown—some mages advanced the theory that she's a divine being of some sort, or the avatar or servitor of a deity, or perhaps a creature that lives or feeds on the Weave. Others maintain that she must possess an artifact that gives her complete magic resistance, although no such relic is known in any bard's tale.

The most intriguing tidbit of information about Myrkyssa Jelan yet advanced comes from Ambassador Carrague—or, rather, from a young sorceress who was bringing him tea and claims she heard him dictating some vague notes aloud to his somewhat recalcitrant "follow your tongue" pen. It seems the good Ambassador had a surprise visit from The Magister relating somehow to Myrkyssa's quest, but as usual with the venerable Carrague all the details were vague. However, the sorceress swears she heard him mutter "Alive, yes, and near . . . very near. Wearing a new face, here in the city . . . All to win her time . . . and freedom . . . and willing hands, to search . . . The Eaeraedia . . . The disenchanters feel it half a world away . . . enough power to . . . Tea . . . nice tea . . . and sugar? . . ." At this point, the Ambassador noticed that his afternoon snack had arrived and the moment passed, nor did he seem afterwards to remember that he'd ever spoken on the subject. Nor has any sage been able to identify "The Eaeraedia." And since no one knows what Myrkyssa looks like, finding her in her new guise seems a hopeless task. For now, she seems to have abandoned her former methods for more subtle means (to the relief of the average citizen). All that seems certain is that the Bluff will hear of her again whether her methods meet with success or failure.

Secret Societies

Local rumor in Ravens Bluff has always painted vivid pictures of a city a-crawl with secret societies and dark intrigues. Certainly there are intrigues a-plenty, from quiet backroom deals among adventurers to major power struggles between the old guard and the new (nobles vs. merchants, Civic Religion vs. "interloper" faiths, Wizards Guild vs. Ministry of Art, ex-Mayor O'Kane's supporters vs. Lady Amber Lynn Thoden's). Still, overall there are actually very few cults and secret societies deserving of the name in the Living City. The following fragmentary notes delineate five such organizations believed to be active in the city.

The Cult of The Raven

Most keen observers of things Ravenian believe this is the only true native cult or quasi-religious organization based within the city (this excludes adherents of various established faiths from elsewhere who are trying to gain a foothold here, such as the faithful of Shareas and of Eilistraee). The Cult of the Raven has been around for a long time—first as something of a fad among noblewomen wanting to feel powerful and to have secrets from their husbands and fathers: something they did that wasn't judged, restricted, or demanded by their roles as part of this or that noble house. Later the Cult became something of a refuge for lonely, intelligent misfits of Ravenaar society. The Cult of the Raven has always been numerically dominated by young women and always meets underground, at night, in the dark (in a succession of fam-

ily crypts, damp cellars, and even sewer passages). They conduct simple ceremonies of worship to raven statuettes, led by a priest or priestess who wears a raven head-mask. Most ceremonies involve worshippers wearing flowing black robes, kneeling and chanting, sharing a communal cup of salty black wine (the "Blood of the Raven"; it supposedly passes dream-visions of the Raven's will to the most favored of the faithful), and listening to a recounted vision or short homily from the presiding priest or priestess.

The Cult believes that wells, springs, valleys, mountains, and all large settlements have hidden place-spirits, immortal natural forces that wield the powers of their sites against those they deem unfriendly and to the benefit of those they see as loving the place—and that Ravens Bluff, as a magic-strong area, has a particularly vigorous spirit. They call this spirit the Raven and believe it speaks prophetically to all through certain rare talking ravens, aiding those who do its work as they dwell in Ravens Bluff by bringing them their heart's desire.

Place spirits, or *genus loci*, do in fact exist. However, for the most part they lack the vigorous sentience cult members ascribe to the Raven. The Cult's priests and priestesses have been a succession of minor mages using their spells to make ravens speak. The aims of these self-styled clergy have remained obscure down the decades. The motivation may be no other than those of most of their congregation: the desire to feel important, powerful, and part of something greater than themselves. Cult members are often to be found creeping about underground in the city with lamps in hand, seeking more favorable places to worship the Raven; these site must always be old and seldom disturbed (thus a forgotten storeroom would be ideal, while the wine cellar of a busy tavern would not do). Recent urgings by the Cult's leaders to do this traditional work with some vigor suggest to some suspicious older members (in particular, those who find kneeling in the damp increasingly hard on the limbs and joints) that the Cult is being influenced—or even controlled—by an outside force interested in learning just what lies where under the city.

The Four Ravens

This most secretive and underground of thieving guilds has frequently been dismissed as a fabrication, an urban legend, or a thing of the past now gone from the city—only to have the name reappear again a few years later in a passing mention or rumor. There certainly once was a Thieves Guild of that name that controlled the city's underworld, back in the days before the city ever had a mayor. It was spectacularly suppressed over forty years ago, its leaders publicly tortured and executed, its membership decimated, its treasury seized by the corrupt Lord Treasurer of the day. The Bluff has not truly had a Thieves Guild since, not one that was anything more than a gang writ large who managed to corner one small part of the city's larcenous projects for a year or two before being dispersed by the City Watch.

Despite this, the vast majority of the Bluff's citizens believe that the Four Ravens is alive and well (the name comes from an old symbol for the city, a raven-headed figure bearing a shield with two ravens on it. A guild password was to ask "Where is the fourth raven?"—the correct answer being "The fourth raven is the one you don't see, behind you"). Its current membership, aims, and deeds remain unknown—except that all agree that if there is a guildmaster, it must be old John Porter, who works in the municipal dump and as a gravedigger at the city cemetery. John Porter is the son of the couple who acted as guildmasters at the time the guild was suppressed; he was spared because he was only a child at the time but was sternly warned that if he were ever charged with a crime he would suffer a fate like that of his parents. Apparently he listened to that warning, as he has never been arrested in all the years since. Still, observant neighbors notice that an odd variety of people pay calls one of John Porter at all hours of the day and night. No one has ever proven that he's involved in anything underhanded but suspicions remain unquenchable in the mind of the common folk. Surprisingly, enough, the average citizen, especially those of old families who have lived in the city all their lives, remember the Four Ravens with time-dimmed nostalgia and whisper that they preyed more on the nobles and visiting adventurers than the working poor.

Rumor has it that Porter has placed sleeper agents in various shops around the town where newly arrived adventurers are apt to display their wealth; these folk pass word along to Porter, who passes it along to





other parties, and such adventurers often find their excess wealth suddenly diminished not long afterwards. Nobles and merchants who make ostentatious shows of riches—for example, appearing at a revel wearing jewelry worth enough to feed every mouth in the city for a year—often suddenly stop wearing such jewelry a few days later, refusing to offer any explanation of where it has gone. Such folk are generally believed to have experienced a nighttime visit from the Four Ravens. At any rate, such items are never seen in the Bluff again—“a little bird carried it away,” as the saying goes. The Ravens are said to have excellent relations with the pirates operating in the Dragon Reach and presumably use them to fence such recognizable items for resale far, far away.

The vigor with which the Silent Network and several adventuring thieves are pursuing inquiries about the Four Ravens suggests that the group has recently done something that has made more than one important personage uncomfortable. Current rumor on the streets suggests that the Four Ravens left quiet messages with several senior nobles, merchant lords, or highly placed city officials suggesting that unless those persons stopped some unspecified activity then secrets long kept firmly secure would be pasted up on broadsheets on every street corner overnight. Just who the Ravens are, and what they want, are mysteries to most Ravenians today—but whispers about the Ravens are growing more frequent again. Some even link this group with an apparently random series of isolated murders of specific citizens performed under the cloak of “battle casualties” in the recent war, but no one can suggest a reason for the stealthy Ravens to suddenly change their tactics, if indeed they are responsible.

The Mark of The Wolf

While the Four Ravens are subtle, the Mark of the Wolf is anything but. The sign of this dangerous group is an upright, long-taloned paw mark that exaggerates the claws of a real wolf. It is seen only on the bodies of Mark victims or the sites of other Mark crimes, as a warning—or, in a few inns and taverns at the north end of the city, to designate a place where discreet inquiries can lead a person with enough coin to spend to a “meeting through a curtain” with someone who can talk to Mark members and perhaps urge them into undertaking certain specific acts.

Originally the Mark was a merchant society formed to slay, swindle, or squeeze trade rivals of its members. Its targets were often the relatively large

and powerful merchant concerns sponsored by nobles. Over the years, the Mark has been taken over by killers-for-hire, becoming a collective that gives adventurers in the city as much freedom as possible by keeping fear and persecution of them to a minimum. It does this by forcing adventurers to be (relatively) good citizens while within the walls: the Mark acts against all who indulge in vandalism, ignore agreements made and bills due, or dare to establish “protection” rackets. This has kept thieving bands small and very well concealed, enabled unarmed merchants to do business with adventurers with some confidence, and bolstered the effectiveness of civic authorities—both by extending their reach and by preventing them from becoming overly brutal or repressive.

The Mark is known to be able to muster as many as fifty armed and skilled adventurers (including at least a handful of mages), but its contacts, informants, and spies probably number dozens more—and its habitual operatives far less, perhaps a dozen in all. Its secrecy is impressive; its leadership and membership remain almost entirely unknown, although the warrior Arglendra Tallcloak died in an alley fighting as a member of the Mark. Her habitual companions, the minor mage Shaltrin Druine and the thief Colgond Veiry, haven’t been seen since; most presume they are Mark members because their taxes are still paid and their homes still staffed and maintained in their absence.

The Silver Sheaf

This shadowy brotherhood is never known to have indulged in any acts more violent than arson, or to have held any large meetings of its membership. It acts almost exclusively on a one-on-one level, with one member recruiting the next—and its founding members, overall leadership (if any), and even time of origin and original intent remain mysterious.

To join the Sheaf, a prospective candidate pays 7,000 gold pieces and receives in return two identical silver finger-rings (most members immediately hide one very thoroughly and take to wearing or carrying the other). A tiny wheat-sheaf graven on the inside of the rings is the recognition sign of the organization and tells other members “you can trust this person, a fellow member, to loan to and borrow from, in complete secrecy and without worries over deceit or non-payment.” Although fraud is possible, the Sheaf seems to keep a close eye on its members and acts swiftly if rings are sold, stolen, or counterfeited (usually by driving the perpetrators into financial ruin, repeatedly, until they leave Ravens Bluff for good).

The Sheaf is what the Mark of the Wolf was intended to be—an organization for merchants only, intended to help them succeed in trade. Most members only know the identities of whoever recruited them, anyone they’ve recruited, and one or two others. Naturally they suspect the membership of a handful more by a process of deduction, eliminating everyone they’re ordered not to do business with, or to withdraw investments from, as an unscrupulous rival of a member. Obeying such where-to-trade directives are the most service most Sheaf members ever render the organization, although many have been saved by the ability to make and take short-term, fair-rate loans in confidence. “Confidently and in confidence” has even become a Sheaf catchphrase, sometimes uttered in a tavern or marketplace conversation to identify one’s status to possible Sheaf members without displaying a ring.

The Viper Ring

Rings also feature in the workings of a long-established, rather sleepy local society that has recently turned vicious—and seems, in some cases, to be trying to identify and eliminate members of the Silver Sheaf.

Members of the Viper Ring wear rings of various appearances. All of them have pointed spurs that can be folded into view or attached in a projecting manner: fangs that can deliver sleep poison or truth-babble drugs to beings they scratch. The Ring apparently maintains stocks of both drugs and of the fanged rings that can deliver them—as well as, from time to time, supplies of various serpent venoms purchased from adventurers in the Bluff and in several of the nearest Sembian ports (where the Ring has agents). Originally, the Viper Ring was formed by members of several old Ravenaar noble houses as a means of spying on upstarts (rising wealthy Ravenians who were seeking to become nobility or take on some of the rights of nobles—such as gathering private armies—without being entitled to them) and guard the powers of the highborn. Over the years, as its original members died and the tactics of the Ring made it less attractive to their heirs (or the views of their heirs made them unsuited to membership in the Ring), the ranks of the Ring changed. In time, the entire organization was sub-



verted by outlander merchants, who used it as an intelligence-gathering group to aid them in winning guild membership, breaking guild monopolies and dominances, and increasing the openness of trade. Outlander merchants linked to the Ring are known to include the rug and textiles dealer Almaerth of Calautn, the horsebreeder and dealer-in-medicines Roel Ontalrath of Saerloon, and the shipping magnate Issur Belraegen of Yhaunn.

In recent years, the Ring's focus has shifted again, but the reason why is unclear. Rumor has it that the membership was infiltrated by yuan-ti disguised as human, but their purpose in the Bluff is entirely unknown. Under their supposed control, the Ring is turning from manipulation of trade to assassination, with older members terrified into silence and frightened submission. The lack of willing witnesses and informants has so far prevented the Watch from cracking the Ring, but Chief Constable Sunriver promised an impatient Lady Mayor developments in the case soon.

The Wizards Guild

Willem sat listening to his master Elcao in the Rathskeller, tankards before them both.

"... but you have reached a crossroads. You've started down a path of power and have shown the wisdom to not let that power control you. It is time to tell you of the Wizards Guild."

The shock on Willem's face told Elcao he'd made the impression he'd intended to. Not-quite-smiling, he sipped from his tankard, to give Willem a moment to consider what to say next. It's always wise for wizards to take that moment, and consider what comes next.

The founding of the Ravens Bluff Wizards Guild dates to the time before Charles Oliver O'Kane's ascension to the post of Lord Mayor—a time of chaos. When the various lords of the Fire River lands began to deplete their private armies in petty wars on each other, they recruited wizards. The escalation continued until Lord Carlton De Sheers, the most ambitious of all the lords, gathered enough spellcasters to form an entire company of mages. Naturally, rival lords responded by hiring battlemages of their own. Alarmed by the potential devastation if all these war-wizards unleashed their power at once, two priests (Sir Gregory Cherbourg of Mystra and Lord Anthony Norwood of the temple of Azuth) secretly gathered all the lords' mages together for a private conference. After an impassioned plea, Norwood convinced the majority of the wizards to stop pursuing the reckless dreams of greedy men. Those who disagreed with this position were asked to go elsewhere. Those who remained joined a mutual non-aggression pact, allying together to discourage disgruntled nobles from seeking revenge against their former employees. As political tensions eased, alliances began to evolve into working partnerships and even friendships. Many of the wizards had hitherto been solitary due to their arcane calling; having tasted camaraderie, even when spiced with grating egos and a certain amount of intrigue, they found a return to loneliness very unappealing. The increased security brought on by their alliance and the benefits of shared resources and secure research facilities were added benefits that led the former rivals into cementing their alliance into a Guild. Independent from political control but dedicated to the well-being of its host city, the guild has evolved greatly since those early days. Today the Wizards Guild is a social outlet for the members, a repository of knowledge, and a place to learn.

The Guild is organized according to the "schools" of magic (enchantment, conjuration, invocation, etc.) and governed by the Wizards Council: eleven of the Bluff's most accomplished wizards and two advisors (one each from the temples of Azuth and Mystra). At the head of the council sits the Archmage. Joining him are the eight deans, each representing one of the schools of magic, plus a dean for generalist mages and another for elementalists. Thus a balance is maintained among the various specialties and competing interests of those who pursue the Great Art (as they call it). The priests are present both to recognize their orders' role in forming the Guild and to help stress common interests among all the various schools and practitioners.

The membership is divided into seven different ranks, each with its own rights and responsibilities. Guildmembers are expected to pay dues, to share research, to accept some duties, and to abide by the rulings of the Council. Advancement brings increased opportunities, benefits, and responsibilities.

Guild wizards are expected to support both the guild and the city. Strangers to Ravens Bluff sometimes confuse the Wizards Guild with the Ministry of Art—a sometimes perilous mistake, depending on the company in which it is made. The Guild, while allied with the city, is an independent body; the Ministry is a government department modeled on the Guild that parallels its organization and function but is directly under government control. The rivalry between the two runs deep and sometimes erupts into quiet hostility. "Guilders" consider "Mins" (as they call them) to be puppets and lackeys of the city bureaucracy; Ministry of Art mages consider the Guilders to be dangerously erratic and lacking a proper sense of civic duty. The Ministry recently almost collapsed, with a major defection of many of its most talented members to the Guild, much to the Guilders' satisfaction; the next few years should reveal whether the "Mins" will be able to rebuild their organization.

Membership

A wizard may become a member of the guild upon learning to cast 2nd-level spells from memory. Testing to prove personal ability is required in order to weed out charlatans and tricksters. Membership is not open to bards or other non-mages who can cast wizard spells, nor to those who require magical items to trigger their spell effects; only innate ability to wield magic will do.

Applicants must pay 1,000 gp per level upon acceptance into the guild, plus an additional 1,000 gp each time they advance in level thereafter. Note that the new member's rank is determined by his or her casting ability; it's not necessary to join as a Neophyte if the applicant qualifies for a higher rank. Once a member, however, he or she cannot skin ranks but must move up the ladder step by step to the next higher rank. If a candidate cannot afford the requisite total, then he or she must join at a lower level or wait until his or her financial situation improves. In addition, the hopeful applicant must provide letters of recommendation from two members in good standing of at least third rank (e.g., Full Member or higher) or obtain the sponsorship of a single fifth rank (Outer Circle) or higher member. New members must also swear an oath to uphold the Guild, protect Ravens Bluff, and obey all civic laws and Guild ordinances on spellcasting. All new members are considered probationary members for the first six months, after which they are fully accepted by their fellows.

Wizards Guild Levels

Rank	Title	Casting Ability	Monthly Dues
1	Neophyte	2nd-level spells	5 gp
2	Associate	2nd-level spells	10 gp
3	Full Member	3rd-level spells	25 gp
4	Circle Initiate	3rd-level spells	50 gp ^o
5	Cuter Circle	4th-level spells	75 gp
6	Median Circle	4th-level spells	100 gp
7	Inner Circle	5th-level spells	200 gp

Wizards who don't wish to join the guild as regular members may acquire "Affiliate" memberships at the cost of 50 gp. Such a wizard receives a formal reading of city laws concerning spells and their usage (see page 75) and is warned that the Guild imposes severe fines for violation of these laws. Affiliate members aren't entitled to all the benefits of regular members but are welcome at all Guild social functions and allowed limited use of the library.

Benefits of Membership

Besides opportunities for research, intellectual stimulation, and camaraderie, the Wizards Guild offers much to its members. When a member advances in the Art, he or she will find the Guild a ready source for new spells. In addition, member mages are spared the distrust sometimes extended to "unregistered" wizards by the Watch and citizenry alike, especially in the wake of the recent war. Better yet, because of its large membership the Guild can arrange discounts (typically 10% to 20%) for purchasing certain spell components (see the entry on Bendakar's Mercantile in the Walking Tour chapter), glassware and laboratory supplies (available directly through the guild workshops), and sundry other wizardly necessities (anything from powdered gemstones via a local jeweler with clumsy apprentices to paupers' corpses for carefully-supervised necromantic magic). Officially, only high-ranking Guildmembers in good standing can legally make potions and scrolls in Ravens Bluff—a law which, although rarely en-



forced, remains on the books as a potent tool for use against troublemakers; the usual penalty against offenders is confiscation.

Perhaps the most widely used Guild benefits are the availability of well-stocked lab facilities for magical experimentation and spell research and the safe storage of spellbooks offered by the Guild's well-secured vault. Its guardians include both a watchghost and a (confined) magebane, potent concealed *glyphs* for those who slide back the wrong combination of door-panels, and various alarm spells that summon several powerful wizards (some of whom will arrive accompanied by their own servitor monsters).

Rank Benefits

- *Neophyte*: Tutoring is available for those wishing to learn spells from guild members, conferring a 10% bonus (to a maximum of 95%) on the chance to learn the spell. Teaching is available in almost all of the widely-known or "standard" spells (i.e., those found in the *Player's Handbook*). At the DM's discretion a particular spell may not be available at a given time; delays of two to six months aren't uncommon, as a tutor may lack free time between other projects to give his or her pupil the undivided attention needed for magical instruction.

- *Full Member*: Sufficient access to the Guild library to learn an additional two spells upon level advancement (rather than the one new spell available to most mages gaining a level). This rank brings with it the freedom to browse at will in the library; Neophytes, Associates, and Affiliates may only examine tomes, or more often single-spell scrolls, brought out to them in separate, supervised reading rooms.

- *Outer Circle*: Unrestricted access to laboratory facilities. This confers access to all but the rarest and most valuable spell components and grants a +1 bonus to Spellcraft proficiency checks. Members can either provide their own components or draw them from the common stock maintained by the Guild; the lab staff keep careful records and bill each wizard quarterly according to the components he or she has expended.

- *Inner Circle*: Instruction in the Alchemy proficiency to learn the secrets of potion-making. This training is required by **statute** in order to receive certification to make potions and scrolls.

Rules and Regulations

While there are many benefits to Guild membership, certain guidelines must be observed:

- Obey all laws of Ravens Bluff concerning the use of magic.
- Never knowingly cast a spell upon another Guildmember in anger or for personal gain.
- Respond to any summons to aid from another member of the Guild if it is within your power and does not constitute a violation of any city laws.
- Respond to any summons by an official of Ravens Bluff to aid, protect, or defend the city and its residents. In addition, each member shall be called to serve the city for a tenday of "standing watch" service twice each year and be required to handle whatever situations occur in that time to the best of his or her ability.
- Accept judgments of the Archmage and the Wizards Council in all things relating to Guild matters.

If a Guildmember is found guilty of breaking any city law or Guild rule relating to spellcasting, that member shall be punished as follows:

- First Offense: Pay required city fine.
- Second Offense: Pay required city fine and pay matching fine to the Guild.
- Third Offense: Pay required city fine, pay matching fine to the Guild, and surrender one permanent magic item to the Guild. If the offender owns none, he or she must acquire or make one and turn it over within a time specified by the Archmage or Council. In addition, he or she must appear before a review board called to debate the offender's right to remain a member of the Guild. Those who cannot convince their peers are expelled or suspended, depending on the crime and its circumstances.
- Fourth Offense: *Nystul's nullifier* is cast upon the offending member. This ancient spell erases all magical knowledge from the wizard's memory, removing his or her spellcasting ability and making him or her zero-level. This extreme penalty is visited upon those whose actions have disgraced the Guild and endangered the city and its citizens by their careless disregard for its rules and regulations.

Sponsors: If the offending Guildmember had a sponsor, the sponsor shall suffer the same Guild-enforced punishments as the offender. The only exception is where the offender faces expulsion or nullification; if either of these fates befalls the offender, his or her sponsor stands before the same review board to determine if the sponsor should be reduced in rank (e.g., from Median to Outer Circle). A sponsor is responsible for his or her protégé just as a knight is responsible for his or her squire; hence the sponsor will often take action to punish a wayward protégé as soon as the matter comes to his or her attention. The review board often suspends punishment from a sponsor who can show that he or she has done everything possible to reign in or bring to justice an erring pupil; this usually means that a misbehaving mage usually has to face denunciation by his or her own sponsor before the review board, making dismissal a much greater possibility.

The reason for all this strictness is simple. The concentration of strong magic in the Bluff, and its seemingly intrinsic magical nature (see the "Dark & Deadly Secrets" chapter), bear close watching—for strong magic attracts magedooms, magebanes, alhoon, and similar menaces, including brutes of all species who simply want to seize what is powerful and use it to slash, smash, bum, threaten, and control others. One Guildmember once likened living as a wizard in the Bluff to "playing catchfire while sitting on a rug spread with smoke powder," summing up the situation more aptly than most like to believe. Problems with the potential of becoming full-fledged disasters include independent ("rogue") mages of all types, the smoldering rivalry between the Guild and the Ministry of Art, and a long line of ignorant nobles who think a few scrolls and rings (or worse yet, an infernal deal with some fiendish power) can make them mighty archmages, finally in a position to demand the privileges their exalted birth destined them to wield—not to mention thieves chasing magical baubles that harbor rather more powers than they understand or can control.

Fifth Nights

One of the most useful functions the Guild offers its members is the chance to gossip (in private) about civic acts, social events, and street incidents in the city. Wizards from the lowliest neophyte to the most potent dean can frankly and openly share information and speculation about the doings of ambitious nobles, Thavvian agents, lawless adventurers, grasping merchants, mysterious strangers, and (best of all) each other. Anything which might be of interest to spellcasters is fair game at these gatherings. Despite the need for solitude and concentration in their work, mages are often lonely folk starved for companionship, who love a chance to relax after hours and just "talk shop." Twice a tenday (every fifth night) the High House hosts such gatherings, strictly for members only. These Fifth Nights are always relaxed affairs at which folk lounge around with weary feet propped on footstools, dress is decidedly casual, talk goes on late into the night, and a wide variety of hors d'oeuvres and drinks (ports, sherries, brandies, coffee, tea, and spirits) are on hand to help stave off hunger and thirst. These Fifth Nights alone are worth the costs of Guild membership to many adventurer-mages; amid all the catty chatter, one can learn much about what's going on that's magical, suspicious, or dangerous in the city. Even better, a newcomer can gain insight into the personality of many powerful Ravenian wizards. All participants at these gatherings can relax due to the absolute prohibition on any use of spells and magic items at such events (save for direct self-defense), a prohibition enforced by on-duty wizard-erful Ravenian wizards. All participants at these gatherings can relax due to the absolute prohibition on any use of spells and magic items at such events (save for direct self-defense), a prohibition enforced by on-duty wizard-erful Ravenian wizards. All participants at these gatherings can relax due to the absolute prohibition on any use of spells and magic items at such events (save for direct self-defense), a prohibition enforced by on-duty wizard-erful Ravenian wizards. All participants at these gatherings can relax due to the absolute prohibition on any use of spells and magic items at such events (save for direct self-defense), a prohibition enforced by on-duty wizard-erful Ravenian wizards.

Revels Arcane

In contrast to the informal Fifth Nights, the Guild also hosts monthly "Revels Arcane," open to members, their guests, associates, and anyone formally invited by the Guild. This always includes every Ravenian noble or important civic official (Regents and up), as well as all members of the Merchant Council and all guildmasters. Many of these folk never attend, but the revels are open to them as a way of impressing such folk, perhaps attracting their sponsorship and business, and allowing members of the Wizards Guild a chance to get to see and talk to folk of prominence and power in the city. To encourage at least a few such usefully powerful folk to attend, Revels always involve good food, good music, and entertainment—from hired dancers, exotic beasts, and poetry recitations to magical spectacles arranged





by Guildmembers. Dress is always splendid, and those who attend often bring the most comely escorts they can find, or seek to gain the company of such during the festivities. Flirtation is rife, and many a comely young wizard has attracted an older patron at such an event (likewise many a merchant's or noble's son or daughter has caught a wizard's eye, sometimes leading to long-term alliances). Spell demonstrations are frequent, spectacles calculated to impress and to carry an implicit warning to rival power groups such as the Ministry of Art and the Merchant Council.

Most popular of all are the "spelltale" illusions for which the Revels are becoming justly famous, in which stories of famous or important events in the Realms are told (sometimes fancifully or comically) entirely by the use of three-dimensional, intangible images. Occasionally these spelltales are accompanied by dialogue or music (professionally recited by skilled performers from the Fellowship of Bards). Guildmembers take pride in crafting these to be very realistic, even when they descend into buffoonery (scenes lampooning Elminster are perennially popular). More recently a series dubbed "the Bumbles" parodying various local groups—the City Watch, an imaginary Thieves Guild, civic leaders, the Ministry of Art, etc.—has become extremely popular, so much so that attendance at the Revels have almost doubled.

Spell Research

Wizards who rank as Outer Circle or above may research spells at the High House of Magic. Those of lower ranking who are nonetheless members in good standing may be allowed to use the Guild's spell-labs so long as they perform all such researches under the guidance of a Guild mentor (typically a sponsor of 5th rank or higher). In such cases, the Guild mentor is required to furnish the appropriate Dean with full reports on research progress and a copy of any completed spells. The mentor is also entitled to a copy of any spell thus created in return for his or her aid. Most such projects are true collaborations, with the younger mage seeking out a senior Guildmember interested in the same field and gaining the benefit of his or her advice and experience during the spell creation process.

Higher-ranking wizards are not required to gift the Guild library with copies of new spells researched in whole or in part at the Hill House, but most do so anyway as a matter of "good form." The vast majority of mem-

ber-created spells in the library of the Wizards Guild of Ravens Bluff are variants on well-known spells in which material components, areas of effect, and casting times vary from the "tried and true" standard version of the spell, but there are occasional surprises. Upon review by the relevant Dean, the spell is then placed in the library for fellow Guildmembers to consult. A secret hidden library elsewhere in the building, accessible only to the Archmage and Deans, contains the most powerful spellbooks the guild owns and an armory of scrolls intended to be issued in an emergency to members defending the High House against assault. Also in this Inner Room are copies (not the only copies, but the whereabouts of others are known only to the Archmage, one Dean, and one other anonymous member) of the series of spells that give the High House its wards (see below).

The Wards of The High House

Among the most strictly guarded of Guild mysteries are the interwoven, many-times-augmented wards that govern the interior of the High House and its outer walls. Its many powers include (but aren't limited to) the following:

- spell reflection of all lightning-related or electrical discharge spells, and of all wild magic spells and effects (not surprisingly, this ability works less effectively with wild magic than with electricity, often spray ing uncontrolled magical effects in unforeseen directions).
- detection of intruding creatures who are astral, ethereal, invisible, magically disguised, shapechanged, or duo-dimensional (such creatures acquire a soft red, pulsing, softly chiming aura that lasts as long as the conditions triggering it persist; if *dispel magic* is cast on the aura, it vanishes for 1d4 rounds, only to reappear spontaneously 2d4 rounds later).
- protection against magical fire (magically caused flames won't ignite; such flames brought into the High House from outside are instantly extinguished, and items such as a *flametongue* sword have their flames suppressed). A few designated areas, such as the laboratories, are exempt from this effect.
- scrying misdirection (all magical detection and observation spells directed at any part of the High House from outside will deliver scenes or information about random places and beings elsewhere in the Vast instead of seeing their intended targets).



- translocational redirection (beings can't *teleport* or *dimension door* in or out of the High House, or from one part of it to another; attempts to do so from within the House result in complete failure of the magic—the spell is expended without effect. Attempts to do so from outside result in arrival 6d20 feet away from the High House in a random direction and 4d12 feet off the ground, rooftop, tree, or other feature directly below the arrival point. These conditions also apply to all items that cause translocated. Unfortunately, they prevent successful translocational spell experimentation within the High House, but the Archmage considers this a small price to pay for such effective security).

- *guardian eye* (by the casting of a certain secret Inner Room spell, a mage of Inner Circle rank may bring into being a *guardian eye*; the High House may have as many such eyes in existence at once as there are mages to empower them. Guardian eyes function as *wizard eyes*, except that their caster can aim spells through them every other round. These spells must be already memorized in the caster's mind, can't be wild magics, and can't be effects delivered by direct touch. Use of a *guardian eye* is very tiring; one can be maintained for a maximum of three rounds per level before the caster must banish the eye into nothingness and rest, unable to concentrate enough to cast any spell, for 1d4 hours. A maximum of one spell per caster level can be cast through a *guardian eye*; if this maximum is achieved, the eye collapses, along with its caster, once the last spell cast through it expires).

- *Passwall*, *stone shape*, *transmute rock to mud*, and similar reshaping or substance-altering spells directed at any part of the High House itself are twisted into *Evard's black tentacles* spells that promptly menace the spellcaster that caused them to come into being, ignoring other beings (the *tentacles* seem able to sense their creator, even if the spellcaster changes shape or appearance).

- Conjunction/summoning spells are nullified and wasted if cast within, or cast so that their effect will occur within, the High House (these protections can be placed in abeyance in the research laboratory, but only for carefully monitored experiments).

Different but still potent wards protect the buildings that house the Wizards Guild's rival, the Ministry of Art; their precise powers are a civic secret but demonstrably duplicate some of the known abilities of the High House wards.

Potions and Scrolls

Spellcasters of enough power and learning may research spells and learn to make potions and scrolls. Tight civic regulations govern the production of such portable magics due to the volatile nature of the processes involved, and the consequences of the possibility of much magic passing into hostile (or even merely careless) hands. The Guild enforces strict limits on the number of these items that can be created in a year (the quotas change according to political and market forces and are kept secret except among the Deans, who agree on a fair distribution of permissions to members in good standing with ability enough to successfully undertake such activities). The Guild formerly stockpiled a baker's dozen each of all the more widely known potion types (i.e., those found in the *Dungeon Master Guide*) for use in emergencies, along with a considerable reserve of spell scrolls. Most of these were expended in the defense of the city in the recent war, and the Guild is now working to replace this depleted resource.

Guild rules forbid the outright sale of magical items, but on rare occasions this rule can be bent (typically to supply missions of vital importance to the Guild or the city). At such times, potent items might be grudgingly loaned to adventurers serving the city in some official capacity, with strict admonitions to return them unharmed when the mission is over. If the Guild is coerced into surrendering such materials, or harbors grave suspicions as to their possible misuse, items may be handed out into which a hidden tracer enchantment has been woven (activated by any use of the item in question) to reveal the location in which they are used. Likewise, in extreme cases potions may be dispensed that purport to be something else but are in reality either *potions of delusion* (usually mixed in with one or two real potions, just for verisimilitude) or faulty *potions of levitation*. These latter convey an imbiber up off the floor to a heel-height of about four feet aloft, to bob helplessly there for 1d4+1 turns per sip or quaff (1d12+4 turns if the entire potion is consumed), unless he or she can catch hold of wall or ceiling features to drag himself or herself along. These take effect in a rush (typically causing head-crashings into low ceilings) and fail just as swiftly (always involving a loud, hard fall).

More common than these are magical trades, where the Guild exchanges items it has acquired but cannot use (magical swords, clerical tomes and talismans, thievish implements) for wands, bracers, rings, and other items useful to its members. Contrary to popular rumor, the High Hall does not contain a vast magical storehouse of rare and arcane items; the Archmage and Deans agree that items are more valuable in the hands of those who can use them than moldering in some vault.

Current Officials of The Guild

Alcides Von Tighe, Archmage of the Guild and Knight of the Raven (LN hm W18 [Invoker])

A tall man of stem features, athletic and even slim build, and a classic yet close-cropped white beard, Von Tighe is the first Invoker to occupy the Archmage's chair. Free of much of the pride and disdain of "lower orders" that blinker many a mage, Von Tighe is a skillful actor and impressive orator when he deems it necessary. He's risen meteorically through the ranks of the Guild chiefly by a willingness to work, to befriend other mages without thought of reward, to plunge right in to handle necessary but tiresome tasks that others can't be bothered with, and by his diplomatic skills. Alcides is a masterful negotiator, deftly handling conflicts as they arise. He wants to build the Bluff into a city that so welcomes mages that wizardry dominates daily life and is neither hated nor feared—in short, he wants the Bluff to rule all the Fire River Valley and eventually the High Country.

On a personal level, Von Tighe is quite sociable and on good terms with a number of lower-ranking mages. His name has been romantically linked with a number of noble ladies, priestesses, and wizards, but he has had no long-term liaisons. He recently escorted the Lady Mayor to one or two official receptions, sparking much gossip. His personal ideal is to find a kindred spirit who shares his passion for magic and might grow from an apprentice into a full partner and companion. Until he finds her, he enjoys the company of attractive and intelligent women when his duties permit.

Sebastian Silverlocke, Dean of Abjuration and Knight of the Mystic Flame (LG hm W15 [Abjurer])

A long-bearded, white-haired man with piercing emerald eyes, flowing white side-whiskers, and bristling brows, Silverlocke has a beak-like nose, a mellifluous voice, and "eyes on all sides of his head without ever seeming to notice anything," as one chastened Guildmember once ruefully put it. The protective grandfather of the Council, Silverlocke is by no means a doddering old man and often seems to have as much energy as the youngest initiates. Certainly he seems to keep abreast of most wizards' schemes afoot in the Bluff and always has just the right spells ready (some of them stored in a nondescript enchanted belt he always wears, origin and full powers unknown). The one black spot on his reputation is a distrust of gnomes that extends to rude speech and a refusal to work with or even speak directly to the Dean of Illusion. This behavior is rooted in an incident from his distant past about which Silverlocke refuses to speak; all that is known is that it involved an obelisk, a five-headed dragon, and talking spiders.

The Dean of Abjuration in his younger days enjoyed a wild career as a planes-hopping adventurer, and he still often slips off for a quick spot of adventuring. What is not known beyond one or two close friends is his long term liaison with a formidable evil sorceress named Tigres who lives elsewhere in the Realms. Sebastian believes that he can eventually "tame" her without blunting her strength and spirit; she likewise believes he will eventually come to see things as she does. Their periodic assignments are accompanied by wizards' duels, intense philosophical debate, and passionate trysts. So far their sparring seems to have proved little more than that they are well-matched; should they ever work out their differences, they might well found a wizardly dynasty of which any mage would be proud.

Martin MacGreggor, Dean of Alteration and Knight of the Hawk (NG hm W16 [Transmuter])

A craggy-featured, side-whiskered man whose black eyes snap with alert intelligence and inward humor, MacGreggor has been described aptly as "cantankerous." He's demanding, to say the least, but has a genuine affection for his students, who are usually in awe of him. He's always been known as "Old Blackwhiskers," despite being younger than some of his fellow Deans, who have been overheard using the phrase with as much mingled fear and exasperation as apprentices. MacGreggor is a shrewd judge of



character with an uncanny nose for falsehood, and he keeps close watch on intrigues, cabals, and meetings all over Ravens Bluff. "Born suspicious, that one," a visiting sorceress once (correctly) judged, and any Dean of the Guild might be tempted to add, "and eager to act on as many of his suspicions as he can." A close friend of Alcides Von Tighe, he's thought to be the Archmage's most trusted advisor.

Though he keeps his views strictly to himself, the Dean of Alteration sees Ravens Bluff as an exciting cradle of adventurers, innovators, and accomplished manipulators with shining potential. He alerts all he can to what he sees as the perils of Mulmaster, Calaunt, Thay, and other eager exploiters waiting to swoop down on the rising prosperity of Ravens Bluff, believing that the Guild must fight tooth and claw to preserve that potential and allow the Bluff to rise into (in his words) a "great land to grow old in." He sees Scardale and Hillsfar as constant trouble spots that need watching and isn't above covertly meddling in their affairs (through intermediaries, to conceal his own role). He often hires roving peddlers and adventurers to report back on the doings of this or that person, business, or group, to keep him "in the hawk's view" of what's befalling in these and other distant places. The Harpers sometimes trade information with him, but each is deeply suspicious of the other.

MacGreggor sees Sembia as the true enemy of the Bluff—or rather, hundreds of greedily, self-interested merchants, acting individually, who happen to share Sembia as their home. He believes that the Wizards Guild should never openly act in the wider politics of the Vast (such overt and unsubtle dabblings are for civic governments) but should always be hard at work steering affairs behind the scenes. Peace permits mercantile prosperity, but idle warriors make mischief; the aggressive powers of the Reach must be kept busy eyeing each other and made to understand that Ravens Bluff as a place too useful, day in and day out, to molest.

"Old Blackwhiskers" has no personal life to speak of; he simply doesn't have the time to spare.

Jerrod (Jerra) Korbador, Acting Dean of Conjuraction/Summoning (LN hm W12 [Conjurer])

Slender, tall, clean-shaven, and fine-featured, Korbador is visibly younger than his fellow Deans. He has brown hair, hazel eyes, and a soft speaking voice which he uses as seldom as possible. In deeds he's just as quiet and reserved and is often the target of good-natured teasing from fellow Deans. He lavishes more time and care on his Guild work than any of the other Deans, aiding and guiding Guildmember conjurers without dominating, morally judging, or offending them. For a Guildmember who needs aid, financial support, or just someone to talk things over with, he's "always there." In short, he's a truly outstanding administrator and endlessly supportive mentor. Though Korbador remains "acting" Dean at his own insistence (he was appointed to the post after the former Dean of Conjuraction/Summoning mysteriously disappeared, presumably as the result of a summoning that didn't work out as planned), the Dean's mantle is his for as long as he desires, on the strength of his having swiftly and quietly forged stability out of uproar.

Korbador guards his personal life so well that it remains a mystery to his fellow guild members (most assume that he doesn't have one). The Dean is reticent for a very good reason: "he" is actually a woman (Jerra) who has successfully maintained a male persona ("Jerrod") since childhood. Her secret is known only by the Archmage and the Dean of Divination; the latter discovered it on his own but keeps quiet out of a sense of fun to see how long the charade can be kept up. Despite their dramatically differing personalities, the two have become close friends—so close that scandalous tongues are beginning to wag—and often support each other's projects.

Though she keeps her mouth shut about her own dreams, Jerra would like to see Ravens Bluff grow from a city-state into a large and prosperous nation ruled by four or five ruling families of mages, firmly allied with nearby demihuman populations—a restored dwarven kingdom beneath the city, elven enclaves in the wooded regions of the Vast, and autonomous halfling shirelands (she has already begun encouraging halfling settlement along the Fire River in abandoned farmlands desolated by the recent war). Realizing her plans would mean absorbing, either through alliance or conquest, Mulmaster, Tantras, and Calaunt; claiming Scardale (and defeating Sembia in the inevitable war that would follow); and eventually absorbing Hillsfar or one of the cities on the north coast of the Moonsea in order to claim the mineral wealth of the frigid Thar and the lands beyond. This in turn would require decisive victories against the orcs and other monsters of the mountains on the one hand and against the Zhentarim and the Citadel

of the Raven on the other. As for Thay, she believes it will collapse through internal conflicts within the next decade, giving way to a mage-state which might become Ravens Bluff's natural ally.

These aren't small dreams, and she doesn't expect to live long enough to see them through to a triumphal end—but she does believe she should always work towards them for the sake of her grandchildren's or great-grandchildren's generation. The first move must be eliminating enemies of Ravens Bluff who are active in the city itself. The second involves working with fellow conjurers to develop a means of effectively policing the roads of the Vast so that they are safe for travel and commerce (she favors developing a technique of establishing Ravenian road patrols who summon monsters to fight for them—wolves in winter, for instance). The third move will be to infiltrate and eventually take over the governance of Tantras and Calaunt, working on both at once so that neither can come to the aid of the other. So long as they're kept in ignorance of the overall plan and of the identity of their employer, hired outlander adventurers are ideal agents for all three initiatives. As she says to herself of these schemes, and of her Guild work openly to the other Deans, "Well, it's a start." Jerra is a tireless worker who never stop pushing ahead with what she sees best for Ravens Bluff. Quietly, of course.

Micah Starfire, Dean of Divination (CG em W15 [Diviner])

Handsome, carefree, and flighty, Micahalytae Starfire retains the classic fine bones, slender build, and gliding grace of his moon elf forebears. His hair is raven-dark, his skin pale as polished horn, and his eyes two dancing, merry flames of violet. He delights in the sheer energy and intrigue-riddled striving of Ravens Bluff, that "fire of life" that he believes his bored, decadent fellow elves have lost. To him, the doings of the city are a free show, endless ongoing entertainment that can only be improved by his occasional efforts to stir things up.

Whimsy and impulsiveness are the watchwords of this most mercurial of the Deans; Starfire attends to his school like an artist working on many projects at the same time, dabbling here, swooping in for a word or an argument there, and then dashing off to another confrontation or supportive word elsewhere. He has to be in on everything and to "see it all." Though none deny his love for the Guild and its members, his inquisitive nature is sometimes trying to the objects of his endless curiosity. Diviners have complained of his dropping in to spy on their private business dealings, at-home spell research, and even lovemaking ("Better check under the bed for Micah" is a standard Guild phrase, only half-spoken in jest). He's close to the Dean of Conjurers, Jerrod Korbador ("thick as thieves, those two"), whose perpetual calm makes a useful counterbalance to his impulsiveness.

His forbearance and love of fun is the main reason the Wizards Guild hasn't made the final moves to crush and destroy the rival Diviners Guild; some of his fellow Guild diviners think he should be dismissed from his post for this alone—though they'd still love to have him around, perhaps as Revelmaster to guide and govern the apprentices' pranks. For his part, Micah has gone out of his way to befriend members of the Diviners Guild, seeking to set them at their ease and show them the benefits of merging with his Guild rather than harass them into joining. They're still wary, remembering decades of persecution, but his approach has won a sizable minority of the non-Guild diviners over to his view.

Micah likes things unsettled, exciting, even a bit dangerous—though open war isn't to his taste at all; the recent hostilities involved bloodletting that cost him too many friends. His impatience with restraint made him one of the few figures of authority who spoke out openly against the "necessary repressions of freedoms" in the recent war, winning him great and unlooked-for respect among the common people. Micah works towards continual change in the politics and power of Ravens Bluff, just to keep things most interesting.

Angela Nereid, Dean of the Elements (CN hf W15 [Water Elemental Wizard])

Leathery-skinned, bony, and bouncy despite her obviously advanced years, Nereid is opinionated, talkative, and rather ridiculous figure. She periodically dyes her knee-length mane of gray and white hair various vivid colors (emerald green, sky-blue, purples), adorns her eyelashes and nails in like hues, and wears low-cut gowns that accentuate her rather lean décolletage. She never seems to stop talking, like an interfering old aunt who can't leave the private affairs of those around her alone, and she loves to play matchmaker between anyone unlucky enough to attract her notice, however briefly.





"The lovely Angelica" (as she's sarcastically known) always has some comment to make on any subject that comes before the Council. She's a capable Dean, although many in the Guild disagree with her constant attempts to enhance her specialty in Art at the expense of others. "Pushy" is an apt description, though some Guildmembers enjoy her energy and enthusiasm and love to inflict her on shy or difficult merchants, adventurers, or ambassadors.

Privately, Angelica is desperately lonely and unhappy (her matchmaking is a way of trying to be happy by bringing happiness to others). She wants a mate and is prepared to do almost anything to get one. She considers it beneath her dignity to magically disguise herself as younger and more beautiful than she actually is, wanting someone to accept her as she is, warts and all. Recently she thought she'd found a companion in the suave mage Alakander of Telflamm—but he turned out to be a Red Wizard of Thay bent on gaining control of the Guild through her. When he tried to slay her and cloak his body in her shape, she used a spell of her own devising to drown him inwardly, flooding his lungs and organs with endless seawater until he burst. She's left the stains he made on the fur rugs of her bedchamber as a grim and ever-present reminder of her folly. After this experience, Angelica has come to believe that most folk are grasping at heart, too selfish to truly love an old woman—or a city.

Lady Belinda Moonglow, Dean of Enchantment and Charm (CG of W15 [Enchantress])

Tall and lushly built for a moon elf, Lady Moonglow stands almost six feet in height, with an ample rather than slender figure; there's clearly human blood somewhere back in her ancestry. She has the pale, glowing white skin, bright green eyes with lush black lashes, and long, silky black hair of her famous Sembian family. The premier socialite of the Guild, Belinda is an unabashed hedonist. Her frequent visits to the temple of Sune Firehair have brought on (justified) accusations that her loyalties are divided between Guild and temple. Her habit of attempting to seduce any new Guildmember who strikes her fancy upsets her fellow Deans and has caused more than one shy wizard to flee precipitously at the sound of her voice. She hates dignity, pomposity, and propriety—drawing no distinction between the three—and deliberately dresses to shock.

Not surprisingly, her school has suffered under her inattentive regime. Most of the lower-ranked enchanters and enchantresses spend their time vying for her attention (in Guild parlance, "enjoying the Moonglow") rather than researching new spells or dealing with Guild business. The Archmage has warned her to do something about the disarray, to no avail, and is now quietly drawing up plans for her replacement as soon as a likely candidate surfaces. To her credit, Belinda's "generous nature" extends to sharing spells and spell refinements (she is particularly interested in making castings swifter and less obvious in delicate situations). She dislikes any emphasis on rank and seeks to embrace non-Guildmembers as fellow practitioners of the Great Art. Completely free of prejudice against any being because of its gender or species, she has discovered that "evil and rapacious" races such as drow, orcs, illithids, and doppelgangers hold a surprisingly large number of individuals who enjoy getting to know a traditional racial enemy. As a result, Belinda has many friends and lovers among unexpected folk; she is the only dean as much at home in a sailors' low dive as at a noble's ball.

When she thinks beyond her daily pleasures, Lady Moonglow sometimes dreams of building Ravens Bluff into at least an echo of lost Cormanthyr: a realm or city-state where elves, dwarves, gnomes, halflings, and humans can live in harmony and magical might. Perhaps, one day, she'll know the glory of participating in the weaving of a mythal (vivid descriptions of the ecstasy of being a part of the raising of Myth Drannor have been told and retold to younglings in her clan down the years). If she does lose her post in the next inevitable crisis, as seems likely, she will probably become the Guild's liaison with the Temple of Sune.

Uldiznae Rockfall, Dean of Illusion (NG gm W16 [Illusionist])

A hunched and scuttling figure in his tattered, patched, and ragtag black robes and thick-soled sandals, 'Diznae has a huge wart-studded nose, bristling brows, homely face, and merry nature. He loves adventuring and playing pranks and often visits taverns where returning adventurers are celebrating the completion of some successful expedition, to hear their tales and stand them a round of congratulatory drinks. He's always interested in any news of illusions, deceptions, and disguises, and most of the clever touches that make the magical spectacles cast at Guild revels so striking are

his. He's a master of causing illusions lit or posed so as to blend in with what is real—for instance, if he caused an apparition of a man to cross a street, he'd make the figure's shadow change shape to suit the available light sources; on an icy street, his illusory figures would skitter on patches of ice, duck under passing ravens, and so on.

Good-natured and warm hearted, Rockfall would prefer a life of casting illusions for pay (to enhance the feasts put on by nobles, for instance, or to fool the business rivals of his clients into believing that a lightly-guarded warehouse is bristling with sentinels), playing pranks, and hoisting tankards at ease with friends. Having won the post of Dean, however, he recognizes the need for strong leadership, to make his school seen as something more than a bunch of feckless tricksters. He's constantly fighting to engender respect for illusionists, both within the Guild and in the city as a whole.

In his heart, 'Diznae is keenly aware of the dismissal of his kindred as the "Forgotten Folk" of the Realms and sees Ravens Bluff as a chance for gnomes to become accepted as equals, influential and important in local affairs. He's pushing for gnomes to become nobles, civic officials, and respected merchants. For once, as a beginning, he'd like gnomes not to trail behind dwarves and halflings. At least four gnomes sitting on the Merchant Council would be a good immediate step—and if he has to manufacture a crisis or scandal or two to get them there, he'll gladly do so. 'Diznae secretly has a lover among the elven maids of a certain noble house; whenever asked why he doesn't have a (gnome) wife and family, he cheerfully replies, "Too busy! Too much work, that! Time enough when I grow up—ha-ha!"

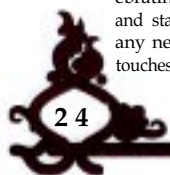
His canny investments and spellcasting fees have earned Rockfall a great (and secret) fortune, most of which is invested in property: over two dozen buildings, scattered throughout the districts of the city, most in choice (corner) locations. He also keeps several sacks of "ready money" (gold and platinum coinage) hidden away in crawlspaces and other hard-to-reach corners in his various residences.

Lady Penelope Norwood, Dean of Invocation and Evocation (CN hf W16 [Invoker])

Matron of a grand old Ravenian noble house, Lady Penelope has long brown hair, deep black eyes, and a strikingly attractive face and figure. Always well dressed in tasteful and expensive robes and gowns with simple jewelry, Lady Penelope is the epitome of graceful manners, refined tastes, and self-control. Gifted by the gods with a fiery temper from birth, she understands better than most the need for perfect self-restraint and precise mastery of one's arcane powers. She is actress enough that most folk who anger, irritate, or disgust her never know it from her face, voice, and body language. Lady Penelope is always busy with Norwood family affairs (the daily running of the estate and overseeing family investments in particular) and has sometimes admitted to having "a very full platter" between her work as Dean and her tasks as Lady Norwood.

Her husband, Lord Transtible Norwood, is a country gentleman with a heart of gold and a head nearly as dense; his passions are hunting, Lady Penelope, and his country estate (not necessarily in that order). They have three children—two sons who are the very image of their father (bluff, burly, and impatient) and a daughter who's inherited her mother's cleverness and recently entered the Guild as a neophyte Enchantress. Despite her poise and family tree, Lady Penelope is not a snob and has a soft spot for adventurers dating back to her youth (there was a major scandal involving a Tantrian fighter named Talargeth Brimmon some twenty years back). Since she abhors merchants and their grasping ways, she is seeking to forge an alliance between the old noble families and the adventurers for which Ravens Bluff is justly famous; rumor has it that she's keeping an eye out for clever young women who might do nicely as wives for her sons Jethrar and Laeremar.

Lady Norwood is, at heart, a talented and capable woman who is far too busy juggling her responsibilities as Dean, wife, estate manager, and mother. Nevertheless, she delegates well (her daughter Stelma helps manage the family fortune; her more responsible fellow invokers handle various day-to-day Guild matters under her supervision) and has the respect and loyalty of her fellow wizards. She is also respected by the "Old Guard"—the city nobility—and is beginning to win a number of them over to her scheme of reviving their fortunes with an infusion of "new blood." Penelope is devoted to her husband and content with her lot in life. She is deeply proud of having won the post of Dean (as a personal accomplishment rather than something that came to her as a Norwood).



Terrance Trent, Dean of Necromancy (LN hm W18 [Necromancer])

Balding, mild-eyed, and straggle-bearded, Terrance Trent is of average, nondescript manner, bearing, and appearance. He wears simple gray robes or the clothing of a merchant of middling success and often appears shy or distracted. He's the son of a now-dead famous warrior, Errance, and spent a miserable childhood being taunted as the weakling, bookish "Terrance son of Errance." Terrance has the least self-importance of any of the Deans. "In fact," one Ravenaar merchant said recently, "Trent doesn't seem like a wizard at all. He's polite, treats us all as equals, is friendly, and sees the problems and views of common folk. Whatever possessed the gods to make a wizard so sensible—and where did those Guilders find the wits to make him a Dean and not a doorservant?"

The previous Dean of Necromancy, the late and unlamented Paladrius Daerwood, was the classic sort of necromancer: an impressive man who played the role of sinister mystic master of evil to the hilt. Paladrius always wore black robes and had a host of specially enchanted crawling claws that could fly and hover which he used to fetch and carry for him, to hold goblets near his lips at revels, or simply to terrify anyone who crossed him. Paladrius delighted in little intrigues, muttering dark phrases and threatening curses or undead visitations upon creditors and anyone trying to "overcharge" him (that is, not give him a hefty discount) in business dealings. In short, he did all he could to encourage fear and mistrust of necromancy in general and himself in particular.

In contrast, Terrance seeks to cast his school in a different, friendlier light. He believes great strides can be made in the healing arts through necromancy—long-lasting protections against diseases and parasites, healing spells that work instantly to restore strength and vigor without the need for rest, etc. The other Deans respect Dean Trent's views and openly support his efforts to popularize "the Dark School."

Terrance has sometimes been seen in two places at once. He was once asked point-blank by his fellow Deans if he's been dabbling with clones, as they'd be the ones to have to deal with his resulting insanity (his reply was soothing but evasive). The truth is that Terrance has a twin sister, Tasherra, who's a necromancer even more powerful than he is (19th level). She dwells with him, dresses as he does, and always has ready a spell that can transform her into his exact double. She keeps to the house for the most part, working magics and guarding their home against intrusion (a small

army of skeletons stand upright in shallow closets all around the house, awaiting either sibling's command). Relieved not to deal with the outside world more than she has to, she spends her time absorbed in thaumaturgical pursuits; the two collaborate on all their spell research, achieving far more together than either could alone. When she has to go out, she takes on Terrance's form, sometimes replacing him at Guild meeting or official functions which would otherwise interrupt his research. They work hard to keep Tasherra's existence secret; thus far, with success.

Terrance and Tasherra love each other dearly and see no need to find other companionship. The two are linked in some fashion and can always tell if the other is in trouble; if one is attacked, the other will magically appear at the scene within seconds to effect a rescue. On occasions when Terrance requires an escort for a revel or reception, Tasherra magically alters her appearance and accompanies him. Both brother and sister have scars on their hip where they've removed flesh for magical safekeeping in case *clone* spells ever become necessary to recall either one to life (they have a pact that the surviving sibling will do whatever is necessary to heal or bring the other back to life).

Terrance really doesn't possess the ego most wizards have built. He considers himself a normal man blessed by the gods with a sister he cherishes dearly and magical gifts that have enabled him to do things most folk never can. He wants to live forever, Tasherra at his side, overseeing Ravens Bluff (in a kindly, behind-the-scenes way, not as a ruler or cut-and-thrust-of-the-tongue politician) through its deserved rise to greatness. Towards this end, he has been researching new methods of preserving sentience and free will in corpses and ways to animate the dead, or at least indefinitely defer death, without allowing the body to distressingly decay as is usually the case. He and Tasherra have had some success in both and are now seeking ways to combine the two lines of research.

Lady Delshandra Sinaran, Dean of Wizardry (generalist mages) and Knight of the Raven (NG ef W15)

This petite elven lady of austere beauty radiates an almost tangible aura of authority. Lady Delshandra has rich golden hair that reaches to her ankles, white skin, and blue eyes flecked with gold. She usually wears simple gowns of a single color, often white or yellow or pale green, across which play moving figures of humans, elves, and animals in an endless magical show, like shadows cast by some intricate unseen puppet-play. Of all the elven mages in the Bluff, she is perhaps the most reserved, level-headed, and conservative. Many guild members consider Lady Delshandra the "power behind the throne" in the Guild: when the Archmage is absent, Council meetings are chaired by his designate, who is most often Delshandra (Sebastian Silverlocke and Micah Starfire also occasionally take the chair). Chairing or not, Delshandra often controls debate, demanding that all options be thoroughly considered before a choice is made, and is deft in the marshaling of undecided votes to support whatever view she settles upon. Her role on Council is to stand for the balance between the schools of Art, and she admirably fulfills this task. The Archmage often defers to her during debates, because she's never shown any signs of trying to mold Guild policy or decisions to further any coherent personal view—she merely insists that situations be examined from all sides before decisions are made, and that decisions periodically be reviewed and, if need be, changed without thought of lost pride or reputation.

Delshandra has been a widow for many centuries and has no desire to remarry, preferring privacy to the social contact beloved by younger elves (such as Micah Starfire, whose puckishness she finds rather trying). She wants to see Ravens Bluff flourish, and from its success spring a "new Myth Drannor" where humans and demihumans can dwell together in harmony and prosperity. She intends to devote the next century or so to this project, after which she will reevaluate and decide whether she's any closer to her goal. Delshandra loves beautiful things and so collects paintings, sculpture, and cunningly crafted gems, but such things have very little hold on her; she simply delights in their artistry. She keeps herself sane by once in a while renewing her contact with nature. When she's weary of being the voice of reason, she entrusts the Archmage with word of her whereabouts, then slips off quietly. Polymorphing into animal form—typically that of a bird (often a raven), sometimes a wolf or deer—she spends the next month or so roaming the Vast, the Dragon Reach, or sometimes even further afield. Delshandra dreams of someday founding her own school of wizardry in the wilds, years from now when Ravens Bluff has grown too great to need her; towards that end, she makes it her business to know as many of the mages (Guildmembers or otherwise) within Ravens Bluff as possible.





Current Guild Projects and Long-Term Goals

Besides continuing and bettering acceptance of magic among outsiders, and continually improving communications among wizards in the city, the Wizards Guild deals with a wide variety of concerns. These tend to burst on the scene like clusters of spring flowers, thanks to the power and importance of magic, and the frictions of the strong egos possessed by most wizards and the nobility and other wealthy persons who can afford to sponsor or hire them.

In the recent war, the Wizards Guild and its traditional rival, the Ministry of Art, briefly united into the Guild of Magical Arts under the leadership of Archmage Alcides Von Tighe. The combined mages unleashed impressive magic in the defense of the city and were considered by many citizens to have been a deciding factor in the war. Although this union was always intended to be a temporary arrangement, the majority of the Ministry's members remained with the Wizards Guild after the reformation of the Ministry. Alcides warmly welcomed them and expressed the hope that their departing comrades would someday reconsider and accept the benefits of Guild membership. On the whole the new members have fitted in well, despite fears on the part of some of the old guard that these "New Cloaks," (as the former Ministers have been dubbed) were government spies, now watching the doings of Guild members from within the very heart of the Guild.

A brief postwar crisis came in an inundation of disenchanters who flocked to the city, no doubt attracted by magical residue remaining from the many potent battle-spells so recently cast in the area. Although the Church of Chauntea announced these creatures should not be harmed, the Guild posted a bounty of 100 gp per tail, with the result that the camel-like snout-nosed creatures are rapidly becoming rare in the area once again.

Other specific Guild concerns center on the tendency of newly rich merchants to hire outlander wizards (Van Tighe fears that history will repeat itself, with merchants trying to assemble private armies of adventurer-mages just as the local nobles did decades ago), the periodical appearance of various quacks and rogue wizards who attempt to sell magical items (often bogus or cursed) on the sly, rumored "magic poisoned," areas and drifting wild-magic fields in and around the Bluff. There are always the resident Thayvian wizards to keep an eye on, and long-term investigation into whatever it is, in or around or under the city, that is causing so many divination spells to fail or go awry. Some Guilders believe someone is trying to raise a mythal or awaken an ancient local mythal, but elven guild members who've walked in areas governed by mythals disagree; local conditions "feel" different. Then there's been a string of murdered mages over the last few months—unrelated incidents, or has someone managed to turn their own spells against them? All these and other events, in addition to their regular goals and duties, are sure to occupy the Wizards Guild for some time to come.

Temples & Religion



faith in Ravens Bluff is both a private and a public matter. Here one can find a temple or shrine to almost any deity currently revered in the Realms. As with most trading cities, the government doesn't interfere with religious rituals and private devotions of its citizenry, as long as no laws as broken. All citizens of the Bluff, however, are expected to honor the gods of the civic religion in addition to their other private worship; only priests, paladins, and others formally pledged to a specific deity are exempted from this civic worship.

The civic religion honors powers whose influence can ensure the safety and prosperity of Ravens Bluff. Its observances address the needs of the city as a whole, rather than spiritual needs of individuals. Trade holidays mark the civic religion's seasonal rituals and festivals, so all can participate. These important events supplement the more frequent rituals of each civic temple.

Their official status makes the temples of the civic religion the wealthiest and most powerful clerical elements in the city, exempted from taxes and further enriched by lavish gifts from those desiring to make a public display of piety. City guilds and wealthy citizens have renovated civic temples and sponsored many a lavish public festivals. All civic temples share in a

"civic" offering: a tithe (10% tax) collected from all householders and businesses on the first day of every month. Wealth, stability, and political connections have given the civic religion and the Clerical Circle that oversees it a conservative, sometimes complacent, outlook. Still, its collective clergy work diligently to thwart any threat to the city, as continued prosperity demands such vigilance. Moreover, the civic temples are formally required to provide assistance and protection to Ravens Bluff in exchange for their special status.

The greatest disruption to "business as usual," for the Circle has been the status of Waukeen since the Time of Troubles. Nothing was done after the Ascension, partly out of respect for Lady Lauren DeVillars (Waukeen's chief cleric in the city and a much-loved member of the local nobility) and partly because of a lack of any definite knowledge of Waukeen's fate. With the absorption of Waukeen's portfolio by Lliira, the Clerical Circle decided to add Lliira to the Circle in Waukeen's stead as a temporary measure. It was generally agreed that when a new avatar of Waukeen appeared the Lliirans would retire, but as the years passed without Waukeen's return most came to assume that this temporary appointment would become permanent. Then, to everyone's surprise, the goddess Waukeen recently returned. Lady Lauren DeVillars has just resumed her seat, much to the relief of High Revelmistress Shanna Aslaros of the Church of Lliira (who often skipped Circle meetings anyway, finding them irredeemably dull). The full effects of this change have yet to be felt, but popular opinion has overwhelmingly embraced Lady Lauren's return.

Note that many divine powers not included in the civic religion are openly worshipped in Ravens Bluff. Those concerned with poetry, knowledge, and nature, and the patrons of druids, rangers, and paladins are particularly important. Veneration of evil deities is usually carried out in secret to avoid persecution, as these religions' rites often involve illegal sacrifices and other crimes forbidden within city limits. All non-civic temples known to the authorities must pay seasonal taxes to legally operate in the city.

The Clerical Circle

The governing Circle of the civic religion is composed of one representative from each of the ten official civic temples. The power of choosing Circle representatives is vested with the individual temples (usually taking the form of an appointment by the high priest) and need not be the same person for every Circle meeting. Usually the highest ranking priest of each temple attends. The Circle is led by a Chief Prelate chosen by Circle election from among the high priests of the civic temples. When the Chief Prelate is not present, the senior Circle member present takes charge. The Chief Prelate presides over all meetings of the Circle, appoints all committees, and serves on the Council of Lords. The Circle meets once a month, the location of its meetings rotating among the member temples.

Circle Responsibilities

The duties of the Clerical Circle are to maintain a harmonious relationship among the civic temples, to regulate construction of temples within the city and for a day's travel in all directions, to try and punish priestly criminals, and to work together for the common good of the city. The Circle encourages civic worship and promotes efforts to improve the religious sites of Ravens Bluff. Through prudent and timely sponsorship, the Circle supports local agriculture, crafts, trade, and defense. It sees to the well-being of citizens by making available education, healing, and food (all at a cost, of course). It works to combat faith-related threats to the city, both internal and external.

Specific duties of civic priests include advocating worship of civic gods; providing healing for City Watch, civic officials, and Knights of the Raven; countering spells from insane, or criminal spellcasters; repelling or destroying hostile undead or extraplanar creatures; mitigating the harmful effects of natural disasters; blessing agriculture, craft, and trade activities; conducting marriage ceremonies and funerals; educating children; preserving and protecting the city history; and conducting divinations in respect of official investigations or projects. All civic priests who are residents of Ravens Bluff can be conscripted by their superiors for special missions or duties at any time. Visiting priests can be requested to assist the civic temples in times of need but are not required to do so (although declining can count as a black mark on the priest's record, so far as his or her religious hierarchy is concerned).



Civic priests are tried by the Ecclesiastical Court for all crimes relating to actions taken on behalf of their faith and by the Civic Courts in other cases. Civic priests may reside at their temples if facilities and space permit. They receive a +4 reaction bonus in dealing with City Watch officers and government officials when they make their status known.

New Temples

Priests may build new temples in Ravens Bluff under certain conditions. First, a charter from the Clerical Circle may be necessary, plus written guarantees to adhere to applicable civil building codes (determined by the same official who collects a building permit fee upon receiving written building plans from the priests). Approval from other government bodies is not necessary. Recently, some faiths new to the city have attempted to bypass these laws by magically creating their sanctuaries or adapting already-existing structures for their purposes. Neither of these approaches is explicitly forbidden in the city statutes, much to the Clerical Circle's annoyance; they are currently trying to change the laws to become more comprehensive and hotly debating the legal status of the new temples (see below).

A small temple is a private chapel of under 1,000 square feet in floor area, intended for the personal use of the priest, his or her lay master (usually a noble patron) or clerical superior, and/or friends. Such a temple will not generate revenue and is treated as personal property for tax purposes. Other buildings may be associated with it, and two Circle representatives (one of the faith to be venerated in the temple, if it is represented in the Circle) will together inspect the temple to ensure it poses no threat to the city or local peace. A small temple of this type needs no charter from the Clerical Circle.

A medium temple is either a general or special purpose temple of 1,001 to 2,500 square feet. General purpose temples require charters. Special purpose temples (such as a marriage chapel of Lathander) associated with a general temple of the same deity are considered branch temples; in such cases, the charter of the main temple is simply amended to reflect the addition of a branch temple. General temples of this size cannot offer any services besides worship and healing. Such a temple usually generates enough revenue to cover normal temple supplies and maintenance (about 100 gp per level of the high priest, annually).

A large temple is defined as any temple greater in size than 2,500 square feet. All such temples must have charters. Running a large temple is a full-time occupation that prevents a player character from adventuring. Annual revenue is approximately 500 gp per level of the ranking priest. If a large temple is also a civic temple, its clergy will receive a share of the monthly civic offering. For example, a new temple of Torm was recently raised in the Bluff. A small temple to Torm already existed, but the growing body of the faithful required a larger facility, which the Clerical Circle approved. The larger temple required a charter, and the smaller temple became a branch of the larger. As Torm is not in the civic religion, the temple pays seasonal taxes. Under a ninth-level high priest, the temple takes in some 4,500 gp per year. If the Tormish priests had built a medium temple instead, they would still have required a charter, but the temple would only make 900 gp per year.

Civic Temples

The leader of the Clerical Circle and each of the ten Ravenaar civic temples are described hereafter. Holy officers of each temple are listed in order of descending temple rank, with their internal temple titles; most have additional holy titles corresponding to their level within the wider faith of the deity they worship. Unless otherwise noted, the alignments of listed clergy match those of their deity.

The Chief Prelate

Relarn Dayspring, Chief Prelate of Ravens Bluff (NG hm P13 [Lathander]: Morninglord specialty priest)

Relarn was a popular choice to the Prelateship after the death of the widely-respected Sinus Melandor, a Holy Justice of Tyr (who had in turn replaced Sarastos Gilgaldar as Chief Prelate years before, after the Circle argued, cajoled, and took vote after vote without resolution—until the aged Lion of Tymora, one of the two favored candidates at the time, suggested the most junior Circle representative as a compromise Chief Prelate).

Relarn lacks some of the grand authority of his famous predecessor but is widely (and correctly) viewed as kind and caring. Like Sirrus, he's earned

the sullen respect of those of evil faiths, whereas clergy of good and neutral alignments hold him in admiration.

Upon ascension, Relarn discovered the library of religious esoterica assembled by Sinus—and like Sirrus he's become fascinated by the details of ritual and the aims and deeds of all faiths. The desire to study religious points from all sides often leads him to delay decisions until he can study relevant texts from the library. Relarn recognizes that his primary aims in office must be to maintain the influence held by the Circle over the government (a difficult task in the face of the upstart Merchant Council), and to hold the Circle together in the face of religious challenges from outside its ranks. Expansion of the Circle to new faiths may well be necessary—but pressure to do so cannot be allowed to tear the alliance asunder and plunge the Bluff into the sort of behind-the-scenes struggles for supremacy that plague all too many established cities of Faerûn.

Relarn is a nondescript middle-aged man with thinning brown hair; large, melting brown eyes; and long, delicate arms, hands, and fingers. He dresses in simple temple robes, loves good music, and avoids overly ornate ceremony. This has led some to dismiss him as “a backcountry hedge-priest,” but he ignores sneering; keeping his temper and clear wits in even the most tumultuous battles and heated arguments is his greatest strength. His second-best weapon is his shrewd ability to so often correctly judge the characters (and truthfulness) of others. Relarn's first innovation has been to invite representatives from both the Council of Lords and the Merchants Council to meetings of the Clerical Circle; each group now regularly sends a (non-voting) observer.

Chauntea (Goddess of Agriculture; NG)

The House of Bountiful Harvest

Holy Officers:

High Harvestmistress Arabella Ieruin (hf P15)

Harvestmaster Jacob Shumway (hm P9)

Envoy Patricia Caraway (hf P6)

Envoy Libron Mornstave (hem P6)

Sheaf Taker Janice Roldelym (hf P5)

The oldest and most important temple of the Bluff, the House is struggling to maintain its traditional preeminence in the face of rising mercantilism and maritime food imports that diminish local reverence. Recent innovations are “blessed” raw foodstuffs rushed to city inns, taverns, and restaurants by impressively uniformed clergy, who pray over the edibles as they surrender them.

The House is conjoined with the Circle of the Sheaf, a druidic circle located about thirty miles upriver from the Bluff that continues the work it has always seen to: striving to feed all mouths, intelligent and bestial, in the Vast while fending off predators and banishing blight and disease. As specialty priests, all members of the Circle are true neutral in alignment. Senior members are listed here; most eschew the use of titles.

Archdruid Willowbrook Greenleaf (hm D13)

Lark Thorncastle (hf D10)

Vesper Robbinton (hf D9)

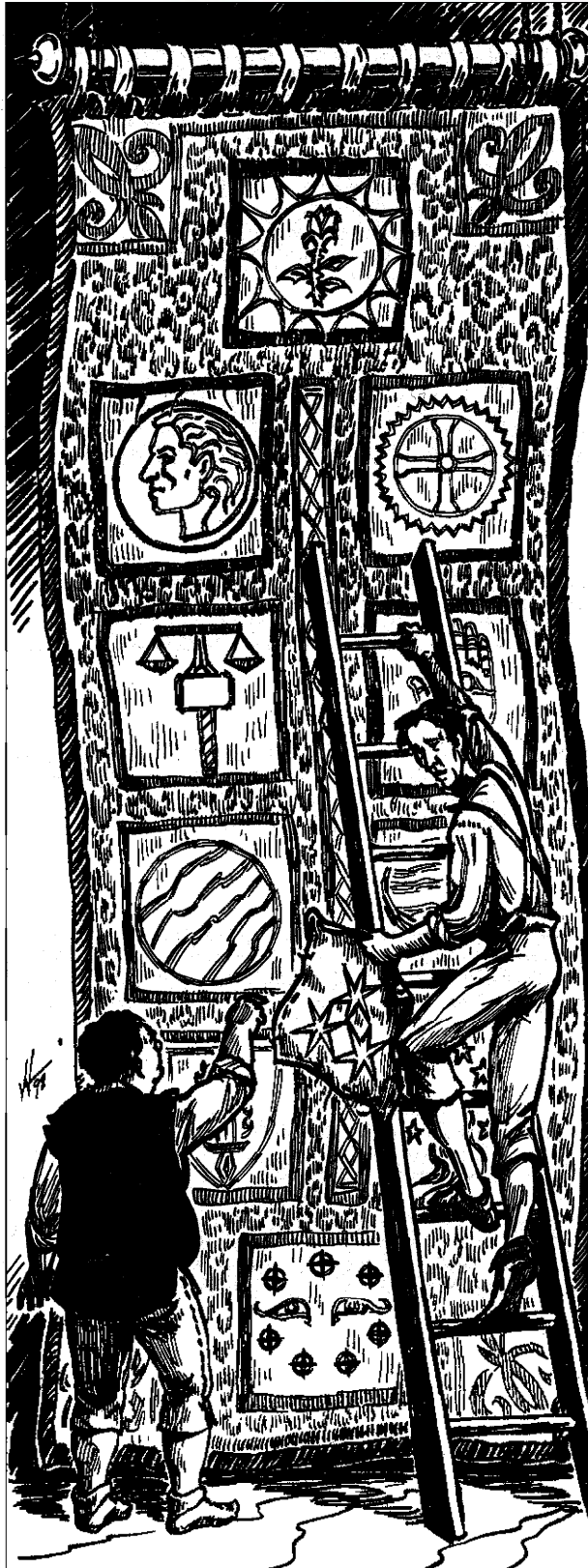
Padric Coralian Ferndale (hem D9)

Laerlyn Snowbrook (hf D8)

Quarthar Halbrithan (hm D7)

The former Archdruid, Hudson Greycloak, perished during the recent war; both Lark and Vesper are known to be upset at having been passed over for promotion in favor of Archdruid Greenleaf, an outsider brought in to restore normality; expect official challenges in a year or two when the natural order in the region returns. In the meantime, the House and Circle are laboring mightily to undo damage caused by the fighting. The lands surrounding the city have become magic-poisoned, due to the large amounts of uncontrolled magic used indiscriminately by both sides: now strange plants grow in the fields and multicolored, drifting lights are seen from time to time in the night sky.

The druids have been making great efforts to remove the magic poisoning and discourage landowners from returning to their outlying estates until those areas have been decontaminated. Aided by the Wizards Guild and the Ministry of Arts, the Chaunteans isolate the strongest pockets of magical energy and then *dispel* these areas repeatedly until all the perverted magical effects are gone. The priests and druids then bless the land in Chauntea's name only when her flowers begin to grow do they pronounce



the site safe. Initially the druids were aided by the appearance of disenchanters, whom they declared a blessing sent by Chauntea herself, only to have adventurers butcher most of the camel-like beasts at the request of the Wizards Guild (who have since withdrawn their offer of a bounty of 100 gp per disenchanter tail). The Chaunteans' efforts continue, but the process is a slow and arduous one, with priority given to estates whose owners survived the war; it may be years before the entire area receives a clean bill of health.

Gond (God of Artifice, Craft, Construction, Smithywork; N)

The Turning Wheel

Holy Officers:

Favored Father Otis Gregor (hm P13; Gondsman)

Bold Brother Helgar "Shieldbasher" Luin (hm [F9]/P5; Gondsman)

Craftsister Roxanne Kettlebopper (gf P6)

Temple Brother Einrykh Thomas (hm P7)

Temple Brother Dempsey Womble (hm P5; Gondsman)

Deacon Theron Simon (hem F5/T6)

A temple of steadily growing importance in the Bluff, the Wheel has been enriched in recent years by its sale of screws, nuts, and bolts produced by the Kettlebopper clan; these have been locally embraced by fabricators of all sorts and used in everything from pots to window-frames. Some of the keenest thinkers of the Wheel are low-ranking clergy, but thankfully for the faith the holy officers by and large listen and heed good innovative advice. The temple is currently purchasing city buildings as fast as it can, readying tooth-and-cog slipways for use in ship-repair drydocks to be opened soon, and working on a variety of lock designs for sale to merchants and private citizens. The future of the Wheel is bright: a vision of coins falling endlessly into the laps of its hard-working clergy.

One very public setback, however, came just before the end of the recent war. The Gondar clergy of the Wheel were testing their secret weapon: a Ground-Avoidance Ship, which utilized both principles of mechanics and principles of magic to fly. Unfortunately, during its maiden flight the wondrous machine drifted over the Halls of Mystery (the Ravenian temple of Mystra). Abruptly stripped of its magical enhancements by Mystran enchantments active around the temple, it fell through the temple roof, causing extensive damage but harming no-one. The Gondsmen paid for all repairs, but a certain coldness remains between the two temples. Furthermore, the Clerical Circle has strictly forbidden any further testing of flying machines within the city, forcing the Gondsmen to begin construction of a hanger some distance off to rebuild their smashed craft.

Helm (God of Guardianship; LN)

The Citadel of Protection

Holy Officers:

High Vigilant Master Darrel Ironhands (hm P13)

Vigilant Master Valeria Milintar (hf P13)

High Guardian Myra Whellow (hf [F8]/P11)

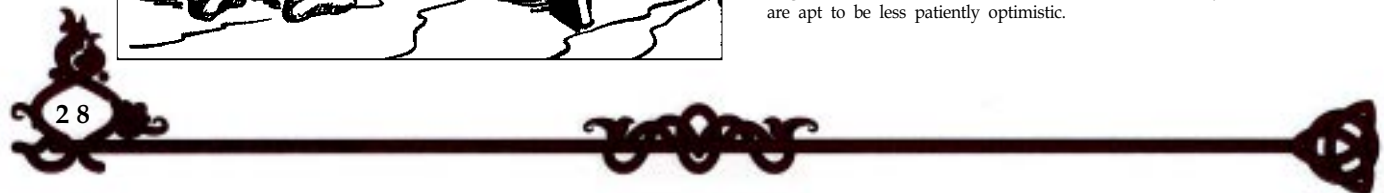
High Guardian Kanbri Draervus (hm P11)

Guardian Lethe Tappan (hf P10)

Guardian Malik Hulstar (hm P10)

Striking Hand of Helm Vhonna Deepdell (LG hf Pal 12)

Battered in wealth, reputation, and personnel in the recent war, the Citadel is still—slowly—recovering, gaining new respect (and funds) through the dogged vigilance and loyalty of its clergy in their hired-out capacities as the guardians of shops, goods in storage or in shipment, homes, and persons (i.e., bodyguards). A recent rumor that the Citadel was offering "tracer armor" for sale (that is, armor enchanted so Citadel clergy could locate its wearer from afar, to affect rescues) was either false or premature; no such armors have yet been sold. The Citadel is offering road escort services from the Bluff to High Haspur or to Dark Hollow, and these runs (at 2 gp per person and 10 gp per wagon escorted) have proven very popular since the war (the city being awash in rumors of brigands and wounded, desperate monsters lurking near the city walls). The highest-ranking holy officers see bright and better hopes ahead for the Citadel, but the cynical underpriests are apt to be less patiently optimistic.





One mysterious piece of unfinished business remains from before the war. The former High Vigilant Master of the Citadel, Alaric Armantle, died in battle before he could reveal precise details of the mission he entrusted to a hired band of adventurers (the Savage Spears, hailing from Telflamm) over a year ago. His successor, the new High Vigilant Master, was badly injured in the war and only fully assumed his duties some months later when his recovery was complete (Vigilant Master Valeria having acted as de facto church leader in the interim). Only when dealing with arrears of paperwork did he discover a reference to the matter. High Vigilant Master Darrel is appealing to Helmites everywhere to report to him any news they may have of the Savage Spears as soon as possible, sparking much speculation as to the exact nature of their mission and fate.

Lathander (God of Beginnings, Birth, Creativity, Renewal, Vitality; NG)

The Halls of the Morning Light

Holy Officers:

High Morninglord Torslyn Oramber (hm P12)

Alarmmistress Allara Dawnmaiden (hef P10;

Morninglord)

Meldacar of the Temple Vethic Dawnshield (hm P8)

Roselit Envoy Eol Hamlardan (hm P6)

One of the busiest and most bustling temples in the Bluff, the Halls of Morning Light resounds during daylight with the mumbled prayers of merchants seeking the favor of the Bright God for this or that new venture. In return for handsome donations, the clergy of the Halls will come and bless new shops, warehouses, and business offices; the rank of the attending Holy Officer depends on the size of the donation. Shopkeepers who can afford it request a “mornblessing” whenever they remodel; it’s considered de rigeur if the rebuilding is major or occurs as a result of a fire. As advocates of the new, the Lathanderites patronize recently blessed shops; if the wares being sold are good, pleasing to the eye, and incorporate any sort of innovation, the trade done by the proprietor is almost always four or five times the size of the money donated for the blessing, if not more.

Ironically, the clergy of the Rosegirt Halls (as the temple is sometimes known, recalling Rosegirt House, the old mansion that housed the faith until it was torn down to make way for the present temple) see no need for any change in their ways. As they see it, the temple is vital to the city; all that need be done to keep the future bright is to hire the occasional odd band of adventurers to keep down brigands, orcs in the mountains, and other lurking foes. Thus may the city know continued peace—and with it, ever-increasing prosperity.

The new leader of the Halls shows no sign of changing any of the policies set by Relam, viewing the Chief Prelate with a deep respect bordering on open awe. The only recent innovation came just before Relam’s ascension to the Chief Prelacy, when the Temple authorized a Lathanderite priest known only as Cheesemore (once a member of the feared Southside street gang known as the Griffins) to sell something called “Life Insurance.” This consists of a written contract wherein the Temple promises to perform the appropriate services to restore the purchaser from death to life in the case of any untimely demise (the body must be brought to the Halls; the contract has no “fetch and carry” clause). A group of purchasers can all contribute to a “group policy,” but only the first to pass away gains its benefits. Many in the Bluff regard this “holy innovation” with deep suspicion, sure that it is some sort of scam; so far the Clerical Council has been reluctant to challenge the new Chief Prelate’s pet project and merely keeps a watchful eye on developments.

Mystra (Goddess of Magic; NG)

The Halls of Mystery

Holy Officers:

Lord of Mystery Chester D’Marke (hm P13;

Dweomerkeeper)

Seer Lady Pamela Anne Legere (hf P4;

Dweomerkeeper)

Seneschal Arcane Derry Hlamae (hm P7)

Watchpriestess Monique D’Starre (LN hf P11;

Magistratus of Azuth)

The heavily-warded mock castle, its grand entrance guarded by helmed horrors, houses the clergy of Mystra. It can readily be recognized even in

the full grip of the thick fog locally known as “The Veil,” by the crackling bolts of watchfire that crawl along the inner walls at random internals (these are actually low-energy lightning bolts designed to stun or temporarily paralyze uninvited intruders). Mystra’s clergy provide moral guidance to the faithful and (in return for stiff fees) identification of enchanted items and magic lore hints to spellcasters struggling to finish a researched spell or learn some vital information about a magic item or spell (such as a word of activation, the optimum material components, et al.). The temple does as well as can be expected in a city that offers competition in the form of a Ministry of Art, a large and successful Wizards Guild, and a Diviners Guild. Still, any place as filled with adventuring mages as the Bluff would command the presence of a Mystran temple even if no wizard ever brought a recalcitrant wand through its golem-guarded portals. With more time on their hands than is usually the case, it’s no surprise that the Halls of Mystery house a fun-loving clergy who favor rather wilder garb than is usual for Mystran clergy; their antics at Wizards Guild and nobles’ revels sometimes frankly shock the Azuthian Advisor, Watchpriestess D’Starre.

Due to localized enchantments built into the Halls of Mystery, attack spells cast therein by any Mystran priest automatically cause maximum damage. This increased effectiveness is due to the strength of the Weave at the Temple and does not carry over to spells stored or suspended for later release (for example, in items such as a ring of spell storing). The temple’s cellars contain a pit of blue slime that gives off a blue-white radiance; immersion therein for an hour or so heals all injuries, banishes curses, suspends geas effects for 24 hours, and acts as a 12th-level dispel magic on malign enchantments).

The temple is currently involved in a property rights issue growing out of the flying ship incident already described under the Gond entry above. The Gondsmen ship crashed when stripped of its magical enhancements by the enchantments of the Halls, raising questions as to the right of any clergy in Ravens Bluff to magically influence the air above their holy places. For now the debate continues, with interesting ramifications for area-of-effect magical protections throughout the city.

Selûne (Goddess of the Moon, Stars, Navigation; CG)

The Moonflame

Holy Officers:

Moonmaiden Ariel Nightglow (hf P7)

Maid of the Waxing Auburn Bright (hf P4)

Maid of the Waning Myla Norrin (hf P5; Silverstar)

Envoy Sorlem Mimbrym (hm F6)

Moonhand Arakha Dunsoun (hf P5)

Sailors make up the bulk of worshipers at the Moonflame; adventurers setting off to explore the wilderlands of the Vast and hoping not to get lost being the next most numerous group, with certain herbalists and spellcasters working with natural forces affected by the moon the last largish group of faithful. The holy officers of the Moonflame attend to the needs of all with legendary gentleness, soft voices, dim lighting, and kind counsel. Should sailors drink rather more of the temple’s luminous green moonwine than is wise, the Moonhand steps in to preserve the tranquil atmosphere. To assist her in her duties, this capable doorwarden wields both a rod of rulership and a special slumberous rod (essentially a rod of smiting that can, by expenditure of two charges, cause any creature it smites to fall asleep for a full turn; the target cannot be awakened even by injury during this period).

The Selûnites are one of the oldest faiths in the area; their priestesses’ services to sailors, explorers, and those stricken with lycanthropy were vital to the survival of the Bluff in its early days. And though other gods have come to the fore since, the temple remains popular. Recently worshipers have been attracted by the moonveil spells perfected by the former High Moonmistress to afford sleepers in the small private chambers with utterly silent moonlit vistas to gaze upon, escaping from the bustle of the city outside. Many folk pay a copper a night to sleep here in undisturbed warmth: the homeless, recuperating sick and wounded persons, individuals just wanting to hide, and folk of all faiths and skills who need solitary silence to rest or think. Each of the sixty small chambers is a simple stone cell with a covered chamberpot; an ewer of water with a bowl, towel, and drinking-jack; a comfortable cot with quilt, blanket, and pillow; a shelf and hooks for clothing; and a large round “moon window” that looks out on a moonlit wood and fields. The door can be barred from within, and each room has at least one secret entrance for the priestesses’ use in case of emergency. The studying of spells here is allowed, but unsupervised spellcasting is forbidden (only healing spells and astral



sphere castings are permitted). Those who surreptitiously cast scrying magics typically find the cost of a chamber rising to 7 gp or more on their next visit; those who continue to abuse the Moonflame's hospitality are told after a second offense that no rooms are available for them.

The Moonflame suffered greatly during the war: a fallen paladin of Liira led a force of Talassan faithful in a full-scale armed attack on Selûne's temple in which fourteen priestesses and paladins of Selûne were slain—including the much-loved High Moonmistress, Mirial Moonsilver, whom the attackers specifically targeted (making it clear that this was in fact an assassination, not merely an armed raid). The Talassans struck a second blow two months later, when many of the surviving Selûnite clergy were possessed by foul magic and transformed into beasts that attacked lay worshippers and fellow priestesses, disrupting a holy day ceremony. At least eight of the clergy were killed in the fighting that followed, including Mirial's replacement, acting high priestess Jenethra Mooncrown. Ariel Nightglow, the highest-ranking surviving priestess, currently holds the seat on the Clerical Council; she has inducted a number of likely novices into the order, but it will be many years before the Selûnite priestesses rebuild their numbers to their former levels of power. In the meantime, it has become dangerous for followers of Talos to walk the streets openly, as the citizenry (especially sailors) mob and lynch them upon sight. Ariel has reportedly hired local adventurers sympathetic to her faith to find and eradicate all followers of the Storm Lord in the southern Vast in a holy hunt.

Tempus (God of War; CN)

The House of War

Holy Officers:

- War Master Karalus Daehventura (hm [F9]/P11)**
- Battle Master Tanyalla Marellus (hf F8/W9)**
- Weapon Master DaeMonde Vochette (hm [P2]/F13)**
- Holy Surgeon Jalathra Nithimyr (hf P9)**
- Right And Trusted Mace Emblar Calamathar (hm P7)**

Large and imposing, the House of War is meant to impress all who view it. Soaring pillars and glaring, larger-than-life bas-relief wall-carving of stern warriors adorn the outer walls. Most can emit goutts of flame, bolts of lightning, or rays of negation or polymorphing (changing attackers into snails that the priests rush forth, collect, and label by chalking their true identities on the shells); these effects come from wands mounted inside the figures, activated by watch-priests posted in tiny chambers within the walls. The doorwarden and security services of the Right And Trusted Mace are seldom required, as the rowdy or larcenous tend to be overawed by animated halberds forty feet long and axebledges taller than cottages which patrol the inner temple. The mace which gives the doorwarden his title stuns those it hits (for 1d4 rounds) if they fail a saving throw vs. paralysis. It can also be awakened to emit the screams made by all the creatures it has ever struck, a howling cacophony this brings clergy running from one direction and Watch patrols sprinting from the other.

Temple rituals involve a lot of lusty male plainsong chanting, the beating of martial drums, and the clashing of swords against metal spindles to awaken clangor and spray sparks. The temple confers the blessings of Tempus on those who go to wage war (including, oddly enough, all civic road patrols) and rents out armor, shields, battering rams, metalclad wagons, and catapults to those wealthy enough to afford their prices. During the recent war, the Ravenian clergy of Tempus were almost wiped out, suffering over 150 casualties in fierce fighting. Most of the losses were suffered in a successful attempt to destroy an armor fragment of the former god of darkness, Bane, which was being used by followers of Cyric to power dark magic against the forces of Ravens Bluff. Battle Master Lyalen Toforman was slam leading the charge into the enemy priests' lines, and many of his followers were struck down in a vicious struggle against the followers of Cyric, which befell in a magic-dead area. The fragment was eventually destroyed with the aid of two priests of Mystra, but the resulting fireball incinerating all within a ninety-foot radius; only those beyond this distance were spared. The Temple has proclaimed the day of the battle to be holy to its followers and have petitioned the city to honor the day in years to come. Statues of the fallen Tempuran priests and the two valiant Mystran priests have been commissioned for eventual unveiling in the temple's Field of Honor.

Most of the current efforts of the Temple are bent to rebuilding the shattered ranks of its clergy. Towards this end, the surviving Tempuran priests have taken in a great many children orphaned by the war, hoping that a new generation of battle-priests will descend from these "living discards."

The city's current war-weariness makes recruitment difficult, and matters are made much worse by the War Master's traditionalist approach ("Only death changes things, and then only for the dying. Blood and fire are the cycle, blood and fire. So it has always been; so it shall be. Meddle not."). The newly appointed Battle Master from Sembia passionately believes the priests must go out among the people in the streets and across the Vast, helping and guiding rather than frightening and dominating. Since disputes are argued out during practice sessions of fighting with blunt-toothed "battlebars" while wearing padded armor, quite often the two senior officers of the temple can be heard shouting their opposing views back and forth as they try to hammer each other to the floor—only to stagger wearily out of the room later, leaning on each other and gasping for breath. As the Tempuran say, "Only time and Tempus know who shall prevail."

Tymora (Goddess of Good Fortune, Skill, Victory, Adventuring; CG)

The Hall of Luck

Holy Officers:

- Luckmistress Calrissa Tupkas (hf P8)**
- Master of Rituals Matasian Windbough (hem F8/W8)**
- Rod of Tymora Bleys Burringlard (hm P8)**
- Lady of the Tomes Alamandra Wilfuel Rida (hf P6)**
- Luckbender Ralogliir Mercyhand (LG hm Pal 7, a.k.a. "The Edge of the Coin")**

There are those who believe the Hall of Luck is one huge gambling-house, but in fact games of chance are only played in the outer rooms, which always stand open to the desperate and the luck-drunk. Anonymously masked underpriests and -priestesses run these games, seeking to spread good fortune rather than fleece players. The inner and upper rooms of the temple are far quieter, kept private by ever-vigilant acolytes. Entered only by granted audience or invitation, these rooms house maps and tomes of travel lore about the Realms. Here the clergy study situations to learn the odds on proposed ventures. Here too come bold adventurers for private audiences, wherein the clergy remove vital things (for example, all their food, water, boots, daggers, or winter cloaks) from the bands of adventurers ere they sally forth, replacing them with shrouded gifts to be opened only later,





when the right ritual is performed. Sometimes the gifts are useless fripperies, sometimes they're useful gear. Sometimes they're even treasure maps or rich treasures, worth a dozen expeditions or more.

In short, encouraging the habit of taking chances, by the reward of good fortune, is the aim of Tymoran clergy; the Ravenian priests of the Lady of Luck see their work to further this habit as essential to the continued growth of the city. As entrepreneurs are encouraged (and, if necessary, rescued from penury by the temple when misfortune comes upon them), the mercantile strength of the Bluff grows, its wealth increases, and more splendor comes to all, who will then "come to know the true glory of Tymora." The clergy of Luck House (as sailors call the temple) are continually seeking new ways of offering the citizenry favorable gambles—and increasingly, as this becomes known, folk of all faiths come to the temple to see how warmly Tymora will smile upon them.

Tyr (God of Justice; LG)

The Silver Halls

Holy Officers:

Reverend Judge Hykros Allumen (hm P13;

Holy Justice)

Prioress Vellura Haumondsar (hf P8)

Prior Cambrin Alluman (hm P8; Holy Justice)

Sword of Justice Suram DeVillars (hm Pal 9)

Tyr is sometimes sarcastically called "The Welcoming God," because—and large—he isn't. Most folk shrink from the promise of open and full justice, suspecting it will strip away the little advantages they've gained through petty deceits and everyday subterfuges, laying them bare to shame, ridicule, or even flogging and hard labor. Clergy of the Just God have to overcome this forbidding aspect of their creed and emphasize the useful side of worshipping Tyr. In a grasping, bustling mercantile city like the Bluff, this chiefly consists of helping folk oppressed by those who've openly bilked them, "forgotten" to pay back loans or debts, and cheated them in ways the authorities can't or won't redress (as when the crime can't be proven or is discovered long after the event). No cause is too humble for a priest of Tyr to champion, no injustice too small to be set right—not even petty thefts of herbs or children's toys or clothes drying on a line. The warlike aspect of the god remains as a threat to brigands, sneak thieves, and (the Reverend Judge's pet hate) kidnappers and slavers. The last of these is always a problem thanks to press gangs and pirates trading in the port but only a pale echo, these days, of what it once was.

The lower-ranking clergy of the Silver Halls spend their days walking the streets, settling disputes and bringing justice to both high and low. They're seldom welcome at guild feasts or nobles' revels, because they're all too apt to embarrass someone with an on-the-spot demand for restitution. The honest workers of the Bluff love and revere them—particularly because the priests live under a strict never-take-advantage rule: food must be paid for, the lonely can be comforted but not cozened out of goods or hospitality or modesty, and so on. A priest of Tyr must always be as kind as even-handed justice allows but as stern as it demands—in other words, he or she must know when to apply the full letter of the law and when to "let things pass" in the name of the greater good. Understanding why actions were taken in the past, and what situation truly stands now, are keys to proper holy action.

The success of the Silver Halls, especially given their pointed independence from other temples of Tyr in nearby cities, is a mark of how well the Ravenian clergy of the Just God do their holy work. Strangers often expect them to be a humorless lot and are pleasantly surprised to find them so approachable—their reward is a warm, communal satisfaction unknown to those who value more worldly pleasures. Like so many other, they suffered much in the war; the Silver Halls, standing as it does on the edge of the city, was destroyed and is being painstakingly rebuilt as close in style to the original as possible. Reverend Judge Tholomen Brontaharan from the city of Milvarune in Thesk was designated to rededicate the rebuilt temple. Choosing to travel the Realms on foot to Ravens Bluff, administering Tyr's Justice to all who request his assistance, he set out some months ago and has yet to appear in the Vast. It is feared a dark fate has befallen Brontaharan, but details are wholly lacking.

Waukeen (Goddess of Trade, Money, and Wealth; N)

Holy Officer:

Overgold Lady Lauren DeVillars (hf P18)

During Waukeen's decade-long imprisonment in the Abyss, her clergy—unable to relearn their spells except through the intermediary of another deity—either defected to other gods (primarily Lliira) or retired. Lady Lauren, her adventuring career long over, chose the latter course and became one of the most prominent "Waukeens," as the old guard were known. The goddess's recent return took everyone by surprise; the Lliiran High Revelmistress gratefully resigned her seat on the Clerical Circle in Lady Lauren's favor. Unable in good conscience to deny the appointment, the indomitable Lady DeVillars has begun the unenviable task of rebuilding a clerical hierarchy from scratch. She has already made a good start, approaching old friends and asking them to resume active priesthoods "for the duration," as well as sounding out several likely candidates on whether they'd like to become Telchar (novices). A particularly thorny issue she has not yet resolved is the status of those who turned to the worship of other gods in the interim—Waukeen needs every priest and priestess she can get if the church is going to thrive, but the Waukeens tend to look with undisguised condescension on those "apostates" who accommodated themselves to the goddess's absence. Soothing the Waukeens, reabsorbing at least some of the wayward, and inducting new blood should keep even the amazingly capable Lady Lauren busy for some time to come.

Recent Ravenian Religious Developments

Something of the tenor of the times and the challenges currently facing the Clerical Circle can be gleaned from events that have befallen just since the end of the recent war.

PETITIONS

At the first postwar meeting of the Circle, several months before the Waukeen restoration, two petitions were presented to expand the Clerical Circle.

The first proposed expansion was to allow representation by demihuman priests resident in the city. Many members of the Circle doubted the legality of having multiple temples electing a representative to a common seat, as there is no precedent for such a collective vote. As yet no decision has been reached in the ongoing debate.

The second petition was made by the faith of Kelemvor, Lord of the Dead. One Damien Rethart, a giant of a man, presented himself to the assembled Circle and informed them that his order would now assume responsibility for serving the needs of the dead and dying from their newly arisen temple in the midst of the city graveyard (located east of town on a bluff overlooking the river). He then bowed and silently left the chamber, leaving the assembled clergy in some doubt whether his statement was a request or an ultimatum. Accordingly, they have decided to defer a decision until they receive a more formal request for a seat on the Circle on Rethart's part.

New Hope

War-time destruction just within the city walls was extensive; many residents of Ravens Bluff lost their homes. The halflings among them rallied to a newly built village not far east of Ravens Bluff, in the wooded hills just north of the Fire River (the ones that form the horizon for those looking out from the city walls). The village of New Hope was built with funds provided by Lady Cassandra (with the assistance of the Clerical Circle, the druids of Chauntea, and Dean Korbandor of the Wizards Guild). The settlement centers around a temple to Arvoreen built into a hillside, providing secure granaries and fortified dwelling-delves for the entire village population in the event of an attack or severe winter weather. At the dedication of the Doors of the Defender, Lady Cassandra spoke of the founding vision sent to her by Arvoreen and expressed her hope that the village will soon be able to assist in the feeding of Ravens Bluff's hungry thousands.



True Temple of The Dead

The night after the funeral of the Deputy Mayor Belanor Fenmarel, a new temple arose in the public graveyard of Ravens Bluff (set some distance east of town, to keep the threat of undead intrusions into city streets at a minimum). It was not raised in the usual manner by a laboring band of the faithful but rose by itself out of the trembling ground, its black marble glistening in the moonlight. When stillness returned to the grave-



yard, witnesses holding vigil for Belanor say that the front doors of the marble spire swung open and out stepped the priest of Kelemvor who had spoken earlier at Belanor's funeral. Identifying himself as one Damien Rethart, he claimed to be "a priest of the people and Kelemvor's representative to all Ravenians" and invited those who could see good in death to proclaim this "True Temple of the Dead," as "the rightful home for all souls." At this, two cowed and cloaked skeletal figures joined him—one issuing forth from the unbroken wall of the temple and the other

erupting straight upwards, like a sprouting flower, from the graveyard dirt beside him. Damien informed all present that these minor deaths were permanent guardians of the temple interior and that only those who truly embraced Kelemvor's teachings would be allowed to enter this, his holy place.

The House of Desires

Shortly after the disquieting eruption of the temple of Kelemvor, the Clerical Circle learned that a merchant house that had just opened its doors in Ravens Bluff was wholly owned, and directly controlled, by clergy of Sharess—a sensuous temptress also known as Bast, goddess of cats. Sharess's worship is banned in several cities around the Sea of Fallen Stars, but a representative from the House of Desires, summoned to the Circle to give an account of the matter, stated that her merchant house is not a temple but merely a mercantile establishment affiliated with the Sharessin. As such, she argued that it falls under the authority of the Merchant Council and not the Clerical Circle.

Despite their skepticism over this claim, the Circle ultimately decided that a strict interpretation of the existing statutes authorizing new temples prevented their interference, much to the annoyance of several members of the presiding clerics (who denounced the Sharess-priestesses as untrustworthy pleasure-seeking harlots). Surprisingly enough, the Reverend Judge of Tyr spoke up for the Sharessin, noting that they had kept within the letter of the law and praising their known opposition to several malign powers. The Merchant Council, despite some misgivings due to the House of Desires' sudden popularity, stand by their latest protégé in the hopes that the priestesses will assist Ravens Bluff in the establishment of permanent trade with some of the far southern realms in which Sharess is well established.

The Dark Dancer

The most recent controversy in what has been a troubled religious year in the Bluff was a riot among the warehouses just within the city wall. Dozens of City Watchmen rushed to the scene to quell a crowd of over a hundred drunken humans who were throwing rocks and debris at a newly rebuilt warehouse in protest against the opening of a shrine to the drow goddess Eilistraee. The riot seems to have begun when protest-

ers gathered at the Ill Eagle Inn, a taproom known for its prejudice against nonhumans, and marched to the site, growing in numbers as they went. Damage to the shrine was minor, although much food and clothing intended for distribution to the Ravenian poor was damaged or ruined in the incident. Acting high priestess Rebekkah Darklyte, the shrine's founder, treated several injured Watch members at the scene; she vowed to continue her mission of promoting harmony between drow and other races. Angry at having been circumvented, the Circle has banned any worship services at the site until a formal charter is issued, and the representatives for Lathander and Tyr have let it be known that they intend to veto any such authorization. The majority of the city's inhabitants reacted with relief at the news, but a member of the Merchant Council expressed surprise: "as long as those dancing elves pay their taxes and don't kill folk in the streets, what's to shout about?"

The Fellowship of Bards

Bords and ladies, good citizens of Ravens Bluff, we are pleased to present to you our humble Guild. Here, musicians, actors, artists, and performers of all kinds live and work, producing fine entertainment and works of art for your enjoyment. Our theater, the Ravens Bluff Playhouse, offers weekly performances by some of the most talented bards of our fair city. Look for the Guild red and blue for a great show!"

The Guildhouse

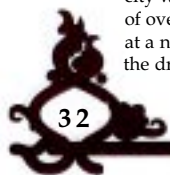
The Fellowship's Guildhouse is a large four-story building that (from a distance) resembles a manor house. The foundation and lower two levels are made of smooth-cut stone blocks, while the upper levels are dark-stained wood fitted with many windows. The Guildhouse stands in a wealthy district of Ravens Bluff, yet near enough to the Crow's End and Harbor districts that commoners have easy access to the adjoining theater. Its most distinctive feature is a huge carved sign depicting musical instruments, chisels and brushes, juggling balls, and bardic tools surrounding the guild's name. Like many of the fine woodcarvings in and around the Guildhouse, the sign is the work of Randall, the guild's master woodcrafter.

Inside, the Guildhouse has a homey feel, like a familiar tavern or inn. The ground floor is mostly given over to a huge common room and kitchens. Large wooden tables crowd the common room; all are worn but in excellent condition. Some of the chairs (Randall's work) are beautifully engraved; others (from the hands of his apprentice, Jolan) are less ornate. One can always find bards here, engaged in eating, arguing, practicing, idly juggling, or giving impromptu concerts or lessons. The few small private dining rooms at the back of the building are dusty with disuse. A wide stairway trails up the right wall of the common room to practice rooms above, where thick walls and floors prevent bards at work from disturbing each other. The top two levels are divided into sleeping rooms. Apprentices bunk together in a large room on the fourth floor, near the smaller private rooms for the Journeyman. The third floor is reserved for Minstrels and Master Bards. A dozen or so rooms are usually available as guest chambers.

The Ravens Bluff Playhouse

The theater, a large building next door to the Guildhouse, is also adorned with one of Randall's signs. This one depicts sword-swinging heroes, fearsome monsters, and damsels in distress, all coming from the mouth and harp of a life-sized bard.

The theater is three floors high. The ground floor holds the stage, common bench seats, and a small foyer where seats are purchased and cloaks may be hung. The second-floor balcony is equipped with upholstered seats. Private boxes, a bold stroke of Guildmaster O'Lyre's, line the walls between the balcony and the stage. The boxes are rented by citizens who are either wealthy and important or wish others to believe so. They are equipped with curtains that the occupants can close for personal privacy (commoners often swap salacious stories of what goes on in the boxes during plays, but in





truth concealing curtains usually hide only snoring—the lack of privacy restricts “secret deals” and assignations more than most people assume, but sometimes a quick embrace or simple code-phrases are exchanged in the din). The third floor of the playhouse holds a “birdwire” winch that can lower scenery (and actors!) to the stage floor, and the “yawn-savers”: iron cages that hold the realistic sculpted bodies of monsters (and scantily-clad human prisoners) that can be dropped suddenly into view to startle or stir an audience that’s growing restive during some long soliloquy. Several guild members are quite skillful in appearing to make the occupants of the cages speak or roar, projecting their voices as they lie prone on the third floor catwalks. A valance shields the view of all but the foremost row of the audience from these “godwalks” aloft, and darkness normally cloaks this area during performances—which has on at least two occasions allowed murderers employing hand crossbows to strike down victims sitting in the front rows of the audience.

The cellars of the playhouse are crammed with props and costumes. This musty, labyrinthine warren is the bane of all bardic apprentices, many of whom have been lost here for hours or even days amid all the statues and false walls and mock coffins. The dingy, packed cellars hold most of the guild’s wealth and records, hidden in secret places among all the clutter. The logic behind this lies in the thought that no one would think to look here . . . and they could never find anything anyway. Hiding places abound, from unlit alcoves tucked away behind furniture to props built to hide actors (hollow trees, barrels with rear doors, cavities inside large pillars and statues, and so on). This level is ruled by Brunhilde, the mistress of props and costumes, and she long ago forbid the use of bare-flame torches here under any circumstances. Amorous guildmembers trysting down here have caused many scares with the minor disturbances and noises they make (one embarrassed couple accidentally knocked over a set which then toppled another, and another, and another, like dominos). Certain areas have “shinny-wires” strung from the ceiling to allow young and agile apprentices to drag themselves along above all the clutter, the better to quickly find or reach things. Shuttered candle-lanterns hang everywhere on pegs, but Brunhilde is the only legitimate source of flint-and-steel strikers with which to light them.

The cellars include a vast array of props: realistic rowboats (complete

with oars), the starboard half of a full-sized ship, a working coach and several sets of harness, at least three wagons, six or more handcars, trumpets and a number of unfashionable instruments, suits of armor (some the real thing but most cuirboili painted silver to mimic plate), collapsible lances and javelins, many banners and brightly adorned shields (with both true and fanciful heraldry), long coils of ropes, a portable sheep-pen, a shanty, a privy, several mounting-blocks, a pulpit, a good deal of furniture (including a canopied bed), and even a hangman’s scaffold (and false bodies to hang from it). Plus, of course, any number of fake daggers and arrows, and a good many swords (blunt-edges) and rapiers (with the tips unobtrusively capped). From time to time props are borrowed by adventurers, other guilds, and the civic authorities; the fees levied for such rentals provides a tidy, if irregular, income for the guild.

When performances are in progress, the theater seems a truly magical place. Stage lighting comes from spirit lamps enclosed in metal cylinders which can be opened and closed by the stage crew. Some are fitted with panels of colored glass or painted with crisscrossing threads to create strange effects (such as the inside of a giant spider’s web or deep beneath the sea). Many performances utilize illusions cast by Arrion, the special effects master. This trickster has been known to liven performances (and even dress rehearsals) by subtly and humorously changing the illusions, a practice that drives his wife Beatrice, the perfectionist director of the guild’s theatrical productions, nearly insane. They put up with his whims because his comic touch is superb: he once caused a noble to literally collapse in mirth (the unfortunate man fell headlong from his box onto several even-more-unfortunate commoners below).

The theater’s goals are threefold: to provide quality entertainment to the public at a good price, to give bards a place to perform, and to pay for the upkeep of the guild. Bench seats cost only 5 cp a show, while balcony seats go for a loftier 1 gp. Private boxes are 30 gp apiece. Season boxes can be purchased for 150 gp and are popular among the wealthy. It’s become a sign of class and breeding to be interested in the arts (an attitude encouraged by the bards, naturally enough). Increasingly, married or amorous nobles and merchant-lords are gifting their spouses or desired partners with personally commissioned ballads, performed by the bards who composed them at dra-



matic or romantic moments (once, memorably, in court during a trial—a performance highly embarrassing to the recipient and displeasing to the presiding authorities).

Guild Operations

The Fellowship is a guild rather than a Bardic College—a rare institution amongst the free-wheeling bards of Faerûn. It's not strict but does look out for its own interests. Guild bards are recognized and respected by commoners and nobles alike, while non-guild bards are generally considered those who couldn't "make the grade" and often have a hard time even finding a place to perform in the Bluff.

Any bard may join the guild as a full member. The cost is 100 gp per level, levied once per year. In return, several benefits accrue based on the bard's guild rank. Rank is based on experience level, modified by the number of "art proficiencies" the bard has mastered (i.e., those in which he or she has a skill of at least 14)—the applicant must have mastered at least one such proficiency to be admitted to the guild. The artistic proficiencies are Acting, Animal Noise (a variant of Animal Lore), Artistic Ability, Chanting, Craft Instrument, Dancing, Gem Cutting, Juggling, Musical Instrument, Poetry, Singing, Tighrope Walking, Tumbling, Ventriloquism, Voice Mimicry, and Whistling/Humming. Guild members are allowed to keep anything they earn from private arrangements but are required to perform in the theater at least four times a year, and all proceeds from these performances go to the guild.

Under the guild's charter with the city, no non-guild performer may perform within Ravens Bluff without a temporary permit from the guild. After six months a resident non-guild bard must either join, stop performing, or leave the city for a full year. Spellcasters and other folk who traditionally sing or dance as they perform other (non-performance) work are allowed to do so without permits as long as they pay their respects at the guildhouse upon entering the city, but minstrels who try to do the once-popular "month in Tantras-month in the Bluff-month in Tantras again" shuffle will find their temporary permits revoked upon their second "return" to the Bluff in the same season (the guild has a spy in Tantras, but none in other towns or cities of the Vast).

Members can purchase musical instruments, art supplies, and many other tools of their trade from the guild at a significant discount. Most prefer to select their own choices from among the supplies kept under watchful eyes at the Guildhouse, but free delivery is available anywhere inside the city walls (at all hours, and at breakneck speed if it's an emergency—such as replacement strings needed during a performance). Guild-crafted instruments of normal quality and other musical supplies (picks, strings, tuning forks, staved paper) are also made available to non-members at the prices listed in the *Player's Handbook* during daylight hours at the Guildhouse only.

Master Crafter Randall and his students create beautiful instruments, which are available to guildmembers at three-quarter of usual prices listed in *The Complete Bard's Handbook*. A half-dozen or so each of the most popular instruments (lute, birdpipe, hand drum, and songhorn) are always available, the only exception being the harp. It is an unofficial but unbreakable rule in the Fellowship, as at many bardic colleges, that if a bard does not inherit a harp from his or her mentor then a new harp must be always custom-made for that particular musician. A hard-luck story might win the loan of a refurbished handharp, but using such an instrument causes a bard to suffer a -2 penalty on all bardic abilities. Randall himself can also make instruments of exceptional quality that grant musicians playing them a +1 bonus on relevant proficiency checks; these are for sale to guildmembers only and at five times the usual price. Each such instrument must be crafted from scratch, a process taking no less than three months (Randall simply can't be hurried, no matter what the proffered bribe).

Other musical supplies, such as instrument cases, strings, rosin, and swabs, are available to members at three-quarters their usual prices. Most guild members avail themselves of repair and safe storage services at the Guildhouse. Randall is particularly proud of the storage system he's devised (at great expense, and in cooperation with the Wizards Guild), wherein instruments are locked into padded boxes fastened together in columns like single-cell bookcases and then lowered down lined and spell-protected wells wherein they're safe from fire, damp, molds, vermin, and changes in temperature. On more than one occasion, the guild has made huge profits from discreetly hiding certain valuable and highly-sought-after (not to say hot) items for short periods, in among the instruments in these wells. Magic items, however, aren't welcome in the storage wells, due to their distressing

habit of awakening spontaneously and unleashing magical effects on the precious nearby instruments.

Any member may live at the Guildhouse free of charge. Bards come and go, as is the way of their kind, allowing their memberships to lapse for months or even years at a time. They retain their rank throughout and can join again upon their return. Apprentices, however, are treated very differently. If they leave the guild for more than a few weeks at a time, they can never return to finish their training without the Guildmaster's personal permission—and he seldom tolerates lack of dedication in students. Nobility or royalty forced by the death of a relative to take on the duties of a new title would of course be forgiven a sudden absence, but it's seldom extended to others without a very good tale or handsome donation to the guild, either a large monetary gift or an old and fabled instrument. One wayward student was allowed to return when she gifted the guild with a set of nested, luminous rock-crystal bells that change their hues when played—an instrument crafted in lost Myth Drannor and retrieved by her in her wanderings.

Non-bard performers and artists are allowed to join the guild as Associate Members if they have at least two artistic proficiencies (with the requisite level of proficiency). Associate Members receive the discount and may perform in the theater but may not live at the Guildhouse; their membership fee is, however, the same as that for full members (i.e., 100 gp per level). Associate Members are considered Apprentices, and their rank may only be modified with mastery in artistic proficiencies as described below.

Guild Ranks

- Apprentice (1st level)
- Journeyman (2nd to 4th level)
- Minstrel/Artisan (5th to 8th level)
- Master (9th level and up)

Ranking is modified by the number of artistic proficiencies the bard has mastered. All guild bards must have a score of 14 or more in at least one such skill to qualify for membership. Possession of additional skills, or the lack thereof, can boost or reduce a bard's ranking as per the following table:

Number of Proficiencies	Rank Modifier
1	-2
2	-1
3-5	0
6-8	+1
9+	+2

For example, a 3rd-level bard who has only mastered one artistic proficiency would be considered an Apprentice rather than a Journeyman by his or her fellow guildsmen, whereas if the same bard had nine such proficiencies he or she would be a Master (talent outweighs experience so far as bards are concerned). Regardless of the rank modifier, it's not possible to be lower in rank than an Apprentice.

Officers of The Guild

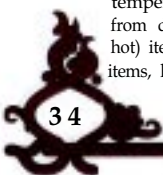
Guildmaster Colin O'Lyre

Human Male 12th-level Bard (N)

Artistic Masteries: Acting, Dancing, Musical Instrument—stringed instruments, Whistling/Humming
Other Proficiencies: Etiquette, Lip Reading

Colin O'Lyre is a smallish man in his forties. His shoulder-length auburn hair is graying at the temples, and his neatly trimmed mustache is liberally flecked with white. His most distinctive features are a hawkish nose and bright, piercing green eyes. Many apprentices refer to him fearfully as "The Hawk," although a few brave ones have revised that to "The Warbling Hawk," in reference to his notoriously bad singing voice.

The only child of a destitute young minstrel, young Colin grew up with music, but a childhood illness took away his singing voice. When his mother died he took the stage name "O'Lyre" (never having known his father's name), came to the Bluff, joined the guild, and worked his way up through dedication and love of the arts. He became guildmaster after his predecessor's death seven years ago. O'Lyre works hard to advance the guild's influence in Ravens Bluff and has largely accomplished its promotion to a state of cultural importance and even mercantile acceptance and





respect. He's secure in his position because most Masters of the guild are his close friends, many respect him, and most lower-ranked members hold him in awe or at least grudging respect. Strongly opposed to any wrongdoing or illegal activities by guild members, O'Lyre doesn't want to compromise the integrity of the guild in any way—a task made difficult, given the relaxed, casual attitude most bards have towards obeying the letter of the law.

Master Crafter Randall Morran

Human Male 9th-level Bard (NG)

Artistic Masteries: Craft Instrument, Musical Instrument—woodwinds, Poetry

Other Proficiencies: Agriculture, Woodcarving

Randall Morran is a huge, burly man in his early forties who looks more like a farmer or a lumberjack than a bard. He has a receding hairline and expanding bald spot which threaten to meet in the middle of his head any day. His balding thatch is more than offset by a thick brown beard; he's inordinately proud that none of his remaining hair is gray. A bear of a man often found chuckling or roaring with laughter, his huge friendly grin and hearty guffaw soon win over those who think a country bumbleshanks has no right to hold an exalted guild position having anything to do with the arts.

The younger son of a farmer near Dark Hollow, Randall moved to the city to find his fortune. Initially he made a living selling woodcarvings and playing crude pipes of his own making. His activities attracted the attention of the guild, particularly after he was seen peering through the windows of this woodcarver and that, trying to learn how they hollowed out cherrywood and the like. Formally apprenticed to a master instrument maker, he gladly absorbed every lesson and did much experimentation on his own to find ways to make better and better instruments. He's since risen to the position of Master Crafter by dint of his friendly, forgiving disposition and his instrument-making skills, which have improved "faster than a lightning bolt flies" (in the words of one awed bard who was overwhelmed when Randall surprised him by replacing a crude lute he'd made and sold to the musician in his early days with one of masterful quality, for free). Randall has developed new techniques for finishing and protecting wood from wet and winter cold (vitaly important to the adventuring bard, whose instruments may be exposed to all kinds of hazards) and now customarily makes instruments of surpassing quality. He trains a workshop full of apprentices managed by his assistant, Jolan. Jolan was formerly Randall's apprentice but is now his companion; her carvings are not yet up to the level of his but she is rapidly improving.

Arrion Weatherspoon

Human Male dual-classed 2nd-level Bard [Jester]/9th-level Illusionist (CN)

Artistic Masteries: Acting, Dancing, Juggling, Musical Instrument—pan pipes, Singing, Tumbling, Ventriloquism, Voice Mimicry

Other Proficiencies: Disguise, Etiquette, Jumping, Spellcraft

Arrion is a tall, very thin man with an extremely narrow face, large blue eyes, pale skin, and blond hair that trails halfway down his back. Though the crowsfeet around his eyes and laugh lines around his mouth suggest he's not young, he remains young at heart.

Arrion grew up as the child of two servants in a large manor house on the outskirts of Procampur. As he grew up, his knack for comedy and his unusual looks won him the post of house jester. He later learned magic from the lord's own tutor and specialized in trick-oriented wizardry. One day, for reasons he's never discussed (those who know him suspect a broken heart over unrequited love for one of the lord's daughters), he left without a word, wandering Faerûn and learning what magic he could. A few years ago his travels brought him to Ravens Bluff where he found a home in the Playhouse, his tricks and illusions finally becoming useful. So useful, in fact, that they won him Beatrice's hand in marriage. Guild apprentices know him as "Horseface" because of his looks; even senior guild members have been overheard referring to him affectionately as "Old Horseface." His pranks can be irritating, but his merry refusal to hold grudges and his obvious delight in pleasing people (singing funny songs to the sad, deftly equipping the chilled with a cloak and a hot mug of stew, mending the torn clothing of a pauper among the guild ranks while he or she slept) have earned him the friendship of almost everyone. Only Beatrice and a few

others have caught him in moods of intense melancholy, singing love songs in various minor keys when he thinks no one else is listening. More than one guildmember has remarked thoughtfully that "there's a mystery behind that horse face . . . but it'll keep. It'll keep."

Master Thespian Beatrice Weatherspoon

Half-Elf Female 8th-level Bard (N)

Artistic Masteries: Acting, Dancing, Musical Instrument—harp, Poetry, Singing, Voice Mimicry

Other Proficiencies: Disguise, Etiquette, Modern Language—Elven, Read/Write Elven

Beatrice is a beautiful woman in her mid-forties, the epitome of growing old gracefully. Her long gray-streaked brown hair is almost always in a neat bun in the back of her head, accentuating her delicate features and high cheekbones. She comes from a long line of Master Thespians (who, down the centuries, have performed in Waterdeep, Baldur's Gate, Athkatla, and Arrabar) and has been acting in the Ravens Bluff Playhouse all her life. She's something of an elitist and believes O'Lyre's policy of "art for everyone" is throwing pearls before swine. She would prefer to perform for the upper classes only, believing that "peasantry cannot hope to understand True Art." If she had her choice, she'd stage plays only in Elven ("the Language of Art"). She was much more militant and outspoken about such things before her marriage to Arrion four years ago; perhaps their union has given her some insight into the "lower orders." All who know her have noted how relaxed and happy she seems these days—except when actors forget their lines or (worst of all) decide to improvise.

Brunhilde Eriksson

Human Female 5th-level Bard (NG)

Artistic Masteries: Acting, Dancing, Singing

Other Proficiencies: Disguise, Etiquette, Modern Language—Dwarven, Modern Language—Elven

Brunhilde is a massive woman in her sixties whose thick braid of gray hair is matched by sharp gray eyes. Her round, red-cheeked face is usually pinched into a frown of disapproval, often contradicted by a twinkle in her eyes. Once a famous and highly-regarded singer in the city, the toast of revels and ardently sought after by dozens of men, Brunhilde has retired gracefully into obscurity as the mistress of props and costumes (though she still vanishes on evenings every so often, to spend a quiet evening of drinks and flirtation with certain old and graying nobles who still remember the slender beauty she once was). In daily life, she mothers all the "younglings" in the guild (everyone under the age of 50, and the young apprentices in particular) as if they were wayward children (which indeed many act like, much of the time). Brunhilde is very content with her role in life and almost always anticipates when this or that of her young charges is going to plunge into an amorous or artistic crisis. Of all the guild officers, Brunhilde is the most difficult to either shock or surprise.

The Silent Network



he Silent Network is run by rogues who specialize in obtaining and brokering information. This guild stresses non-theft-related skills and sells its information to any one who can pay the price. It has been active in the city for at least five years, though at first few are aware of it

(since its name has been bandied about in the *Ravens Bluff Trumpeter*, its public profile has been considerably raised). During this time it has gathered information on the many illegal organizations that seem to flourish in Ravens Bluff. Part of the organization's goal seems to be to support the city; no evidence can be found to suggest that any information gathered by the Network has ever been used to the Bluff's detriment.

The guild is divided into cells, overseen by a small leadership team. Members of the individual cells have no knowledge of how the information they gather is used, nor who is in the other cells. Most new members are recruited by the flamboyant Martin, who seems to govern membership and collection of dues. The cells channel their information to an Information Officer re-



sponsible for its sale and disbursement. The Deputy Guildmaster, Kassandra, handles the day-to-day running of the guild; the Guildmaster remains an unseen figure of mystery somewhere in the background, his identity known only to the Deputy Guildmaster. The guild has trainers in its employ or in its debt to whom members can go to train for level advancement.

Most members are rogues, but folk of almost any profession can join the Network. Each member must take an oath, pledging loyalty to both the Silent Network and Ravens Bluff. The cost of membership is 500 gp per year. The Network has several nameless but distinct internal ranks, based on experience within the guild.

The guild provides training in necessary skills, arranges for the disposition of items for its members (via a reliable fence), and provides advocates if a member should find himself or herself in court. The Crescent Moon Inn is associated with the guild and serves as a safehouse for members.

One of the benefits of membership is the right to request the guild to gather information free of charge. Requests take time to research, and the amount of information gained is determined by the difficulty of the request, as per the following guidelines:

Simple (a name, date, or description of a known item—for example, “what so-and-so was carrying as he left the Ravens Bluff Playhouse last night”): 90% of available information

Moderate (a concealed business connection, source of an item seen, identification of an observed item, probable identification of an observed magical effect, whereabouts of a prisoner incarcerated in Ravens Bluff, positive identification of a rune or heraldic device, the result of an internal meeting within another guild, etc): 50% of available information

Difficult (probable identity of an unseen individual, identification of the stances and actions of all parties in a private dispute or argument, positive identification of the perpetrator of a crime by handwriting or personal effects left at the scene, tracing and location of individuals in hiding, specific amounts and locales of civic spending, means and manners of an individual’s behavior and probable future behavior—in other words, how he or she managed to do something, and what he or she will probably do next, based on past behavior—the tracing of bloodlines and relationships in detail, penetration of magical disguises): 25% of available information

Nigh-Impossible (identification of the thoughts and intentions of a wizard or spellshielded individual, correct anticipation of the next pirate raid or change of personnel in a guild council or the civic government, blow-by-blow accounts of treaty negotiations or other delicate and secret meetings, identification of the aims of a mage’s current magical researches, tracing of the movements of a particular nondescript and unenchanted item around the city): 5% of available information.

Note: Dungeon Masters should never let players bypass important sections of an adventure through this means. This source of information should give member PCs a clue, not an easy solution.

Of course, membership also has its drawbacks—any cell member can be asked at any time to drop whatever he or she is doing in order to gather some specific information. These “requests” are ignored at the character’s peril—at the very least, an unresponsive character will be expelled forever from the Network and permanently branded as untrustworthy. A few of his or her less savory secrets will probably mysteriously become public knowledge shortly thereafter. Characters who accept the assignment may find themselves watching a building to note all who leave and enter, trailing a particular individual, or even engaging in a little discreet burglary to ascertain some specific fact; anyone caught trespassing is expected to keep the Network’s name out of the subsequent proceedings.

The Guildmaster is a mysterious individual known only to the Deputy Guildmaster; his purposes in running this network are entirely unknown. He (or she) may not even exist, or may be posing as a lower-ranking member of the Network. If there is truly a Master behind the scenes, gathering all the strings into his (or her) hands, past evidence suggests it must be someone with a good education who has sufficient social standing to attend many nobles’ parties in his or her proper persona (unless he or she posed as one of the servants). The ability to evade or deflect divinations suggests that person has access to either spells or some minor magical items, such as an *annulet of proof against detection and location*. A recent rumor claims that the late Judge Rupert T. Hangman, universally viewed as incorruptible, had some connection with the Network; some even believe that he secretly controlled it, using it as a means to gather information about the city’s underworld to enable him to enforce the law more justly. Most who knew Judge Hangman, however, openly scoff at the idea. Until such time as Kassandra decides to speak up

(an unlikely prospect) or the mysterious Guildmaster decides the time has come to step from the shadows, his or her identity must remain a mystery.

Lad Kassandra Minstrelwish, Deputy Guildmaster
Halfling Female 10th-level Rogue (NG)
Knight of the Hawk

More graceful and quiet than many of her race, Kassandra is a member of the only halfling noble clan of Ravens Bluff, the Minstrelwish family. She has bright, dancing blue eyes, light brown hair, and a robust build. She’s fairly tall for a halfling, standing just under four feet. Given to humming through her nose thoughtfully when listening to reports or handing out missions, fingers busily working on her everpresent embroidery frame, she looks more like a seamstress than a guildmaster. Those who have underestimated her usually live to regret it: she carries sleep-poisoned daggers in both of her boots, mounted point outwards for swift kicking (one witness to such an attack later remarked that anyone stupid enough not to pay attention to a halfling who wore boots deserved whatever he got). She also keeps daggers up her sleeves which she can throw with frightening accuracy.

Kassandra collects maps and stray facts and understands the everchanging world of Ravenian finance like few others. Responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Silent Network, she selects guild trainers and officers on a yearly basis. When doing so she judges folk dispassionately, setting aside all ties of kin and friendship. Well-known in the adventuring community, she recently married Harold Pierre, proprietor of the Crescent Moon Inn, and spends a lot of her time there.

Officers

The three officers of this organization report to the Deputy Guildmaster and serve for one year. Both of the “public” officers, the Recruitment Officer and the Information Officer, are now serving their third consecutive term in their respective offices. There are no elections: the officers are simply informed by the Deputy Guildmaster that she (acting presumably on the authority of the unknown Guildmaster) has chosen them for that particular job.

The Purchasing Officer, still unidentified, is responsible for buying and selling gems, jewels, and art objects for the members. This service enables members to trade in bulky piles of coins for easily portable gems or cash in unwanted jewels or adventuring items for unobtrusive, anonymous cash. It also provides a revenue source for the guild, which takes a cut on all transactions. More than one of these officers may exist.

Martin, Recruitment Officer
Human Male 6th-level Bard (NG)

Tall (6 feet), handsome (weighing 175 pounds, much of it in his broad shoulders, and having both rakishly cut dark blond hair and sly hazel eyes), and graceful, Martin is the epitome of a cynical rake. His charm and connections (Martin seems to know almost every noble in Ravens Bluff, and to have done favors for all of them) win him invitations to many revels and private parties. His quick tongue, superb acting abilities, and knack of easily making friends (coupled with a positive eagerness to bribe or at least hand out gifts to those he meets) get him past many guarded doors and glowering bodyguards.

Certain Ravenaar ladies, of station both high and low, positively quiver when they see him and move to his side as if drawn by a magnet. By all reports, he’s deft in dancing, kissing, and the paying of a compliment. His latest witty quip or observation is usually making its way around the city even as he lets fall the next one, and he’s always stylishly dressed in vibrant silks and tight-cut leathers. At a recent performance of *Another Dart In The Minstrel’s Heart* at the Ravens Bluff Playhouse, to benefit The Hand of Mercy Children’s Hospital and Orphanage, Martin played the leading role so dashingly that the sighs from the ladies in the audience whenever he kissed the heroine were said to be audible in Mossbridges.

Offstage-if Martin can ever truly be said to be offstage—the Recruitment Officer of the Silent Network is responsible for finding new members and collecting dues. Outside of a member’s cell, this person is every member’s main guild contact. Martin has apparently decided the best place to hide is in plain sight—no one thinks it’s odd if someone wants a word with him or takes any notice (other than a certain envy). Having been in the city for almost a decade, Martin knows literally thousands of people and seems to remember all their names and faces.



A Network member's inquiry once learned that Martin is in truth Martinel Jaslath Raldaree, the son of a widowed lady weaver of Telflamm. For reasons unknown he goes only by his first name and never mentions his past or his reasons for leaving home ("perhaps he just likes to appear mysterious" quipped one jealous bard). One rumor claims he challenged and slew six men who'd insulted his mother in successive duels on the same night and then fled, slightly wounded, from their vengeful kin. Another rumor claims he had a romance with a weredragon and fled when she revealed her true nature—and her pregnancy—to him, later repenting his act but being unable to find her again. A variant of this story declares that he wooed and won the love of a dragon princess, only to be separated from his true love and forced to hide by her parents (though how acting as he does counts as "hiding" is anyone's guess). Despite his flamboyant manner, however, Cassandra has found him to be utterly reliable as well as absolutely fearless.

Snaggly, Information Officer **Dwarven Male 5th-level Fighter/6th-level Thief (NG)**

This raven-eyed, raven-haired (thickly, and all over) dwarf has seen 128 summers and a lot of hard manual labor. His forearms are covered with knotted muscles and twisting veins; his neck is thick as many a man's thigh. He stands 4' 3" tall, on the rare occasions when he emerges from knee-deep sewer muck to stand beside anyone, and spends his days working—usually with a shovel and a prybar—on keeping things flowing in the Ravenaar sanitary system. Snaggly can usually be found covered in muck somewhere in or near the sewers, a perfect place to be contacted without arousing suspicion—as, like most men in his trade, he commands a small force of fiercely-loyal youths as runners (to pass word of blockages and surges in the flow to other diggers, but in Snaggly's case to tell Network cell leaders things he thinks they should know, or to ask them to swing by for a chat).

Snaggly's real name is Arnuthbold Gemdigger, and he's been in the city for six years. As Information Officer of the Network, he's responsible for the passing of information either to clients or other guildmembers, depending on the wishes of the Deputy Guildmaster. He's also the one who organizes thorough checks into a person's background, often working through cell leaders to do so. His hobby is the growing of exotic mushrooms for the tables of the wealthy, his clients seldom caring to inquire too closely as to what their edibles have been grown in.

Snaggly prefers to use street vendors, lady escorts, and old folks—whoever can approach a client without arousing suspicion in onlookers—to pass on guild findings to those who've hired the Network to gather information. He prefers that messengers know only what they're told, and that coins get to the less fortunate as much as possible. He can hurl prybars with deadly accuracy (gaining a +3 bonus on such missile attacks).

Trainers

The guild covertly hires a constantly changing set of trainers, each specializing in certain skills. Trainers cover basic lock- and trap-handling techniques, etiquette and social skills, impersonation, movement and climbing, languages, and sleight-of-hand work. Trainers are responsible for the performance of all members in their area of expertise for their terms of office but rarely serve more than two years at most. Cassandra keeps their identities strictly secret and promptly dismisses any trainer who reveals his office to another guild or to the civic government or enforcement authorities.

The Knights of Ravens Bluff

Go outlanders, it must seem from time to time that Ravens Bluff simply bristles with knights; they must clank into each other on every street corner, mutter "Sorry!" or draw steel, issue their challenges, and start hacking. The truth is a little less romantic. Knighthoods and knightly honors are a way to honor a noble who "already has everything" for good deeds or to placate a resentful or wayward younger noble. Knighthoods have also traditionally been used by the ruling nobles as a way to keep the increasingly numerous adventurers who call Ravens Bluff home from openly and energetically becoming a law unto themselves. There are a lot

of adventurers—and so, yes, there are a lot of knights. All of them are overseen by the Knights Council (founded by Lady Lauren DeVillars), which governs the day-to-day activities of the knights of Ravens Bluff. Its members, all knights themselves, are responsible for swearing in squires who have accomplished the requirements for full knighthood, conducting hearings into valid complaints concerning the actions of knights of the city, and ruling on any expulsion or censure that may be warranted. While not an official governmental body, within its realm of influence its decisions are absolute. Each order holds a seat, and the current chair of the Council is Sir Uldred Deepaxe. Knights may (and customarily do) use their titles in everyday converse; a knight who has belonged to various orders (and not been dishonorably expelled from them) may use them in any full, formal rendering of his or her title—for instance: "Sir Uldred Stonefist Deepaxe, Knight of the Pillars of the Realms, Knight of the Griffon."

Player characters may belong to any of the following orders of knighthoods if they meet all other requirement: Lords' Knights, Knights of the Golden Rooster, Knights of the Dove, Knights of the Griffon, and Knights of the Hawk. These orders are therefore described below in some detail. The more prestigious orders (Keepers of the Mystic Flame, Right Hand of Tyr, Knights of the Phoenix, Pillars of the Realm, and Raven Knight) are not yet available to PCs in the LIVING CITY campaign and thus the qualifications for joining those orders are not given here; should the Dungeon Master want to incorporate these into his or her home campaign the information given on the lower orders should provide a firm basis from which he or she can extrapolate. Remember, however, that while these knights follow recognized religious affiliations or specific, stated goals, they tend to be more secretive about day-to-day doings and mysterious ongoing missions.

The Orders

All Ravenaar knights belong to one of the following various orders:

- Tier 1: Lords Knights (knighthoods sponsored by individual nobles)
- Tier 2: Knights of the Golden Rooster (initiate order)
- Tier 3: Knights of the Griffon, Knights of the Dove, Knights of the Hawk (secular orders)
- Tier 4: Pillars of the Realms, Right Hand of Tyr, Keepers of the Mystic Flame, Knights of the Phoenix (religious orders)
- Tier 5: Raven Knight (an elite order, not to be confused with the civilian Order of Ravens, which is a medal for valor or self-sacrificing service to the city and not a knighthood)

In brief, these orders can be described as follows:

- Lords Knights:** Those orders created by the city's nobles, each to serve some specific ideal.
- Golden Roosters:** The lowest order of the city's knighthoods, drawing its numbers from proud nobles and cocky adventurers deserving of some recognition for services to the city; concerned with the prestige, conduct, and appearance of the city and its champions.
- Griffons:** Knights who concentrate on martial skills, planning battles and campaigns against an enemy, famous for a willingness to prove themselves in battle.
- Doves:** Knights concerned with using brainpower over brawn to find solutions to problems, bringing evildoers to face civic justice.
- Hawks:** Hunters who scout an enemy and use all their skills and means to accomplish an assignment, eschewing the ceremony and sometimes hauteur of other orders.
- Keepers of the Mystic Flame:** Knights dedicated to maintaining the correct and responsible use of magic by all Ravenian practitioners.
- Right Hand of Tyr:** Knights who concentrate on the administration of justice and the opposition of all evil, no matter what its form.
- Phoenix:** Knights committed to keeping the city free of undead and extra-planar creatures.
- Pillars of the Realms:** A non-denominational order organized by the Clerical Circle to ensure that no faith accepted in Ravens Bluff is ridiculed, or its clergy oppressed, by any citizen, resident, or visitor.
- Raven:** The elite commanders and protectors of the city and her people, charting the future of Ravens Bluff and enforcing agreed-upon views of what life in the City of Ravens shall be.



The Knightly Code

Every knight lives by a code; this is what separates knights from other armed warriors. Religious codes are rigidly defined for paladins, but even the secular Ravenian orders follow specific rules. Each knightly order is different, with distinct values and ideals, so specific orders emphasize some elements of the code of conduct over others. However, all knights should strive to live by these beliefs:

- to serve the nobility and citizenry of Ravens Bluff.
- to defend Ravens Bluff.
- so that one's life is worthy of respect and honor.

Fair Play

- Never attack an unarmed or defenseless foe.
- Never use a weapon on an opponent unequal to the attack.
- Avoid lying or deception through silence.
- Keep promises to a fellow knight.
- Avoid cheating and torture.

Nobility

- Obey the laws of Ravens Bluff.
- Administer Justice and show Mercy.
- Protect the innocent while always maintaining self-control.
- Show respect to authority.
- Accept and acknowledge personal responsibility for your actions.

Valor

- Exhibit courage in word and deed, defending the weak and innocent.
- Destroy evil in all its forms, crushing the monsters that would steal our land and enslave our people.
- Fight with honor, avenging the wronged.
- Never abandon a friend, ally, or noble cause.

Honor

- Always keep your word or promise while maintaining your principles.
- Never betray your order, or a confidence, or a comrade.
- Respect all life and freedom.
- Die with honor.

Courtesy & Benevolence

- Exhibit manners; always be polite and attentive.
- Be respectful to hosts, women, knights, the elderly, and all who are honorable.
- Be generous to the less fortunate.
- Seek personal glory, not monetary reward.
- Serve your city and her people, not yourself.
- Set an example of right action to all people.

Benefits of Knighthood

Since knights serve the city, in addition to the honor and renown of their position they receive certain concrete rewards as well. These take the form of discounts on the cost of high-level healing spells (*heal*, *raise dead*, *resurrection*, *restoration*, and *regeneration*) at any temple belonging to the Civic Religion. Knights of 1st and 2nd level receive a 40% discount; 3rd and 4th level knights receive a 30% discount; 5th and 6th level knights receive a 20% discount; 7th, 8th, and 9th level knights receive a 10% discount. Knights of 10th level and above receive no discount, as it is assumed anyone rising to this level will have accumulated enough coin along the way to pay for himself or herself; the whole system is skewed to help worthy but relatively inexperienced knights. These discounts apply to any knight belonging to any civic order; Lords Knights are not eligible (it is up to their sponsor to foot the bill in any sad necessity).

All Knights of the Golden Rooster have access to the Rooster Fitness and Training Center, one of the finest facilities of its kind for keeping knights in peak physical condition (and thus battle-readiness). Knights of other orders have access to specialized training in skills related to that order's focus (for example, Knights of the Griffon learn to ride griffons). Particular knightly orders may offer other benefits, commensurate with the order's responsibilities, at the DM's discretion.

Knights of The Golden Rooster



Formed to bolster the city's military in times of war, the Golden Roosters are the easiest order of Ravenian knighthood to enter, and the most diverse (having fewer rules than other orders, and accentuating few specific talents or approaches to life). They are thus the most numerous of Ravenian knights—even after the heavy losses of the recent war. Golden Roosters can be found throughout the armed

forces of Ravens Bluff, all holding at least the rank of Lieutenant.

A primary function of all Ravenian knightly orders is to help bolster morale and pride among the citizens. The Rooster knights were initially encouraged to make themselves noticed and to spread the word that the Bluff is well defended, especially during peacetime. This plan met with limited success, because the Roosters became more of an annoyance than an aid to the citizenry. Their courage was expressed as aggressiveness, and their confidence as arrogance, gaining them a reputation as "cocky little bantams that do nothing but strut about and boast." This widespread perception of the Roosters as all pomp, bluster, and circumstance was augmented by the easy admission standards of the order at first, which admitted some real drunkards, swaggering cowards, fops, and outright scoundrels into their ranks. Even worse, the Roosters seemed to flaunt their shortcomings rather than trying to hide them.

After none-too-subtle proddings from the Knights Council, the Golden Roosters have recently made efforts to improve their image, adopting tougher admission standards to ensure that applicants are worthy of knighthood. Slowly a manner of quiet elegance is replacing the ostentation of the past—with a few noticeable exception among the "old guard." While the leaders of the order often seem concerned about status and personal appearance, most Roosters prefer the relaxed attitude this order offers compared the other Ravenian knightly orders. Many who joined the Roosters as a stepping stone to another order now find that they are reluctant to leave. The Golden Roosters also redeemed themselves in the eyes of many by their valor during wartime; many citizens recall how in the dark and crucial days of the final battle of the war, when the enemy was at the very walls, members of "the gilded order" laughed at defeat and smote the enemy with enthusiasm and high spirits, rallying all the Ravenian forces.

Today a Rooster can be as proud of his or her order as any other. As the order imposes relatively few rules on its members, a Rooster's reputation is based largely on personal accomplishments. Conversely, the reputation of the order depends in turn on the reputations of its knights. If a knight always acts bravely and generously, his or her excellence will increase the prestige of the Roosters. Of course, such knights are soon invited to join another order, leaving Roosters to complain that "the cream of their crop" is constantly being skimmed off.

The new breed of Roosters take their oath very seriously and are vigorous in their adherence to the tenets of their order. Principal among these tenets is their oath to defend Ravens Bluff from all enemies. Their honor, and the honor of other knights, is also very important to a Rooster. Roosters swear to refrain from lying and cheating, to defend the honor of other knights, and to deal fairly with all persons they encounter, be they knight or knave. More and more folk are being attracted to the order by these ideals. The order admits only those who have proven themselves in the face of adversity and bear as proof of such deeds and their character either (a) the verbal testimonial of three understanding—that is, prosperous, land-owning, or office-holding—Ravenian citizens or (b) a letter of recommendation from a knight, high-ranking priest, or lord of the city. The prospective Golden Rooster must also be of at least 4th level (in order to properly execute his or her new duties) and must gift the city of Ravens Bluff with 1,000 gold pieces (to improve the city defenses).

Responsibilities:

1. A Golden Rooster must pay 10 gold pieces a month to support the Rooster Fitness & Training Center and the Rooster Roost (an inn open only to members of the order); if the Rooster



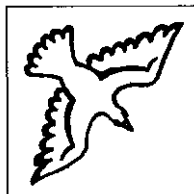
participates in more than three peacetime tournaments-of-arms annually, he or she must pay 10 gold pieces per tournament.

- II. In time of war, all members of the order are called upon to serve in the defense of the city, filling whatever positions are required, and submitting to all orders of the officers over them except where such orders are in clear violation of the tenets of the Golden Roosters.
- III. A Golden Rooster must uphold the vows of the order at all times, whether in Ravens Bluff or not.

Benefits:

- I. Upon payment to the order of 10 gold pieces per social event, a Golden Rooster will be provided with a proper escort to take to important parties, revels, and city functions. Such an escort will be a willing and relatively attractive person of more or less the same height and alignment as the knight, who is not of a faith or organization opposed to the knight, is not known to be of inappropriate character, and does not bear personal animosity towards the knight. Many of the Bluff's most available and attractive persons enjoy attending social gatherings on the arm of a Golden Rooster. The social standing, age, and any disabilities of escorts are ignored; Roosters are expected to provide the poor, the maimed, and the elderly with opportunities to join in Ravenian high society.
- II. A Golden Rooster may write a recommendation for a person seeking admission into the Roosters or any order of Lords Knights. He or she may also appear as an upstanding citizen to verbally recommend any individual for admission into any order. This serves to alert other orders to possible candidates for their ranks; Roosters cannot write official recommendations, or make admissible testimonials, for admittance into higher orders.
- III. Golden Roosters may serve with the City Watch (and in fact are encouraged to do so).
- IV. The knight is entitled to a secure room with a bed at the Rooster Roost. This may be demanded at any hour and comes furnished with a candle-lantern (commonly lit from a hallway sconce), blankets, a chamberpot, towels, a robe, and three ewers of water fit for drinking or washing. The Roost has a self-service drying room, laundry, and facilities for sharpening, oiling, and straightening weapons and armor. Soup, stew, and mintwater are available at all hours upon payment of 1 silver piece per meal (ample quantities and second helpings included); more elaborate meals are sometimes available but must be paid for separately. Former Roosters who have joined other orders are only welcome at the Roost if space permits and upon payment of a 4 gp per night fee.
- V. A storage chest is provided at the Rooster Fitness & Training Center for the knight's personal use. The Center is the finest facility of its kind in the city, offering full bathing facilities and exercise areas with climbing ropes, tumbling mats, vault-bars, a circuit track, a rough stone wall to scale, and secure areas for weapons-practice against either a live opponent (provided with padded armor, blunt weapons, helms, and shields, if desired) or a rope-operated moving dummy. There is, however, no room for mounted work; tilting at the quintain and mock passages-of-arms or lance-through-ring practice must be conducted outside the city. Former Roosters who have joined other orders are, of course, still welcome at the Center.

Knights of The Dove



peace" can be said to be an unofficial motto of the Doves (another is "In-

Like the other secular orders of knighthood, the Knights of the Dove were founded in part to protect Ravens Bluff in time of war. Many see them as a peace-loving, ceremonial group who try to "talk away" war, lacking martial skills or battlefield experience. This is a foolish underestimation of a formidable order. The old knightly saying "There cannot be true peace without the ability to defend that

crease the peace!"). Rather than enforcing peace through might or threat of arms, this order works through intelligence-gathering (and -sharing) and negotiation but stands prepared to fight valiantly against those who are beyond persuasion.

The Knights of the Dove have several goals. Alongside the Golden Roosters, they seek to uplift and maintain the morale of the citizenry. They are dedicated to defending the city by force of arms and are specifically charged with healing the wounds war inflicts on the civilian population. This they do by giving the stricken medicine, healing and bandaging, beds and crutches and wheel-carts, good food and water, shelter, a clean bad and quiet seclusion to promote healing and prevent the spread of diseases, a measure of companionship to discuss problems, and minor distractions to set the minds of the injured or grieving at ease. The Doves also seek to defend Ravens Bluff against invasion from foreign powers and subversion from within by greedy or ambitious civic officials or others meddling in politics. As part of their oath of knighthood, Doves swear to "defend the rightful authorities of Ravens Bluff in all proper discharge of their duties, so that they are freely able to properly discharge those duties," to shield Ravenian citizens from harm, to refrain from lying, cheating, or stealing, and to shun those who do these things.

When a Dove confronts a foe, capture of that miscreant (for trial in Ravens Bluff) is preferable to the foe's being killed or escaping. To this order's way of thinking, trial and punishment serve as object lessons to those who might consider endangering the city or its inhabitants ("Control through persuasion, order through guided thought" is another of the order's sayings). Should a Dove knight accidentally kill a free-thinking human or demihuman who meant no harm, or a charmed one not responsible for his or her actions, that knight must go before the Knights Council and request of them a quest to purify his or her spirit. This doesn't mean Doves can't defend themselves (they need not wonder whether someone swinging a blade at them might be "only kidding"), but those who strike before trying to understand circumstances should consider joining another order; those who strike to kill without considering other options will be forced to do so.

To become a Knight of the Dove (in addition to the usual requirements, set forth hereafter under "Becoming A Knight" and "Chivalry Points"), a character must have attained at least 5th level as a warrior or priest, 6th level as a wizard, or 7th level as a rogue. An elite unit within this order is open to full knights who are recipients of the Red Rose Ring or the Dove Bracelet and who possess nonweapon proficiencies in Heraldry, Reading/Writing (Common), and at least one Modern Language (most commonly a demihuman tongue). The Dove Emissaries are a diplomatic unit that assists Ravens Bluff with foreign affairs; typical missions include meeting, guiding, and protectively escorting foreign envoys to the city; providing the same escort services to Ravenian envoys traveling elsewhere in Faerûn; and personally delivering treaties, documents, or gifts when the trip is arduous or dangerous.

Responsibilities:

- I. A Knight of the Dove favors negotiation over bloodshed. Negotiations must fail or be impossible (due to a language barrier or unremitting hostility on the foe's part) before a Dove resorts to violence.
- II. A Dove must attempt to bring to justice those who've wronged the city or its citizens. Whenever possible, evildoers must be captured alive and brought before a Ravenian court for trial.
- III. When Ravens Bluff is at war, Knights of the Dove are expected to fight alongside the army and other knights of the city.
- IV. A Knight of the Dove must live within his or her oath to the order at all times.
- V. A Dove won't refuse aid to a citizen of the city so long as that aid doesn't go against the oath of the order.

Benefits:

- I. At the outset of any expedition, mission, or anticipated adventure, a Knight of the Dove may borrow a *potion of healing* from his or her temple. The knight is limited to one potion per adventure and must leave a 500 gp deposit in case the potion is lost or used. If the potion survives the adventure, it must be returned (exchanged for the knight's deposit). This service oft



order is intended to ensure that the knight is always able to lend assistance to Ravenians. In practice, Doves use such potions only when their wounds are life-threatening or impair their mobility; failure to stop a danger to the city must be reported to others in the order, so Ravens Bluff does not stand unsuspecting in the face of approaching danger.

- II. At any time, a Dove Knight may join the City Watch. In time of war, Knights of the Dove hold the rank of army captain but act as advisors in matters of diplomacy, parley, or settlements more often than as troop leaders.
- III. When knighted, a Dove gains the Etiquette proficiency (if not already possessed) as a bonus proficiency, due to intensive training in negotiation skills as a squire.
- IV. A Knight of the Dove may write recommendations for a squire's admission to any knightly orders.

Knights of The Griffon



This order is an elite fighting force attached to the Ravens Bluff military in times of war. Dedicated to perfecting their mastery of cunning battle strategy and personal skill at arms, the Griffons build themselves into able battle commanders. As such, they are often called upon to command Ravenian troops—and they are the natural choice as rallying-points when units are broken in battle.

They're skilled at working with other officers to quickly form effective new units, on or above the battlefield.

Knights of the Griffon tend to enjoy personal combat, often challenging enemy leaders to duels. Griffons pride themselves on their personal bravery; the greatest insult one can offer a Griffon is an accusation of cowardice. Not surprisingly, this attitude led to heavy losses during the war; fully half the Griffon Knights in the city died, most by breaking ranks to charge after enemy command positions that turned out to be traps. Clearly, Myrkyssa Jelan's forces were aware that if a Knight of the Griffon declares that he or she will accomplish something—even a wild boast, in the heat of battle—it is certain that he or she will do the utmost to bring it about. Hence, in normal circumstances the word of a Griffon isn't give lightly, for once pledged a Griffon Knight is honor-bound to fulfill the terms of that pledge. Personal honor, and the honor of other Griffon Knights, is paramount to Griffons, and they are oath-bound to deal fairly with all creatures they meet.

To become a Griffon Knight, a character must either become a squire of the Order or enter from another order as a full knight (something very rarely done, as the Griffons judge other knighthoods very sternly, choosing only those they deem most worthy). From time to time, Ravens Bluff holds tournaments in which all comers may compete, and these are always watched by at least five Griffons. Participants who show personal bravery, a great aptitude for combat, and some measure of fairness or courtesy towards their foes (for instance, discarding a superior weapon so that his or her weaponry matches that of an opponent, or allowing a foe to catch breath and prepare weapons before joining battle) may be offered a knighthood within the order.

To join the Griffons by any route, a character must have attained at least 5th level as a warrior, 6th as a priest, or 7th as a wizard or bard (it is very rare for any sort of rogue other than a bard to be admitted). Characters chosen for their performance at a tourney who lack sufficient levels are usually allowed to become squires without the usual chivalry points or recommendations.

The Oath:

Griffons take their oath very seriously (the Golden Roosters often quip that the Griffons take everything "very seriously"). Its most important tenets (in addition to the behavior expected of all knights) appear here. The fervent adherence of Griffons to their code marks their every move, action and decision; free-wheeling adventurers are advised to seek another, more frivolous order.

- I. A Griffon Knight must protect and defend the citizens of Ravens Bluff at all times, regardless of an individual citizen's social status.

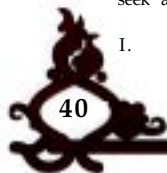
- II. A Griffon Knight must not, through action or inaction, allow harm to come to an innocent.
- III. A Griffon Knight must not allow any personal mission or obligation to impair the Knight's performance of duties to the city and people of Ravens Bluff.
- IV. A Griffon Knight must always be a symbol of chivalry. Griffon Knights must respect and honor knights of all orders, priests of all civic faiths, and those who cannot defend themselves (the weak, young, and aged).
- V. A Griffon Knight must obey and respect the rules of war, showing mercy to a defeated honorable foe. Captives must be treated fairly.
- VI. A Griffon Knight must accept any valid challenge to his or her honor, except from defeated captives, convicted criminals, or when a specific order duty or mission forbids acceptance. Unless otherwise agreed or an opponent refuses to stop fighting, a Griffon Knight shall carry duels to the drawing of second blood and no further.
- VII. A Griffon Knight must uphold the vows of the order at all times.
- VIII. A Griffon Knight must contribute funds as requested towards the maintenance and upkeep of Griffon Hall. In recent years, this has amounted to an annual levy of 16 gold pieces per knight, but it has, in times of expansion or renovation, been twice that.

Responsibilities:

- I. The Knights of the Griffon are the elite shock troops of Ravens Bluff, and thus they either stand in the front line of any Ravenian force or ride overhead on the fierce griffons of the city's air cavalry. Therefore, a Griffon Knight must always be ready to fight for his or her city on short notice, having arms and armor at hand. Any extended absences from Ravens Bluff or special duties that may keep him or her from the fray require special permission, as his or her comrades and superiors must know at all times what battlefield strength can be swiftly mustered.
- II. At any time a Griffon Knight may be called upon to command the massed cavalry of Ravens Bluff or to serve as the heart of a heavy cavalry unit assembled on the battlefield from elements of various orders. Therefore, a Griffon shall be practiced and trained in command, shall know any unit badges and individual cavalry officers of all Ravenian army and knightly forces by sight, and shall be prepared to serve without hesitation or question under any commander, no matter how exalted or lowly, regardless of age, gender, or military training. If a beggar crone is placed in charge of Griffon cavalry, she shall be obeyed as if she were the highest lord of the city. Griffons do their duty and ask questions later; Griffons never dispute orders from recognized commanders.

Benefits:

- I. Griffon Knights receive a secure room with a bed and storage facilities at Griffon Hall. This is their own for as long as they belong to the order. A Griffon may allow an outsider to use the room on a temporary basis by surrender of the key and password (for example, a wife who has been beaten by her husband and needs a safe place to sleep, or a city informant needing a short-term hiding place). All nonmembers entering Griffon Hall will be challenged and asked their reasons for entry, the Griffon with whom they are connected, and the password; the comings and goings of all such visitors are closely observed.
- II. Griffons may purchase (nonmagical) weapons and armor from the Weapon Master of the order at Griffon Hall. Such purchases are always at 20% off the usual market price of such items.
- III. If a Griffon Knight is killed while undertaking a mission for the order or during the course of normal Griffon duties, the order will attempt to recover the body. If recovery is successful, the order will arrange for a *raise dead* spell to be cast upon the deceased Knight (by a priest of the same primary faith as the deceased, if the faith is known and appropriate clergy readily available). If the spell is successful, the Knight will be nursed back to health by the order, without charge. The Knight is expected to reimburse the order for a successful *raise dead* spell (if it fails, the

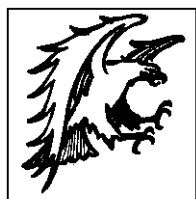




order does not pursue the estate or relatives of the deceased in any attempt to recover any funds).

- IV. Due to their intensive training with Ravenian cavalry units, each Griffon Knight receives a bonus weapon proficiency in the use of the lance.
- V. A Griffon may recommend any candidate as a squire for admission to any Ravenian knightly order.
- VI. Griffon Knights are encouraged to serve as a member of the City Watch, either regularly or for relief duty, but may not serve as a member of any special branch of the Watch.

Knights of The Hawk



*When there's blood in the streets
And people stand and gawk
The throat of the foe greets
Talons of the Avenging Hawk*

from *The Ballad of Ravens Bluff* (Anon)

In a world filled with foes, the Knighthood of the Hawk was founded to protect Ravens Bluff from those who wage open warfare and those who skulk in the shadows alike. Hawk Knights watch, wait, and—should they uncover some evil plot—strike with all the ferocity of a bird of prey. When City officials need someone who is above suspicion (i.e., not a member of the Silent Network) to do surveillance work, act undercover, or scout enemy dispositions, they look to the Hawks. The enemies of Ravens Bluff don't play by the rules, and the members of this knighthood are expected to do whatever must be done to counter their threats. Hawk Knights are the city's shadow warriors, ready to blend in and walk unseen among the city's enemies until they are ready to pounce. This Order is known to attract loners and those who have the wits to hold their own tongues while listening and remembering all others are saying. The best weapons of most Hawk Knights are their wits. They pride themselves on trying to outwit and fool opponents, preferring to make such villains appear ridiculous and so destroy threats without creating another pile of corpses. However, if need be, the Hawks are expert slayers of enemies of the Bluff. Sworn to protect the city and its inhabitants, they're prepared to go to any lengths to accomplish this oath.

A Hawk does not brag or boast. Hawk Knights learn to act in whatever guise is needed, from humble beggar or town drunk to menacing assassin available for some evildoer to hire. They go where they must and do what must be done to protect the security of Ravens Bluff. They are loyal to their fellow Hawks and are devoted to the ideals of this Order. Should a Knight of the Hawk be caught violating his or her oath and abusing his or her position for self-enrichment, the Knights Council has the authority to remove him or her from this knightly order. If city laws have been violated, the ex-knight will face the harshest penalties available for each offense. By contrast, loyal Hawks are sometimes forced to break city laws in pursuit of its foes, but such transgressions are only brought to justice in the case of a disloyal knight.

Hawk Knights who speak, read, and write an elven tongue, who have earned the Fellowship Ring, and who have been awarded the Hawk Tattoo can apply to the Knights Council for membership in an elite guard unit within the Order called the Hawk Brotherhood. The Brotherhood is called on by the military leaders of Ravens Bluff to conduct special (and of necessity, extremely dangerous) missions. Like the Griffons, the Hawks lost many members during the war, most of them on undercover missions to get close to or find out more about Myrkyssa Jelan. They are not as concerned to quickly refill their ranks, however, preferring to take the long view and only admit those who they feel will be valuable permanent additions and a credit to their order. To become a Knight of the Hawk, a character must squire directly to the order or enter from another order as a Knight Squire. All candidates for this knighthood must have reached at least 4th level as a ranger, 5th level as a warrior or rogue, or 6th level as a priest or wizard.

Responsibilities:

- I. When duty calls, knights of this order will always answer, no matter what personal obligations may be disrupted. City officials know that when a problem arises, a Hawk Knight can be called on at a moment's notice to search for suspects or recover stolen items of importance. A knight of this Order attending a fashionable affair could well soon find himself or herself splashing through the sewers; "A Hawk is willing" has become a byword among these knights, signifying that they are prepared to do whatever is necessary, enduring any discomfort in pursuit of a mission.
- II. A knight of this order is expected to keep eyes and ears open at all times. While undercover work usually prevents them from acting personally if they witness a violation of city laws, they are to report such violations to the proper city officials when the chance offers so that miscreants may be dealt with as justice demands.
- III. Knights of the Hawk live their Oaths and must be ready to give their lives if need be to accomplish a mission for the safety of the city and its inhabitants.
- IV. Trained to kill, these Knights understand how easy it is to abuse their authority. All actions taken by a knight that result in a death should be noted in the knight's diary and made available for review by the Knights Council, if required. Most Hawks request a private review once a year to help keep the ideals of the order before their eyes.
- V. While working undercover, Knights of the Hawk are prepared to lie, steal, and betray the enemies of Ravens Bluff. They walk through the shadows bringing terror and death to those who would destroy the city and its inhabitants. All such unlawful actions should be noted in the knight's diary.

Benefits:

- I. Hawks tend to study Tracking, Disguise, Alertness, Lip Reading, Forgery, Local History, and Tumbling. The Order will train each new Hawk in one of these skills upon his or her joining the order, allowing the knight to choose which proficiency to study (on the perhaps fallacious grounds that every Hawk should know his or her own weaknesses best). This is a bonus skill (beyond the number of slots normally available to a character), and the order's training is so good that the knight will receive a +1 bonus to skill rolls when using it. After being active as a knight for a year, the character gains this bonus to rolls for all of the nonweapon proficiencies listed above that he or she is skilled in (in other words, if the Hawk doesn't have a particular proficiency, he or she doesn't gain the bonus in that skill).
- II. In times of war, Knights of the Hawk serve as members of the army, with the rank of captain. Because of their training, knights are usually used as scouts or strike-by-stealth agents. Knights of this order can also serve with the City Watch, usually investigating puzzling crimes and undertaking undercover assignments.
- III. A knight of this order may write a recommendation for a squire who seeks admission to a knightly order.
- IV. A Hawk can qualify for another knighthood with three fewer chivalry points than those who squire directly to another order.
- V. Knights of this order accepted into the Hawk Brotherhood receive a special gift from the elven community of Ravens Bluff. Knights do not speak of the nature of this gift, but the item is considered a most precious possession and must never be traded away. Such elven gifts are always items of permanent but minor magic, such as a *ring of feather falling* or *fang dagger* (see "The Magic of Ravens Bluff" chapter). Any such item bestowed by the elves will carry a tracing magic enabling certain Ravenaar elves to "home in" on its whereabouts by mere concentration; this enchantment is used as a means of locating agents who fail to report or otherwise disappear.



Lords Knights



The formation of the Knights of the Lady during the war by Lady Amber Lynn Thoden seems to have sparked a fresh wave of interest among Ravenian nobles for sponsoring their own civilian orders of knighthood. The reputation of such "Lords Knights" is directly tied to that of their patron: their actions bring glory or disgrace upon their patron, while their sponsoring lord or lady's actions reflect directly upon them in turn. Lords Knights were very popular at one time, forming the core of each major noble's defenses, but the practice gradually fell into disuse. At this point there are only six recognized organizations of Lords Knights in the city, although other lords are certain to follow Lady Thoden's example. The Knights Council does not consider the various Lords Knights to be official city knights, viewing these "civilian orders" as collections devoted to the interests of their patron rather than the city as a whole (as is the case with all the other tiers of knighthoods). Still, one Council seat is reserved for the Lords Knights as a whole so that they can be represented in discussions that affect Ravenian knights.

The focus of each order of Lords Knights will vary with the whims of the noble they serve. Lady Thoden's knights, founded "to serve the citizens of Ravens Bluff who cannot protect themselves," have worked in conjunction with the Hand of Mercy orphanage to find homes for the many orphans created by the war. Some orders of Lords Knights act as little more than elite guards for a particular noble family, while others engage in good works, furthering the causes and enthusiasms of their sponsoring noble. This has, in the past, sometimes led to downright peculiar duties for a knight—in one case, searching the city for cats and rounding them all up as gently and safely as possible (to recover a person transformed into a cat by hostile magic); in another, investigating every member of a guild—and all relatives and employees—to see if any originated in Thay and might therefore be deliberate or unwitting agents of a certain Red Wizard (perhaps under enchantments for later activation); in yet another, starting a short-lived but vigorous temperance movement. The DM should determine the particular "cause" each group of Lords Knights embraces.

Whatever their individual devotions, all Lords Knights are expected to adhere to the basic Knightly Code described on page 38.

Becoming A Knight

Prior to becoming a full knight of a chosen order, a candidate needs to receive two letters of recommendation from current full knights in the same tier as the order to which the candidate is squiring. One of these letters must be from a member of the order aspired to; the second can be from any other knight the candidate has adventured with in the past. The only exceptions to this are the Knights of the Golden Rooster and the Keepers of the Mystic Flame. The Roosters require only one recommendation and can themselves only write recommendations for candidates attempting to enter their own order. By contrast, the Keepers of the Mystic Flame have a formal application that must be filled out and then approved by the head of the order before a candidate can officially call himself or herself a squire. This application can be given out by any member of the Knights Council but must be submitted to the order itself. In due course, the candidate then receives a written letter of acceptance or rejection as a squire of the Keepers of the Mystic Flame.

A recent fire in the Hall of Records destroyed many irreplaceable civic documents, notably records from the time when Belanor Fenmarel was Acting Mayor (it's rumored officials loyal to him set the blaze). In the wake of the destruction, it became apparent that some people (chiefly adventurers) were referring to themselves as knights who had no claim to the title. Therefore, the Knights Council required all knights to provide copies of their official heraldry, the names of their sponsors (those knights who wrote their letters of recommendation), and any awards and honors they may have won. Many a bogus knight was stripped of his or her title at this time, and the Knights Council itself now keeps all records of the city's knights in the Hall of the Raven.

Advancement

Most Dungeon Masters will find the optional chivalry points system (described hereafter) a useful tool for regulating knightly advancement. Candidates are warned that reputation and perception is everything when one is a knight; exacting self-control and the ability to see how others will view a particular act or spoken phrase are important skills. On very rare (and always emergency) occasions, the head of an order or a senior lord or official of the city can make a character an "acting" knight of any order—usually a Golden Rooster for small tasks, for which a knighthood is needed to allow the character entry somewhere, and a Knight of the Raven for very important tasks (such as representing the city at a treaty meeting when the diplomat who was supposed to do so has been treacherously slain). Acting knights who perform their duties ably may win permanent status, but more often they are given a lesser knighthood and automatic admittance as a squire to the order they acted for (at any later date of their choice when they meet all other requirements for membership). Individuals who have been in such situations warn others that regular knights of the orders involved look very harshly upon "back-door" knights who gain a place in an order by such unorthodox means. Such knights are often subjected to various little tests by their fellows before they are accepted as equals and sometimes watched closely for years to ensure that "a bad one" hasn't crept into the ranks.

Willfully impersonating a knight, or any civic lord, is considered "Counterfeiting" (see "The Laws of Ravens Bluff" chapter). Besides the prison term, impersonating a knight carries an additional penalty: the guilty person is instantly dismissed from any order he or she belongs to and forever barred from thereafter holding any Ravenian knighthood. Deliberately wearing the uniform (beyond a shield, helm, or weapon snatched up from a dead knight in battle, for personal and pressing use) of another order is considered willful impersonation. Impersonations at revels, fancy-dress balls, and the like is less harshly treated, but the wise thespian will reveal that the disguise is just that before leaving in order to escape a charge of impersonation under the law. Exaggerated depictions is the traditional Ravenian way for bards and other citizens to criticize the policies and foibles of the knightly orders and often gives knights of the order being satirized solemn food for thought.

Changing Orders

While most advancement takes place within an order (a given knight gradually rising from initiate status to become an officer of the order), it is also possible to rise to a new order of knighthood. Such movement requires the squire candidate to meet with the Knights Council for discussions concerning the proposed move. The valid movements within the orders of knighthood are as follows:

- **Golden Roosters** can move to the Griffons, Doves, Hawks, Keepers, Right Hand, Phoenix, Pillars, and Raven.
- **Griffons** can move to Doves, Hawks, Keepers, Right Hand, Phoenix, Pillars, and Raven.
- **Doves** can move to Griffons, Hawks, Keepers, Right Hand, Phoenix, Pillars, and Raven.
- **Hawks** can move to Griffons, Doves, Keepers, Right Hand, Phoenix, Pillars, and Raven.
- **Keepers of the Mystic Flame** can move to Pillars and Raven.
- **Right Hands of Tyr** can move to Phoenix, Pillars, and Raven.
- **Phoenix** can move to Right Hand of Tyr, Pillars, and Raven.
- **Pillars of the Realms** can move to the Keepers, Right Hand, Phoenix, and Raven.
- **Raven:** no further knightly movement is possible, as the pinnacle of Ravenian knighthood has been attained.

Candidates who attain the status of full knight within one of the secular orders must remain with that order for one full calendar year from the date they took their oath. Those who enter one of the religious orders must remain with that order for two full calendar years. Movement to the Order of the Raven requires a two-calendar-year period of service in the candidate's current order (no one may squire to the Ravens as a non-knight; it is only open to full knights who have distinguished themselves in the service of other orders). These time constraints allow the knight to show his or her commitment to the order—in other words, that he or she is willing to represent it for at least that amount of time.



Those aspiring to join a higher order who meet with Knights Council approval and find an appropriate sponsor become squires of that order. Squires must maintain impeccable behavior and fulfill the conduct expected of a knight (see page 38) for at least one year, under close supervision by a ranking knight. The squire's sponsor will give advice throughout this period, usually also assigning the prospective knight various tasks designed to test his or her mettle. Frequently, the Silent Network or Telvo Spath (see page 130) is also called upon to observe the squire in secret, though the Knights of the Hawk spy on their own squires (such a squire might be asked to spy on other squires as part of his or her training). If the squire under observation at any time behaves in a manner at variance with knightly ideals, he or she is either rejected or asked to serve an additional term in squireship. While a squire, the aspirant is required to earn three knightly honors, one of which must be a special honor of the knighthood to which he or she aspires (these honors are in addition to any the squire had earned before beginning the squireship). Once the knights of the order are pleased with the squire's devotion and performance and the requisite honors have been achieved, he or she is made a full knight.

Most internal movements within an order involve a minimum six-month wait. For example, a Knight of the Griffon who wants to move to the Griffon Guard would need to wait six months after being sworn in as a Knight of the Griffon before being allowed to make the move (and then only if all the requirements for the new placing were fulfilled). A knight squiring to an order who changes his or her mind and wishes to squire to a different order is free to do so without penalty. However, the choice to switch should be considered carefully, as the squire won't be allowed to switch back later—and, of course, the squire must fulfill all the required honors for admission to the new order and gain a new set of recommendations for his or her new choice.

A knight who has membership in more than one order has access to all of the benefits for each order to which he or she belongs. In other words, a knight who began as a Golden Rooster, became a Griffon, and then a Right Hand of Tyr, enjoys the benefits of all three orders and can style himself or herself with a threefold title reflecting this.

Chivalry Points

In a campaign involving more than one character who has or is trying to attain a Ravenian knighthood, the Dungeon Master may find the use of chivalry points helpful. If they are employed, the following guidelines apply:

- Chivalry points are awarded by the DM for outstanding knightly deeds or decisions. Only characters who are squires or knights are awarded chivalry points. All chivalry points and honors used for advancement within the knighthoods must be earned while the character is either a squire to an order or a full knight (earlier points do not apply).
- To become a Dove, Griffon, or Hawk, a character can either squire "cold" (in other words, not already be a knight), move from another order on the same tier, or move from the Golden Roosters. To move from the Roosters, five chivalry points are required; to enter the order from service as a squire (commonly called "squiring into an order"), eight points are necessary. In either case, a candidate must meet the class and level requirements for the new order and must have earned at least two knightly honors, one of which must be from the order to which he or she aspires.
- To become a Keeper of the Mystic Flame, Knight of the Phoenix, Pillar of the Realms, or Right Hand of Tyr, a candidate may squire into the order by winning sixteen or more chivalry points and must win at least five knightly honors (at least one of which must be specific to the order being entered). A candidate who is already a Dove, Griffon, or Hawk knight requires only thirteen chivalry points (and the same honors). In either case, the exacting class, level, and sponsorship requirements for these higher orders must be met.
- Moving to an order within the same tier costs a knight four chivalry points, which are then considered spent and can't be applied to future advancements. Entering a new order also requires the winning of a knightly honor specific to the new order and the passage of one calendar year before acceptance into the new order.

- The number of chivalry points possessed by a character affects the character's reaction roll when dealing with NPCs. A knight who has received one to five chivalry points is considered to have a moderate reputation (+1 reaction adjustment), a knight with six to ten chivalry points has a growing reputation (+2 reaction adjustment), a knight with eleven to twenty chivalry points has an established reputation (+3 reaction adjustment), and a knight with more than twenty chivalry points is a respected and well-known figure in Ravens Bluff (+4 reaction adjustment).
- A negative chivalry point is awarded when a character has done something that violates the tenets of the character's current order or breaks his or her knightly oath in any way. These negative points are meant as a warning that such actions will not be tolerated by the order; a character amassing three negative chivalry points will be stripped of his or her knighthood. Each negative chivalry point can only be offset by attaining five positive chivalry points through game play. These positive chivalry points are only used to offset the negative chivalry point and do not count towards advancement within the orders; no such advancement is possible while even a single negative point remains to stain the character's honor.

Knightly Honors

Knights' honors are rare and difficult to obtain. A knight may obtain only one honor for a given deed. Honors specific to orders can't be obtained by a knight of another order unless that knight is currently squiring into the order granting the honor. A knight can receive an honor more than once; it is then considered that the knight has received "clusters" for the honor. An honor received more than once still counts as a single honor when considering requirements needed for advancement.

Knights' Honors available To all knighthoods:

- The Leonard Skin Cloak: Awarded to a knight who risks his or her own life to save the life of a defenseless innocent.
- The Weapon of Honor: An expertly crafted nonmagical weapon given to the winner of a tournament (challenge of arms).
- The Grass Crown: Awarded to a knight whose individual action saves an army in the field from heavy losses or defeat.
- The Oak Leaf Crown: Awarded to a knight who risks his or her own life to save the lives of fellow knights in battle.
- The Laurel Crown: For leading a military unit or adventuring party to victory against a very powerful opponent in time of war.
- The Hero's Circlet: A silver circlet given to a knight who defeats a great threat in single combat (usually in a duel to the death).
- The Bronze Cloak Pin: A bronze symbol of the knight's current order, given for gallantry against a superior foe
- The Gold Cloak Pin: A golden symbol of the knight's current order. This is awarded to a knight who sacrificed his or her own life so a vital mission for the safety of Ravens Bluff would succeed. Always granted posthumously. If the body is recovered, the knight's order will pay for a *raise dead* attempt; if this fails or the body cannot be recovered the money will be used for prayers for the knight's immortal soul at the temple of his or her prior choice.
- The Jeweled Pin: For rescuing a kidnapped member of the nobility of Ravens Bluff and successfully capturing the person or persons responsible for the cowardly, ignoble crime of kidnapping or incarceration.
- The Hero's Cup: A bronze drinking horn presented by the Lady Mayor to knights who successfully deliver a major evildoer into the hands of city authorities for justice. The evildoer must be alive and must have presented a clear and certain danger to the city.
- Key to the City: A small platinum key that can be worn on a key ring. This is given to the knight who recognizes that a magical item or artifact is too powerful to be left in the hands of those who recovered it (usually including the knight himself) and turns the item over to the proper civic or knighthood authorities.
- The Red Crystal: A glowing crystal, nicely sized for carrying in a clenched fist. It is given to a knight for braving enemy lines to bring help to a trapped or isolated military unit that would otherwise be destroyed.



- **Personal Banner:** The knight's personal symbol and the seal of Ravens Bluff artistically placed side-by-side on a banner for use during tournaments and in time of war to identify a true hero and those who stand with the knight. The knight may fly such banners over any or all holdings he or she owns. The banner is presented only to heroes who save the city from a terrible destructive menace (such as the wrath of an ancient huge dragon or a tarrasque).
- **Red Pennant:** This small flag of honor bears the seal of Ravens Bluff and a symbol of small ship on a red field. It is awarded to a knight who goes to sea and defeats a pirate threat to the city or the city's commerce. The knight should capture some of the pirate leadership alive if possible, so the city can make an example of how it now punishes robbers of the sea.
- **Blue Pennant:** This small flag of honor bears the seal of Ravens Bluff and a symbol of a flaming torch on a blue field. It is awarded to knights who go deep into the depths of the earth and defeat a great threat to the city from one of the evil powers that reign there, such as the drow or illithids.
- **The Fellowship Ring:** A knight earns this sapphire-adorned silver ring for doing a great deed to benefit elves. It is a symbol of friendship, marking a deed that will not be forgotten such as rescuing elven children or recovering and returning an important elven relic. The Knights of the Hawk hold this honor in special reverence. Any elf seeing a knight with this ring can immediately identify the character as a friend to elves.
- **The Cold-Forged Hammer:** The war hammer is earned by a knight who proves by his actions that he or she deserves respect from dwarves. The knight must have learned to speak the dwarven tongue and done a great service for the benefit of the dwarven peoples (for example, recovered and returned a dwarven relic or artifact, aided a royal heir to recover his or her throne, or slain a foe holding a dwarven stronghold and this aided in its return to the dwarves). The hammer is not magical but does +1 damage because of its superb quality. Any dwarf seeing a knight bearing this weapon will view the character as a true friend.
- **The Blue Scarf:** Given to a knight who succeeds in destroying an evil artifact.
- **The Black Scarf:** Awarded to a knight who succeeds in destroying a vampire, lich, or other evil magic-wielding undead.
- **The Green Scarf:** Awarded for lifting a great curse on the land, such as a plague or pestilence.
- **The White Scarf:** Awarded to the knight who finds an innocent being under a terrible curse; uses his or her powers, skills, and abilities to free the tortured soul; and then hunts down the being who laid the curse and brings him, her, or it to justice.

Special Golden Rooster Honors:

- **The Golden Sword:** An elegant and functional weapon. It looks nice on state occasions. Given out each year to the best-dressed Rooster, one who always looks elegant even under trying circumstances.
- **The Golden Cane:** This gold-shod, rooster-headed cane is given to knights who refuse to let danger get in the way of traditions. The cane is a symbol of courage, bestowed on those who commit an act of bravado such as having tea at the usual time, even if the goblins are preparing to attack. The winning knight should epitomize a spirit of civilized behavior that refuses to bow before uncouth beasts and lowborn louts.
- **The Golden Cloak:** Awarded for completing a dangerous mission, where many of the award-winner's companions were seriously injured but the knight kept his or her cool under fire and instructed the lads on the finer points of etiquette even when his or her own life was in danger.
- **The Gold Medal:** Fashioned in the form of a rooster (pierced for a neck-chain but also fitted with a clasp for cloak wear), this award is given to any knight who stops an evil plot to bring the reputation of the order into disrepute.

Special Griffon Honors:

- **Griffon Helm:** Awarded to knights who learn to ride flying steeds (i.e., gain the Riding—airborne nonweapon proficiency). A knight who earns this award and the Griffon Feather Necklace may apply to join the Griffon Guard, an elite military unit that only uses its powerful griffon mounts in battle in the defense of the city.
- **Claw Gauntlets:** Special fighting gloves that do 1d4 points of damage (plus any Strength bonus) in hand-to-hand fighting. These marks of personal honor are given to a knight who avenges his or her honor by completing a quest after having to go before the Knights Council for cowardice. It signifies that in a world of magic there's no lingering shame in failing a saving throw against *fear* spells and the like, just pride in having cleansed your honor.
- **Griffon Feather Necklace:** For fearless (some would say reckless) courage that inspires others to accomplish a great victory over a powerful enemy.
- **Sky Blue Cloak:** For avenging the honor of the order against a plot to discredit the knighthood.

Special Dove Honors:

- **Crystal Paperweight:** Given to a knight who uses his or her mind to discover how an evildoer is cheating or deceiving the city and then succeeds in bringing the evildoer in alive to face civic justice.
- **The White Rose Ring:** Awarded to the knight who saves the life of an innocent at the cost of his or her own.
- **The Red Rose Ring:** Bestowed upon the knight who defeats a powerful monster in order to protect others, without the use of deadly weapons or damage-causing spells. The monster must have Hit Dice equal to at least twice the knight's level.
- **Dove Bracelet:** Awarded for success at negotiating a peace treaty that ends or prevents a battle or war. The agreement or treaty must involve serious opponents who otherwise would attempt to kill each other.

Special Hawk Honors:

- **Hawk Ring (Bronze):** Awarded to a knight who succeeds in recovering a valuable piece of information that aids the city in the defeat of a great enemy. The knight must have acquired this information using his or her wits. Under no circumstances should the knight have resorted to torture to accomplish this goal.
- **Hawk Ring (Silver):** Awarded to a knight who tricks a strong enemy into self-defeat. An example, a Hawk might rescue a prisoner from an evil wizard's tower in such a way that the mage believes letting her captive go was her own idea, or trick the mage or her servitors into believing the prisoner is still captive long after the knight has spirited him or her to safety.
- **Hawk Ring (Gold):** Conferred on a knight of this order for an action of personal bravery and sacrifice beyond the call of duty. Often awarded to those who are brought back to life after making the ultimate sacrifice.
- **The Hawk Tattoo:** This tattoo of an avenging hawk in flight (placed wherever on the body the knight wishes) is the highest mark of honor within the knighthood. It signifies that the knight has forever silenced a traitor to this order and that all who seek to harm the city should recognize this knight as someone to be feared.

Special Right Hand of Tyr Honors:

- **Book of Fair Prayers:** Given to a knight for confronting a creature of the lower planes having Hit Dice at least equal to the knight's level and destroying or banishing it back to its plane of origin.
- **Holy Symbol of Tyr:** Awarded to those who take the final vows and become priests of Tyr. Note that this is a fully sanctified and functional holy symbol, differing from a standard cleric's holy symbol only because it is fashioned with a sculpted scabbarded sword-and-belt wrapped around the customary balance-atop-a-war-hammer.





- **The Way of the Blade:** A hand-lettered and illuminated book with covers of polished white marble, each relief-carved with a human hand clenched into a fist. Its contents set forth the proper care of all edged weapons, how to precisely identify how they were made and what they are made of, and the known powers of many non-unique enchanted blades, with precise instructions for identifying them and awakening and controlling those powers. This book is conferred only upon those who lead a handful in defense against a multitude of evil and triumph. The "multitude" can either take the form of a single creature of great power, such as a dragon, or a mass of evil creatures outnumbering the defenders by seven to one or more. It is acceptable, if regrettable, for the defenders to have taken heavy losses, so long as their aim (for example, delaying would-be royal assassins, or protecting a holy relic) is achieved.
- **The Silver Sash:** To a lay brother or sister who has sworn to only speak when asked questions or confronted by evil, so that he or she can concentrate fully on prayer, self purification, and being a true warrior of the faith. This vow must be fulfilled for at least a year before the sash is awarded; speech is allowed during that period during prayers and religious or order rituals. So long as the silence lasts for five years the sash is not taken away if the vow is later broken, although a knight can only win one in a lifetime.

Special Keepers of The Mystic Flame Honors:

Each Mystic Flame honor is a special gemstone worth 2,000 gold pieces that appears to contain a flame frozen within its heart. To sell one of these gems is to lose all honor and rights of knighthood.

- **The Ruby:** Earned by a knight who captures and brings to justice a being whose actions have proven to be a magical threat to the city, or who destroys a powerful spell or enchanted item that has been set to discharge and create a magical threat to the city.
- **The Emerald:** Given to a knight who provides evidence leading to the conviction and imprisonment or execution of a powerful magical menace to society. The spellcaster involved must have threatened more than just Ravens Bluff with his or her schemes.
- **The Star Sapphire:** Given to a knight who convinces a powerful magical menace to change his or her ways and convert to Mystra. This must be a true conversion, involving a voluntary alignment change and attendant loss of levels.
- **The Pearl:** Earned by a knight who recovers a lost or stolen *thought bottle* (a magical item important to the faith).

Special Pillars of The Realm Honors:

- **The Jade Ring:** Given to a knight who, while on a mission, survived extreme conditions of weather and other circumstances to successfully complete his or her task.
- **The Azure Girdle:** A cloth belt or girdle marked with the order's symbol, given to a knight who sees a potentially dangerous clash of legal religions that could escalate and defuses the problem before it becomes a matter of serious concern. In cases where the trouble was caused by a member of an evil religious cult, the knight should have apprehended the guilty party.
- **The Crimson Gauntlet:** This piece of finely made armor (or, in some cases, a symbolic glove) is given to a knight who succeeds in an undercover mission of rooting out the leaders of a banned religion trying to establish itself in Ravens Bluff.
- **The Broken Pillar:** The rarest of all Pillar awards, reserved for knights who went undercover, died on a mission, and whose bodies could not be recovered. The award is a headstone shaped like a broken pillar. Pillar Knights honor their fallen dead through various ceremonies of remembrance during the year and often dedicate a battle to a particular fallen knight (e.g., "I strike now for Baelrar the Bold!"). If a knight awarded this posthumous honor is later recovered and brought back to life, the award is not taken away; such knights play an important role in the rituals of remembrance, speaking for those of their order who are truly lost.

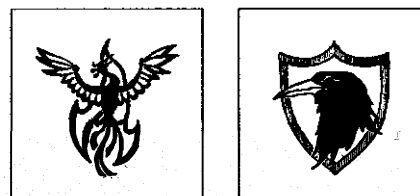
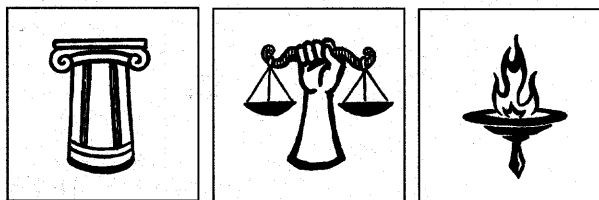
Special Phoenix Honors:

- **The Iron Feather:** This honor is given to a knight or knight-squire who through direct action defeated or otherwise banished a powerful undead or extra-planar creature threatening the city of Ravens Bluff.
- **The Brass Talon:** This honor is given to a knight or knight-squire who single-handedly destroys a level-draining undead or free-willed fiend from the lower planes in defense of the city of Ravens Bluff.
- **The Bronze Wing:** This honor is given to a knight or knight-squire who through direct action rescues a citizen of Ravens Bluff from a powerful undead or extra-planar creature. Other Knights or non-knights may assist in the rescue, but the individual who receives this honor must have played a paramount role.
- **The Golden Crest:** The highest honor given by the Order of the Phoenix, bestowed upon a knight or knight-squire who travels to the lower planes or the Negative Energy Plane and defeats a major fiend or undead, thwarting a plot against the city of Ravens Bluff or any part of the Vast. Often given posthumously.

Special Raven Honors:

- **The Marshal's Rod:** Given to an army commander who decisively defeats an enemy army in the field. Always awarded at a major city festival.
- **The Silver Scroll:** Given to a knight who successfully completes a mission as an ambassador for Ravens Bluff. The mission must result in a trade agreement, treaty, or other important negotiation that greatly benefits the city.
- **The Purple Cloak:** Given to a knight who completes a personal mission of heroism, such as defeating a great dragon threatening the city. The knight must have been under real threat of death or have actually died accomplishing the mission.
- **The Silver Coronet:** This award is only granted to a knight who has already earned the Marshal's Rod, the Silver Scroll, and the Purple Cloak and has an estate of at least 1,500 developed acres. The knight must then defeat a major threat to the city, such as a powerful hidden alliance of Red Wizards who were manipulating civic officials and leaders to gain control of events, laws, or city operations for their own ends. There have been several such Red Wizard plots in the past, as well as intrigues launched by the Zhentarim, the rulers of both Hillsfar and Mulmaster, and at least one cabal of Sembian mages having no link to a government, all of them (one hopes) exposed before they came to fruition.

The winner of The Silver Coronet is thoroughly investigated by the Ministry of Art to discover and remove any magical influences (*geas*, *charm*, or *curse* conditions) or ongoing alliances or affiliations that may prove harmful to the city. In other words, it must first be established that the knight is not a secretly an agent for a foreign power or a shapechanged or disguised creature pursuing its own agenda. When this investigation is successfully completed, the knight is fully accepted into the city's ruling nobility as a baron and awarded a voting seat on the Council of Lords (increasing the number of seats on the Council by one).





The Nobility

Ravens Bluff is a city dominated by bold, ambitious folk. Prestige, social standing, and respect depend on a person's fame; it's possible to receive fair or favorable treatment, or even aid or obedience, from total strangers because they've heard of you or recognize your name as that of someone they look up to and admire. Fame may come through a sudden stroke (the "luck of the gods") or a slow accumulation of hard-earned reputation. Good deeds can bring more than a smile or grateful thanks, and valourous deeds may even be recognized by a knighthood or civil investiture with the Order of the Raven (see the "Knights of Ravens Bluff" chapter); many civilian heroes of the war were recently given Raven medals at a ceremony in Raven Hall.

When recognized in the street, decorated folk command a certain automatic respect among Ravenians. However, the true height of society is the nobility. Most young and fast-growing cities lack entrenched upper classes, wherein birthright is all and wealth has little power to gain its possessor elevation in social rank. Ravens Bluff, however, does have its old noble families which are granted a level of respect not extended to the *nouveau riche* (much to the latter's annoyance). Many common Ravenians pretend not to care if they ever even see a noble or not, but underneath such casual manners waits a lurking excitement at the thought of consorting with nobles—in a hunt, perhaps, or being invited to a revel—or even (if the gods lean down to kiss one) *becoming* a noble!

The Nobles

Nobility in the Bluff can be by birth or appointment. It falls into five ranks, given here in ascending order:

- Knight (addressed as "Sir")/Ladyknight (addressed as "Maer")
- Calagard (addressed as "High Sir")/Calagrath (addressed as "High Maer")
- Baron (addressed as "Urgrave")/Baroness (addressed as "Urgrava")
- Exalted (addressed as "Saer")/Exalted (addressed as "Saeress")
- Lord (addressed as "Lord")/Lady (addressed as "Lady" or sometimes "Lady Lord," a pedantic form favored only by a few of the oldest families—or by those pretending to be of the oldest families)

In daily usage and by those unsure of the rank of the personage they're addressing, the catch-all terms "Lord" and "Lady" are employed. Nobles need not address each other by title at all (preferring "Goodsir" and "Goodlady"), but it's considered an insult for a noble speaker to use a catch-all title when knowingly addressing someone of superior rank. More commonly, such nobles refer to each other by family name (thus Lord Transtible Norwood is usually called "Norwood" by his peers but "Lord Norwood" by those of lesser ranking).

There are many self-styled but impoverished "noble" families who claim grand titles by right of having owned land in the vicinity when Ravens Bluff was founded, and claimants turn up every decade or so using the surnames of noble families thought to be extinct, so there's no exhaustive, definitive list of Ravenaar nobility. Of the hereditary nobles, none dare question the legitimacy of those who hold seats on the council of Lords, so those titles are the most-secure. It's not unknown for ambitious merchants or unscrupulous adventurers to arrange fatal accidents for aged and dissolute nobles or infant heirs in order to extinguish noble lines, make room for new Life Lords, seize properties, or simply avoid repaying inconvenient debts.

In addition to the hereditary titles, many civic offices grant their current holder the title "Lord" (for example, Lord Chancellor, Lord Marshal, Lord Speaker). Titles can thus be acquired by winning office, and many have insisted on retaining the "courtesy title" long after they left office until it has become something of a Bluff tradition (as, for instance, in the case of "Ambassador" Carrague). In the past, sometimes the ambitious even bought titles outright by a donation of heroic proportions to the Exchequer, a practice discontinued by Charles Oliver O'Kane when he first became mayor. It's still rumored, however, that those who discreetly approach certain city officials of the rank of Regent or higher may be able to arrange private meetings wherein an unrecorded donation may lead to the Lady Mayor's office subsequently recognizing a person's "stellar service to our city" by bestowing a title upon that worthy. The recent granting of lordships to the purchasers of the

outlying ring of forts defending the city was universally taken as a sign that the granting of "coronet titles" (as they are known) is alive and well.

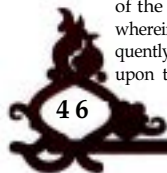
Rights of Lordship

A lord of Ravens Bluff is entitled to a seat on the Advisory Council, a right of first offer of any government posts of the rank of First Clerk to Regent or higher (the offer is made simultaneously to all nobles of sufficient rank, who must then bid for, or purchase, the job), a ten percent reduction in annual property taxes (plus an additional two percent per civic project sponsored by the noble, if the sponsorship is approved by the Regent of the Exchequer, the Council of Lords, the Mayor, or the Deputy Mayor), and the right to raise and arm a personal bodyguard and private garrison for each country manor. A lord of Ravens Bluff has traditionally been allowed "first immunity" to any penalty associated with a crime of which he or she is judged guilty. In other words, a conviction is registered, but no sentence is imposed. In the old days, a lord could in theory openly commit every crime in the book once and escape all consequences; these days, all that remains of this privilege is a certain fluidity of sentence imposed on all citizens who are capable of paying fines of ten or twenty times the usual amount (in other words, a guilty lord who "tentops" the set fine usually walks free). The merchants now rising to power seem quite willing to allow this right to survive, so long as they too can take advantage of it if need be. It has always been cheaper to pay settlements before cases come to court, so the civic authorities simply dismiss most charges in exchange for sufficient funds. In times past, "settle sums" were openly split into two parts: a personal amount for each official involved, and the remnant for the civic coffers. Since Mayor O'Kane's reforms, personal amounts have officially disappeared-to be replaced in practice by gifts of goods to the official's personal residence, such as a good riding horse, or a winter's supply of potatoes or pickled meats, or perhaps an appropriate number of full kegs of beer. Naturally, some crimes are prosecuted no matter what the offender's rank or pocketbook, such as treason against the city or some of the more heinous types of murders.

Lords' Laws

The bodyguard of a lord of Ravens Bluff may number up to twenty men-at-arms. They must wear livery identifying the noble whom they serve, or at least the lord's badge, prominently displayed at all times. The lord is responsible for their actions and will be fined for any breeches of the peace carried out by his or her representatives. In addition a lord is entitled to keep a garrison of men-at-arms for each habitable property outside the city walls (that is, per landholding that has a structure on it that can house folk through a winter, not mere fields or woodlots with "night-over" shacks on them). Members of a private garrison must carry a badge identifying their lord with them but need not openly display it save to authorities of the Bluff who demand to see it. Such men-at-arms can be armed and trained as their patron sees fit but may not include spellcasters or be issued enchanted weapons without a permit from the Ministry of Art (one for each mage or magical weapon; these typically cost 250 gp for a person and 100 gp for an item, and their issuance involves a Ministry inspection and periodic brief surveillance). The Wizards Guild has been trying for many years, without success, to wrest this power from the Ministry and enforce the ban on liveried spellcasters themselves. However, nobles who would defy this rule discover that not only is the fine for unregistered mages and items quadruple the normal fee (should the Ministry discover them) but that the Guild periodically conducts quiet investigations of its own and tends to respond with considerable bluntness (e.g., *fireballs*, *magic missiles*, and the like) against disguised spellcasters.

Trespassers take note: inside or outside the city walls, wounding or killing a non-noble intruder within the boundaries of property belonging to a noble is considered "assault"; and the offense is usually dismissed without penalty, beyond the slayer's name being recorded (so that a warrior who kills in this manner many times will carry an unfavorable reputation into later court appearances). In addition lords need not register any personal magic with the Ministry of Art (who sometimes require inspections and "tallies of Art" as part of the sentence laid upon convicted Ravenian criminals who don't happen to be noble). Those desiring to offer violence to Ravenian nobles should be advised that those who are wealthy enough often carry "blood tokens"—single-use items keyed to function only when worn by a specific individual, who need have no magical aptitude to trigger





the token's effect at will. Most blood tokens are designed to help the noble escape from danger—for example, evoking a *time stop*, *teleport* (to a specific refuge), or a *blade barrier* that moves with the token-wearer.

Lords who do not ally themselves with the city need not pay taxes to the Bluff for their estates outside the city and may do as they like on those estates (Ravenian law does not apply to what happens on such land). In return, they receive none of the rights of Ravenian nobles within the city, except the right to be escorted by a four or fewer bodyguards. Any property they may own inside the city is treated the same as commoners' property. A lord allied with the city can arrest humans and demihumans but may not imprison them for longer than it takes to safely convey them to city jails—for instance, an intruder subdued at midnight can be held until morning, or until there are at least four armed men available to serve as an escort, but by law the noble must otherwise contact city authorities to come and get the prisoner by highsun of the next day. By contrast, a lord not allied to the city can keep his or her own prisoners, for as long as he or she desires, and need only personally follow Ravenian law when off his or her own land. Lords currently owning property inside, but not allied with, the city include the Ampner, Hawkdragon, Liontower, and Yavandar families.

Life Lords

Life Lords are those nobles whose titles are non-hereditary. Their rank is that of Calagard (or Calagarth, as the case may be; see page 47). Each has been granted his or her title in return for "services to the city" (an amorphous phrase, which can cover anything from heroic exploits to massive contributions to the city coffers), and those titles will not pass on to their offspring. A long-standing procedure exists in the civic regulations that allows a non-hereditary noble to purchase a hereditary title upon payment of a stiff fee to the Exchequer and the majority approval of both the Council of Lords and the Advisory Council. The last time this occurred, in the case of Lord Emmerdin, the fee was a staggering two million gold pieces (not including bribes). The Lord Magistrate is of the opinion that majority approval will now be necessary from all three councils for a grant of lordship to be lawful, and it's widely believed that the Merchant Council will only agree to the creation of more nobles if it's to see one of their own number ennobled.

No official list exists of all the Life Lords. Some are still missing after the recent hostilities, and not all can be presumed to be either battle-dead, captive, or traitors whose lives are forfeit if they return. The following names are but the most active and prominent among the Life Lords: Lord Me Albright, Lady Nalatha Baerebrym, Lady Cheseirione Dalbrath, Lady Em-lathree Kheldinor, Lady Daveira Malajikas, Lord Beldrodos Malaver, Lord Charles Oliver O'Kane, Lady Irwina Oustintell, Lord Quinthas Rallogath, Lord Perevel Sauruethyn, Lord Calathor Shamskel, Lady Mreevas Velrin. Many more exist, and some of them are quite secretive about their positions (particularly those granted their titles for "services to the state," who would prefer that their identities not slip out). It's safe to say that adventurers encountering a noble with an unfamiliar family name, he or she is more likely than not a Life Lord.

The Fort Lords

In the wake of the war, fifteen adventurers were ennobled by Lady Amber Thoden in recognition to their services to the city (coincidentally greatly replenishing the city's coffers, which had been sadly depleted by wartime expenditures). This is the largest group of Life Lords ever to be raised to the nobility at the same time and is a perfect example of the purchase of titles. Each adventurer bought one of the outlying wooden stockades left after the war. The titles came with a land grant of the hundred acres immediately surrounding each fort; these former adventurers are now Calagards and Calagrath entitled (literally!) to style themselves as "Lord" or "Lady" so long as they maintain the lands and pay their city taxes. They may also recruit and arm their own personal bodyguards and garrisons.

The Fort Lords are listed below, along with the Fort that serves as each's demesne:

Lord Amlar the Ugly (Fort Condor)

Lady Analiana Blessing, of the Lady (Fort Moonsilver)

Lord Knight Rashaverak Dandelion, of the Right Hand of Tyr (Fort DeVillars)

Lord Knight Lorien Darkarrow, of the Roosters (Fort Thoden)

Lord Darthmoor (Fort Blademark)

Lord Knight Uldred Deepaxe, of the Griffons (Fort Skyhawk)

Lady Knight Melissa Eldaren, of the Griffons (Fort Elminster)

Lord Knight Hildegrim, of the Griffon (Fort Belanor)

Lady Kaitlyn McTavish (Fort Dandelion)

Lord Meadowfield (Fort Carrague)

Lord Knight Nanteen (Fort Blacktree)

Lord Silver Fox (Fort O'Kane)

Lady Knight Tara Sojournn, of the Roosters (Fort Kothonos)

Lord Knight Drakar VonDamn, of the Griffons (Fort Holiday)

Lady Chiara Zhelanaya (Fort Longbottle)

The Noble Families of Ravens Bluff

Here follow brief descriptions of the hereditary noble families of Ravens Bluff. In addition, there are many extinct lines and any member of impoverished, obscure, and doubtful claimants to nobility. Some (such as the Eldermares) seem to have succumbed to vampirism or other dark fates; noble families tend to be secretive about such matters. The idle rich among them tend to dabble in passing fads or hobbies, so the family descriptions below are necessarily incomplete. The badges of Ravenian noble families are considered crude heraldry by some long-established Faerûnian kingdoms, but they are well suited for display on servants' liveries, grand doorways, the sides of coaches, and the like.



Ampner

Motto: "Virtue never unrewarded"

Rank: Baron

Badge: An upright, open-flowering red rose encircled by a loop of silver chain

The Ampners long ago abandoned Carthrose Hall, their sprawling country mansion upriver from the city, as too far from neighbors and too often raided by orc and bugbear bands. When it became haunted from within by spectres (of former family retainers, in a seemingly inexhaustible supply), the Ampners purchased over a dozen modest houses in the city and vary their residence between them. Each has shops in ground-floor tenancy and eschews outward show, though two of them are linked by an enclosed and furnished third-floor bridge. The Ampners aren't known to keep house troops beyond a dozen or so personal servants who are quite capable of serving as bodyguards at need. They keep at least three expert archers among their servants.

The Ampner family has suffered financial losses in recent years. A blight wiped out their flax crops for a decade, forcing them to shift to other grain crops and ultimately into textiles. Their aging mills have been declining slowly under ongoing competition, and various Ampners have shown a marked disinterest for commerce and the family fortune. Only their investments in Dalelands wineries and a glass bottleworks in Tulbegh still bring in a steady income. Recently, however, young Lord Noldron Ampner seems to have come into a lot of money and has been quietly buying properties and shares of businesses (usually financing expansion and rebuilding efforts) as if he has a bottomless pit full of gold pieces to spend. He may well have; at least one merchant believes the Ampners are fencing pirate contraband in return for a healthy split of the profits. True or not, certainly security has been trebled around most of the suddenly busy Ampner warehouses.

The Ampners have never enjoyed much social prominence and have generally been thought of as undistinguished country nobility, given to the occasional drunken crosscountry gallops and other revelry alongside more prominent nobles. Lord Noldron Ampner recently became head of the house upon the death of his father, Ugrave Raedrin. Noldron has an aged aunt, the never-married Lady Kassitrassa Ampner (known as "the Witch Rose" in her earlier days for her unearthly raven-haired beauty and her reputed use of dark magic to achieve her desires); two cousins, Lady Bararra and Lady Aerilyn; and a much younger brother, the sickly Lord Roel.



Balathorp

Motto: "My sword my tongue"

Rank: Exalted

Badge: A star of five arrows, points innermost

This family is still wealthy despite excessive spending and seeming neglect of business affairs. Since inheriting the title, Dunstan Balathorp has adopted the refined manners of an aficionado of fine wines, good clothes, and stirringly recited poetry; he always drops hints in his talk of "interesting and important" doings all over Faerûn about which he seems personally and continually informed. He seems at times almost a parody of the dandified noble, complete with monocle (that keeps falling out, to dangle from its wine-red ribbon), gilded ebony swordstick, and everpresent coterie of overperfumed young poets and languid bards, whom he sponsors and houses. Some of these "Balathorp blades" are in demand at revels and parties for their impressive recitations, but the usual gossip as to Saer Balathorp's personal closeness to them has been tempered by the astonishing number of scantily-clad lady cousins he seems to have acquired, who dwell in every room of his house, and all wear the Balathorp badge on black-ribbon chokers around their necks.

Dunstan Balathorp maintains a vigorous program of importing paper and bulk dried rice noodles from the southerly coasts of the Sea of Fallen Stars but no longer makes personal buying expeditions (which some unfriendly tongue long ago dubbed "cousin-acquiring trips") to warmer ports of call. His trade influence has almost vanished, and many look upon him with barely concealed amusement or contempt. Still, Lord Balathorp continues to set trends and fashions, particularly among rising merchants and the common people, who love his grand gestures (flinging fistfuls of gold coins onto bar tables) and his drawing, unconcerned manner ("If you *must* run a man through, dear neighbor, kindly spray the blood of your kill yonder—I've quite enough red sauce on this already, hmmm?").

Balathorp is the epitome of the upstart merchant, but he's not a Life Lord. The youngest of five sons, he was thrust out into the world to earn his own living and never expected to inherit the Balathorp title. If a shipwreck hadn't claimed the lives of the entire family of his second-eldest brother, and another brother hadn't been poisoned by a vengeful lover upon taking a wife, it's doubtful Dunstan would ever have seen the lordship. There's no hint whatsoever that he had anything to do with the passing of his four brothers or his parents (he still grows misty-eyed when his parents are mentioned). Dunstan has no acknowledged heir—but it's expected that upon his passing, one of his twenty or so "cousins" will produce a son or daughter claimed to be of his blood and attempt to seize whatever remains of the Balathorp riches. It's also expected that this will lead to bloody intrigues among the bards, poets, and cousins that will last for years. When such matters are mentioned to Dunstan, he just laughs and shrugs.



Blacktree

Motto: "Outroar the lion"

Rank: Lord

Badge: An upright black oak leaf

Blackwood Manor, the family seat, sits on an estate of over two thousand acres, almost half of which is prime forest land sporting many walnut, chestnut, oak, and duskwood trees. It supports a prosperous mixed farm and has rolling fields (perfect for galloping) and chases linking the various pavilions shaped like miniature castles where Lord and Lady Blacktree entertain their guests. The estate is formerly home to over three hundred bodyservants and two hundred and fifty gardeners; in reality, the gardeners were a trained and well-armed fighting force nearly wiped out in the war. The twenty-strong "Black Knights," among the best-trained and -equipped warriors in Faerûn, perished to a man, enchanted weapons and all; Lord Blacktree is said to be slowly and carefully looking for replacements whose loyalty he can trust.

Sir Henry Mason (a facially-scarred LG hm 7th-level Paladin of Tyr)—formerly the First Knight until crippled by injuries—serves as Blackwood's seneschal, having replaced the dishonest Ilhans Silverspeak. Ilhans almost bankrupted the family through his embezzlements and blackened their honor by his shady investments. "Iron Henry" works to rebuild the family's

honor and increase the Blacktree fortunes (for instance, by investing in armor just before the outbreak of hostilities); until recently, his master Lord

Charles (the only surviving Blacktree) devoted his time solely to spending them. During the war, after the Black Knights and gardeners had marched off to join the army, Sir Henry defended Blackwood Manor by taking in priestesses of Sharess (long-patronized by Lord Charles, these ladies had come to Ravens Bluff to found a temple in the city, a mission they're still pursuing—see "Temples and Religion"). The priestesses took up posts on the boundaries of the estate; whenever threatened they cast a succession of spells akin to *blade barrier* which animated ordinary farm tools—hoes, plows, sickles, scythes, harrows—into a whirling field of edged death whenever intruders ventured near.



The master of this estate, Lord Charles Frederik LaVerne Blacktree IV, grew up a vain, foolish, lazy, and irresponsible fop who loved wine, woman, and idle pranks more than anything else in life. To everyone's surprise, when faced by a challenge he felt worthy of his talents he grew into a capable and courageous (if wildly reckless) war leader. As Field General (styled Field Marshal once mercenary troops came under his command) of Ravens Bluff, he won new respect among Ravenians and was even touted as a possible successor to Mayor O'Kane. Now that the war has ended he shows signs of reverting to his former habits, much to the dismay of his new bride, the beautiful and brilliant Lady Katharine Marie Moorland (now Lady Blacktree). Lady Katharine has already expelled the sulky priestesses and is just beginning to become seriously worried about her husband's sudden indolence.



Boldtalons

Motto: "Slay dragons, rear nobles"

Rank: Baron

Badge: A silver-scaled dragon's claw, with four blood-tipped talons uppermost, on a circle of purple

The Boldtalons suffered heavy material losses during the recent war. Talon House, their small estate on a wooded ridge just within sight of the city walls, was the scene of heavy fighting on several occasions. Their small private army, some sixty strong, was scattered and is only slowly being rebuilt. The family had sunk much of its wealth into loans to merchant traders, many of whom were slain, captured and divested of all goods, or simply disappeared in the hostilities. Still, they remain extensive landholders within the city, owning some five hundred minor properties, and retain similar holdings in Sembian cities (whose rents have tided them over recent lean times in the Bluff). If the Boldtalons can retain their holdings during the coming decade of rebuilding, they should become very wealthy indeed—but for now, economies must be taken. Thankfully for the family fortunes, at least three of the current generation of Boldtalons are taking personal interests in family investments, not trusting agents and servants to handle such matters for them.

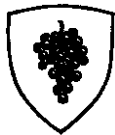
Formerly a successful family of mercenary warriors, the Oldtalons clan deliberately sought to become local nobility. They succeeded by performing so many duties for various powerful noble families and city officials that their grateful former patrons were only too glad to ennoble them as a relatively painless way of repaying the debt. The 'talons have always understood politics, the workings of society, and shifting public opinion better than most and have profited from their attention to the mood of the people. This has recently made them champions of the rising merchant class, with their mercantile gifts and loans and investments buying them the position of "truly noble merchant-friends" in the eyes of merchants throughout the city. If a Boldtalon were to be kidnapped, merchants would leap to their aid without thought of reward—and the same can't be said for any other nobles of Ravens Bluff, beyond Lady DeVillars, Ambassador Car-





rague, and (in some quarters) Lord O’Kane or Lady Amber Thoden. As the merchants of Ravens Bluff grow ever stronger, the importance of the Boldtalons (and hence their influence) can only grow. Better yet, they are loved and respected by those of lesser rank. Some of their fellow nobles privately dismiss them as “low-living rustics who like to grub around in taverns and alleys with common folk,” but they have no real foes among the nobility.

The balding, quiet-spoken Osklavar Boldtalon sports magnificent flowing white sidewhiskers, hair (in a sort of side-mane and tail), and mustache. Taken prisoner by pirates in his youth, he performed some great service for them, the details of which remain murky; still, to this day, no pirate will attack a ship bearing the Boldtalon colors. Thin and in good health, Osklavar remains agile and is a good dancer and favorite escort of single noble ladies. He has survived his wife by some seventeen years, presiding proudly over the blossoming of their three sons and five daughters. In order of their birth, the younger Boldtalons are Lord Elsmargh, the heir; the serene and very intelligent Lady Ilione; the sarcastic and sly Lord Vlandrath (the rebel of the bunch, rumored to be mixed up in all sorts of intrigues); Lady Marargae (the betrothed of Lord Noldron Ampner); the impetuous Lady Ninune, who loves anything to do with the sea; Lord Locklear, a gentleman adventurer who carries on the old family tradition of martial excellence; Lady Rhondeverra (a priestess of Selúne named for her mother, whose long, flame-red hair she’s inherited); and the quiet, studious Lady Belremra (an initiate at the Wizards Guild).



Cathone

Motto: “Leave mercy to the gods”

Rank: Exalted

Badge: A cluster of grapes hanging downwards

Cathoniar, the large (six-hundred acre) family estate of rolling woodlands and farmed plots, was completely burnt during the war, with the loss of all buildings, retainers, and troops. Much reduced in wealth, but still a city landowner of respectable holdings, House Cathone is today a shell of its former self. Five different family members have held the title in the same year. Lord Vaerien Cathone was poisoned just before the recent war by a cabal of merchant debtors—perhaps by the Viper Ring. His sons Saer Delbaerth and Saer Sendrit both died only days apart fighting for Ravens Bluff, while their eldest sister, Saeress Paerthra, was mortally wounded in the final battle (her cousin Ninuvel, last of her side-branch of the family, also died in the melee).

All that remains of the once-haughty Cathones, formerly one of the most obdurate and crusty oppressors of “those upstart shopkeepers and dirty commoners who think to seize power, as irresponsibly as a child seizes a toy belonging to another child” (in Lord Vaerien’s words), are the two youngest daughters, Raerevel and Chuthlessra. A year ago both were young and impressionable beauties who loved revels and teasing lords of their father’s age with over-eager kisses. Since the burial of their kin, Saeress Raerevel has turned silent and serious, attempting to throw off despair and learn the difficult business of managing the few remaining Cathone resources (primarily shipping concerns and a number of useful contacts in Hillsfar politics). By contrast, her plumper sister has plunged even more wildly into dalliance and high living. A dozen old and loyal family retainers remain, including the family seneschal, Nuth Olimbrelt—a grim but capable former merchant and adventurer who was Lord Vaerien’s right-hand man for decades. He sends discreet agents to watch over the Lady Chuthlessra, guarding Lady Raerevel himself with hawklike alertness, watching for any attempt she might make on her own life—or any turning to the wrong sort of man for solace. If House Cathone is to survive, Raerevel will have to throw off her gloom soon and make plans for the future—including who will be the next Lord Cathone.



Daradusk

Motto: “Outshine the sun”

Rank: Baron

Badge: A face-on stag’s head with flames leaping from its (six-point) antlers

Daradusk Hall, a small keep rebuilt into a mansion, stands atop a knoll within a few acres of wooden gardens; slightly damaged in the war, it is still home to about two hundred retainers, of whom fifteen or so are capable and

equipped armsmen. The Daradusks remain comfortably wealthy, despite the tragic loss of Lord Iruiven Daradusk in the war. His battered helm sits on the desk of Lady Amuinara Daradusk, now head of the house, and (in the words of would-be-womanizer bard Othember of Saerloon) “one of the most sleek and alluring temptresses ever to beguile the eyes of a man.”

Lady Amuinara has always known the effects of her beauty, and she’s doubly attractive to men immune to other lures (such as, for instance, Lord Magistrate Sureblade) because of her ever-alert intelligence and kindly nature. This woman has it all—except the husband she loved so deeply. Now that multiple resurrection attempts have irrevocably failed, the sorrow she bears somehow increases her attractiveness; there are bards, nobles, adventurers, and merchants alike all over the city who would dive willingly into flames for her. Her acumen and the general goodwill in which she is held have enabled her to hang on to investments and to chart a financial future for a family where other widows might have lost their inheritance.

Urgrava Amuinara has no sons but four daughters: Shalimarra, Aerendra, Cathlea, and Relara. The eldest two are just growing out of the gawkish stage and blossoming into beauties to interest and be interested in young men, while the younger pair are exulting in the tomboy stage. She intends that they all be free to marry or choose a life for themselves purely as they wish—and that each begin her freedom with a million pieces of gold to call on. Few in the Bluff are aware that the Daradusk fortune is currently in excess of six million gold, but someone certainly knows it: Lady Amuinara has had to fire darts from her hand crossbow into the faces of no less than nine by-night visitors since the death of her lord. She is beginning to think she needs a loyal band of very capable adventurers to protect her daughters—but she’s caught in the heart of a very real dilemma: there’s almost no such thing as loyal adventurers, unless one means adventurers loyal to themselves, or perhaps to each other. Amuinara hesitates to use her beauty as a weapon to win the love of men enough to guard House Daradusk, because that’s both cruel and stupid: down the road, warring loves will mean violence among her bodyguards.

So Amuinara sadly asks the helm on her desk for guidance each morning—and each morning it keeps silent, giving her no answers as the days pass . . .



De Sheers

Motto: “Dare all, retreat never”

Rank: Lord

Badge: A red feather (low dexter to high sinister) crossed over a white snail shell

The De Sheers have no less than three grand estates: High Seraeda (a walled estate of over eight hundred acres, with forests, farms, and two fortified manor houses—Croemarth Hall and Tylathia’s Towers), Saprinton (a walled compound with manor house on the road between Ravens Bluff and Mossbridges), and Daltabria (a walled compound with gardens and manor house on a crag in the foothills of the Earthfast Mountains, overlooking Ravens Bluff). Their garrisons and bodyguards once totaled no fewer than two hundred and eighty armsmen, of whom less than forty survived the war. They are still wealthy, owning much property within the city and silent-partner investments in dozens of businesses run by others, even to the extent of underwriting the expenses of the Builders Guild and the Cartsmans Guild, but their influence has been crippled by upheavals within the family.

The De Sheers have always been wealthy, arrogant, ruthless, and shrewd. Second in seniority, wealth, and prestige only to the DeVillars clan, no De Sheers have ever been heard to admit to being “second” in anything. Once robber barons in what is now Sembia, the De Sheers were pushed out of their traditional raiding and pillaging ways by the spread of commerce and settlement. Coming east across the Vast, they seized all they could, reducing all the shepherds and foresters they found to serfdom. Growing rich and fat on lumber, mutton, and wool, the De Sheers eventually emerged as the most well-armed, energetic, and ambitious of the self-styled “Lords of the Coast.” The head of the family, Keldarvon the Black, was a brawling giant of a man with a bristling black beard and eyes like smoldering coals, known to break the necks of men with a single blow from his great fists. Far cleverer than his forebears, Keldarvon realized the beset future for his offspring lay in his playing the role of grave elder statesman rather than ferocious marauder who might goad all of his neighbors into rising against him. Thus the de sheers family seemed to lose their fire for a generation and thus survived being obliterated by the other landowners of the area, who hated and feared them.





The driving ambition that has always marked this family, however, remained, merely cloaked and hidden for a time. Keldarvon's sons "Rory" (Roarael), Naeblar, and Carlton chafed at the roles their father made them play, especially when other families, emboldened, sneered at the "fallen, gutless" De Sheers. Then came the day when the Obrilt family raided a De Sheers farm, and Rory chased them—into an ambush, where he lost his life (though the Obrilts and their retainers paid a bloody price for his downfall). Keldarvon raged at his dead son for being a "headlong fool" rather than awaiting the right moment to strike—and an incensed Naeblar denounced his father as a weakling. The fight that followed has passed into legend, lasting as it did an entire night and involving the destruction of almost every window and piece of furniture in De Sheers Hall. At dawn Naeblar fled into exile, wearing two of his father's crossbow quarrels in his back. But two months later, before Keldarvon could complete his careful plans to destroy the Obrilts, Naeblar returned in the nights and burned De Sheers Hall to the ground, with his mother and father inside. The only survivors were young Carlton and two sisters, whom Carlton sold to slavers for money enough to hire his first mage. Determined never to be humbled by anyone again, Carlton charged down the dangerous path of relying on wizards when one has no magic of one's own. By trickery and the spells of his mage, he slaughtered the Obrilts to the last man and took their land and wealth. With the wealth, he hired another mage and drove out another family. By the time his surviving neighbors united their forces and hired enough mercenaries to stand against him, he'd thundered through six more families (now extinct) and assembled over twenty mages—with land enough to give them all keeps of their own to buy their loyalty and as many of the conquered as they wanted for servants, slaves, and experiments.

An uneasy truce ensued. Unable to ignore "Carlton's little magic kingdom" in their midst, the other lords began hiring mages of their own. Carlton responded by going to Sembia and bringing back another two dozen hired mages to bolster his defenses. Before all the Vast erupted in a storm of spells, two priests intervened, with the results that the wizards defected en masse and joined forces to form the Ravens Bluff Wizards Guild (see page 19). Stripped of his mages, an enraged Lord Carlton set about festooning the borders of his land with so many traps—carnivorous plants, deadfalls, man-snares, concealed pits and spring-bows—that no one dared approach. There the De Sheers family dwelt. Carlton took six wives, murdering each in turn as he tired of her. Legend says that he took each into the woods when her time had come and forced her to drink a potion that turned her into a doe, which he then hunted alone with knife and bow. Others claimed he merely strangled them one by one and hid the bodies before sending back to Sembia for a new bride. Eventually he was found dead in the woods, his old heart apparently having stopped for no good reason. Many a ballad tells of Lord Carlton and his wives, but only a brave bard would sing one within earshot of a De Sheer.

Carlton left behind seventeen sons and daughters. Being De Sheers, they fought viciously over their inheritance, until only four were left alive: the handsome but ice-hearted Lord Elvaerden and his beautiful and deadly half-sisters Phaermona, Esmel, and Niune. These four made a pact never to act against each other, by poison, intrigue, magic, betrayal, or outright attack. Freed from the need to watch each other for treachery, they entered Ravenian society and were soon gathering ballads of their own. All four were shrewd and ruthless; they saw the fortune to be made in adhering to the letter of the law (and no more), becoming investors, importers, and smugglers. As they grew in wealth and successes, the need for unsavory brutality, whether in private life or business dealings, lessened, and they retreated into bejeweled respectability. The De Sheers retained a dangerous reputation but became sharks gliding smoothly among their fellow nobles, no longer ravening wolves.

And then, as with so many other families, the war came, and everything changed. Esmel joined forces with Warlord Myrkyssa Jelan, only to be hunted down and butchered by her sister Phaermona, who was then torn apart by Myrkyssa's servitor fiends. Lord Elvaerden unleashed himself at last, leading his men into battle against the foes of Ravens Bluff with a swift savagery that chilled the Ravenians who saw him fight. Field Marshal Blacktree, seeing De Sheers exult in the slaying and maim his foes with gusto, muttered aghast, "That lived in our midst?" There are some who say that the enemy advance on the city in the First Battle of Fire River would not have been stopped if the killing machine that was Elvaerden De Sheers hadn't been in the field. He died as night fell, pulled down by a last wave of attackers as the last of his men lay dead around him. One Ravenian officer (who'd been set by Lord Blacktree to keep watch on De Sheers for any signs of

treachery) said that there was no way of determining a certain count of the enemy Lord De Sheers had personally slain in the name of Ravens Bluff, but that he himself had seen Lord Elvaerden kill over seven hundred of the foe.

Today, all that remains of the De Sheers family is the last and quietest sister, Niune. She's put the large family estate of High Seraeda up for sale and taken to entertaining suitors with a calculating view not only to finding a suitable (powerful, handsome, wealthy) mate but a man who will love her (and whom she can thus control). Taking her measure of Ravenian merchants she's crossed paths with, she hired five (each of whom knows others have been hired to keep watch on him and to try to outdo him in investment returns but doesn't know who those others are) to administer the family investments and largely retired from public life. From time to time, just when Ravenian society has decided to dismiss "poor crazy Niune" as a lonely recluse, and the rumors rise once more of her madness and running wailing through the halls and thorn-tree mazes of High Seraeda, Lady De Sheers appears at a revel—devastatingly beautiful, wasp-tongued, and purringly flirtatious . . . and with eyes as cold as those of a waiting, willing executioner.



DeVillars (formerly Daefihlars)

Motto: "Let love be our guide"

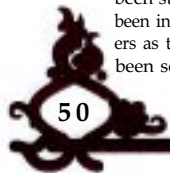
Rank: Lord

Badge: A blue wave, curling up on the sinister, to encircle a single, eight-pointed golden star, all on a circle of white

Chanseridun House, a garden estate of six hundred and twenty-two acres with its own lake—Lake Lauren—and a dozen pavilions, was heavily damaged during the war. The other two outlying DeVillars holdings fared better: Mriteleigh (a farm estate of two hundred and forty-eight acres) and Campegegas Hall (a walled country mansion sprawling over a dozen acres) can still muster over five hundred and thirty souls between them, despite heavy losses during the war among their garrisons and retainers. In the city itself, DeVillars Manor is universally acknowledged the grandest house in the Bluff. Lady Lauren maintains a second, more discreet, city residence as well: Laurentowers, where she often lodges her guests, whisking guests, servants, and the Lady herself back and forth between the two palatial homes in a small fleet of coaches.

Through shrewd investments (such as the Tempest Rose merchant house) and rental properties throughout Ravens Bluff, the DeVillars fortune continues to grow, although all three country estates suffered during the war. The recent election of Lady Thoden to the post of mayor over Lady Lauren's chosen candidate, Charles Oliver O'Kane, was seen by some as marking the end of the old DeVillars influence; still, few Ravenians would hesitate to name House DeVillars as the oldest, richest, and best of the noble families of Ravens Bluff. Lady Lauren is truly and deeply loved by the populace for her generosity and her many personal acts of kindness and caring. She's been known to hire priests to heal the sickly child of a beggar, or walk through the cold winter streets silently passing out splendid new fur cloaks to the poor, or rush down to Crow's End in bitter winter weather to bring hot meals—feasts as fine as she'd serve to noble guests, on silver platters—to hungry folk huddled in the streets. The people look up to her as a mother figure, "Lady Laur," and she in turn considers Ravens Bluff her charge and responsibility, somewhat as a mother regards her beloved but somewhat wayward children and grandchildren.

Lady Lauren wields the greatest economic clout of any single individual in Ravens Bluff (she was until recently a retired High Priestess of Waukeen and only just took up her old post again "for the duration"—i.e., until Waukeen's hierarchy sorts things out). She uses her prestige and wealth behind the scenes to change city laws and policies she dislikes, constantly seeking to mold Ravens Bluff into the image of what she desires "her" city to be. The signs of DeVillars philanthropy are everywhere. Lady Lauren sponsored the original Champions Games that brought Charles Oliver O'Kane to the mayoralty. She erected most of the public buildings and sculptures in the city, paying for them out of her privy purse. To the surprise of many, she bought up blocks of buildings and cleared the land to make way for the temples of other faiths and was the key figure in establishing the Clerical Circle to encourage rival clergy to work together towards a common goal: the prosperity of the city. Before the war, it was DeVillars money that equipped most of the city's army and naval units (though Lady DeVillars has shown no inclination to re-endow units destroyed in the recent war, remarking tartly that Mayor Thoden will have to dip into someone else's coffers if she wants more war-tops). Lady DeVillars likes to keep her finger on the pulse of her city, steering





it as unobtrusively as possible, and often goes to the Silent Network to learn every last thing going on in Ravens Bluff that her own trained and highly-skilled staff of informants can't find out. She's not above hiring dungdiggers, undertakers, beggars, thieves, and adventurers for this or that little task that will nudge a civic official to do this, or a merchant lord to do that, and so move the Bluff along on the path she's chosen for it.

Lady Lauren always maintains a lofty, dignified manner, ignoring the wilder goings-on at those gatherings and revels she chooses to grace with her presence. A recent incident demonstrates her unflappable calm: at one revel several young lords and ladies started a game of snatch-torch that quickly got out of hand. Soon half a hundred guests were running all over the grounds as they chased the torchbearer through fountains and topiary, ending up dripping, disheveled, and in some cases half-naked. One triumphant young woman (a Daradusk) snatched the torch and bounded past Lady DeVillars flourishing it, only to be swarmed over by a dozen young men. One of them emerged from the enthusiastically wrestling pile and waved the torch almost under Lady Lauren's nose. She looked the man up and down from head to toe with a calm considering gaze, smiled, and said gently, "That's a *very* nice torch, dear. I'm sure you've enjoyed all this vigorous exercise. Now, isn't there something you could be reading, instead?"

Lady Lauren's husband, Lord Daimler, is long dead; they were reportedly devoted to each other and she has firmly refused all offers of remarriage. Indeed, on one occasion when a smitten young blade pressed his suit too ardently she snatched up his ornamental sword and whacked him with the flat of the blade, repeatedly, until he fled—then sent the blade back with an apologetic note about her "unforgivable loss of temper; don't know what came over me." Her two daughters, Bethany and Chantel, are both priestesses of Waukeen who have official residences in Procampur but quietly maintain Ravenian residences they don't tell her about (and about which she chooses not to inquire, nor about their occasional discreet amours). Having kept them at arm's length for years so that they might develop some independence of spirit away from the overwhelming influence of her wealth, power, and personality, she has recently begun training them in the responsibilities of their heritage; the two now often visit her, together or apart, to discuss DeVillars investments, to plan the Waukeen revival, and to discuss long-term plans for the Bluff.

Only two other DeVillars are currently in the area. Suram DeVillars, a paladin of Tyr, lives at the Silver Halls (the Temple of Tyr), where he serves as Tyr's Sword of Justice. A country cousin uncomfortable with all of the revelry and trappings of nobles, he avoids meeting Lady Lauren as much as possible. Lady Lauren's second cousin, the beautiful flirt Marilene DeVillars, was until recently the Minister of Illusion in the Ministry of Art. She used to be a bright fixture in the social whirl of the city but a few months ago quit her post, left the city, and went into seclusion near the village of New Hope for reasons that are as yet unclear (a scandalous rumor has it that she is in an "interesting" condition and will return to the city when this is no longer the case). Lady Lauren also has a nephew, Raraerdo Moon-spring, who amuses himself by sampling the city's night life and social whirl but firmly refuses to accept any responsibility or post that might interfere with his pleasures. While not a true DeVillars, he is nonetheless fond of "Aunt Laur" and sometimes undertakes little commissions for her, sifting gossip to find out specific behind-the-scenes information, all the time cultivating the image of an empty-headed social butterfly (or drone).

Fond as the city is of her family, however, it is Lady Lauren herself to whom the citizens are devoted. Many identify her with the city and some folk even whisper that when Lady DeVillars dies, Ravens Bluff will fall, stone upon stone. This legend is deep-rooted enough that the Clerical Circle has held solemn and secret discussions of what magics must be prepared to prevent that death ever happening.



Emmerdin

Motto: "Forget nothing, learn much"

Rank: Baron

Badge: An intricate ornamental knot (in white cord, with the ends trailing away; the particular knot depicted has changed often over the years at the whim of Lord Emmerdin)

Lord Eskevelt Eskeller Emmerdin ("Lord Em," or "Esk" to his friends) is an intelligent, understanding, far-seeing man who always strives to see the future consequences of his actions and those of others. These talents and habits have made him astonishingly rich, eventually earning him a Life Lordship (as Calagard Emmerdin), and opened the way for him to purchase a hereditary title. True ennoblement cost Lord Emmerdin two million gold pieces, but his descendants are now forever noble in the eyes of Ravenians. The emptied coffers are now slowly being refilled through merchant shipping (especially the importation of Zakharan spices) and investment in the making of practical new tools and machines (lighter, stronger carts; improved hoes; better shipbuilding tools). Those-welcome new funds are being used first and foremost on badly-needed repairs to Emmer Hall, a walled manor house on the road to Mossbridges. Only lightly damaged during the war, the manor had been sadly neglected for several years; it's home to sixty-odd retainers and seventeen surviving armsmen.

The greatest blows Lord Em has suffered are the deaths of his wife, Maera, from a shaking fever over a dozen years ago and the loss of his son and heir, Lord Felrin, during the war. He consoles himself with his three daughters: Lady Syrune, Lady Almithara, and young Lady Imramarthree (all named for elven friends of their mother who tended her during her long invalidship). To this day any elf who visits the city can expect the offer of a good feast and a warm bed (one night's guesting) at the Emmerdin mansion (the drow priestess Rebekkah Darklyte was a recent guest; see page 32). Urgrava Syrune has been her father's bookkeeper for some years and is growing into a calm, firm daily administrator of the family business. Almithara is enjoying the role of *femme fatale*, blazing her way through the hearts of young male nobles, dashing adventurers, and rich merchants' sons all over the Bluff. Imramarthree is a tomboy who insists on climbing in and out of her bedchamber window by way of a handy tree at all hours of the day and night to lurk on rooftops and peer in windows with gangs of bored young street boys. She's learning to fence with whatever adventurers she can persuade to give her a few lessons and slips down into the sewers and cellars of the city to seek "lost dragon treasure" at every opportunity—recently she met and befriended the great bronze dragon Eormennoth (see page 93). She is the despair of her governess and tutors, but Lord Emmerdin and his armsmen (who sometimes have to come to her rescue) only smile over her exploits.





Flermeer

Motto: "Foremost to answer the call"

Rank: Exalted

Badge: A brass bell in the shape of an hourglass

The Flermeer family seat, Fireflower Hall, is a sprawling and ornate mansion surrounded by forty acres of rolling wooded hills and creeks; one hundred and thirty-eight retainers dwell there, as well as a garrison of twenty armsmen (very slight war losses and damage have been replaced and repaired). Their other major holding, Turnstone Hall, is a walled manor house on the road to Mossbridges with a staff of forty-odd servants and full stables. The Hall is divided up into sixteen suites, which are rented out to all sorts of folk-adventurers, wealthy visitors to the Bluff, nobles or officials desiring to meet with each other free from watching and interested eyes in the city, and so on; two suites are reserved for Flermeer use at all times, one usually being given free to designated guests of the family.

Steadily growing in wealth and influence, the Flermeers have always invested in wagonmaking, coachbuilding, and furniture-crafting concerns. Saeress Ilmaera ascended to the title while still very young when her brutal father, Lord Augultras, was poisoned by a merchant debtor nine years ago (she's said to have fallen to her knees, clasped her hands, and given thanks to her father's murderer when she discovered the corpse). Augultras was known to flog anyone who displeased him, from the humblest servant to his own wife. Frail Lady Cathlass died twenty years ago giving birth to Ilmaera's sickly sister, the misshapen Jathdra, who's seldom seen outside her private apartments in Fireflower Hall.

To this day, Ilmaera refuses to have any men, except aged servants, in Fireflower Hall when she's present. She seems disinterested in companionship of any sort. She has no friends, rotating the duties of her servants every month so that no one grows too "familiar" with her, and only meets with folk when she's negotiating business deals (which she does with great skill). She avoids revels, politics, and Ravenian social life completely; other than mercantile affairs her only pastime seems to be music. She regularly hires musicians to come and play for her while she sits in the next room or in an overhead balcony, so that she can hear but not see (or be seen by) them. Large numbers of caged songbirds hang about the apartments maintained by Lady Flermeer in the city—and more than one would-be thief insists that some sort of magical guardian beast that can hide itself lurks there as well, awaiting intruders hungrily.



Fleetwood

Motto: "First in the chase, without striving"

Rank: Exalted

Badge: A hunting horn (curved, with the mouthpiece to the lower dexter, and the bell to the lower sinister)

Always impeccably dressed, Lord and Lady Fleetwood and their six daughters are quiet of manner but quick-witted, often sharing amused looks, arched eyebrows, and little smiles between themselves at the antics of their peers. Saer Bremel Fleetwood walks with a cane due to an old battle wound (inflicted by Carlton De Sheers in the skirmishes between noble houses that preceded the Champions Games); his black hair has gone white at the temples but he remains an impressive figure, looking rather piratical with his curling black beard, large and very steady green eyes, and ever-present silver earrings (a vast array, always of his own design). Saeress Saprana Fleetwood is of average height and appearance, but her daughters take after their father: tall, thin, and lithe, sharing bright green eyes, long raven-dark hair, and striking good looks. The daughters prefer reading, mapmaking, and gathering news of the Realms to dalliance and gossip; none have so far shown any interest in the noble suitors who sometimes approach them at revels (although Raraerdo Moonspring once proposed to three of them in turn, all in the same week).

The eldest two daughters have hired adventuring bands to escort them as they explore regions of Faerûn, both wild and civilized, slowly building a clear, deep, and exact understanding of what life and conditions are like all over the Realms. Lady Fleetwood suspects that her eldest daughter, the Lady Jurleena, is taking rather too close an interest in the handsome sailors accompanying her on her latest voyage around the Sea of Fallen Stars—but

so far the servants she placed to covertly watch over her daughter have witnessed no actual indiscretions. In descending order of age, the other daughters are Illyth, Gondeene, Tlamaera, Raerdelune, and Paerythe. Each daughter has mastered a handcraft (sit-down pursuits such as embroidery, weaving, or painting) and all are encouraged to acquire expertise in various subjects of interest of their own choosing. One noble remarked that Lord and Lady Fleetwood "seem bent on raising an army of beautiful lady sages," and it's certain they disdain the usual flashy but empty amusements of Ravenian high society—whatever awaits them seems likely to unfold in tasteful tranquility.



Gultoss

Motto: "Ever able, ever vigilant"

Rank: Baron

Badge: A winged fish, upright and leaping upwards, trailing droplets of water

As Ravenian nobility goes, this family is rather poor, with diminishing returns over recent decades from investments in fisheries and shipbuilding; efforts are now underway to forge alliances with Sembian merchants and win some much-needed wealth through joint shipping concerns. Gultossan Towers, their walled keep and kitchen-farm compound on the sea-shore north of Ravens Bluff, suffered little damage in the war but is generally dilapidated; some fifty-odd resident retainers, fishers, and a garrison of twenty armsmen make their home here.

This fair-haired, athletic, wanderlust-ruled family has suffered from dwindling numbers over the last half-century. They go off adventuring or exploring, never to return. Most die in various horrible ways, while the survivors settle down in some distant corner of the Realms such as Amn, Waterdeep, or the cities around the Lake of Steam. The sea seems to be in their blood, and Gultossans are never far from it or businesses involving it.

The main branch of the family today (i.e., the Ravens Bluff one) consist of Urgrave Adelbaert Gultossan, his wife Urgrava Amadreiz, her two sons (Breltan and Naekol), and Adelbaert's brother, Lord Huehm. The main family tends to be somewhat no-nonsense and close-mouthed (except when talking about the sea), but Huehm is one of those fun-loving, rollicking characters who enjoys dressing up, pranks, outrageous accents, and comic orations (he's particularly fond of playing the role of a deaf old salt). He's also the only financially successful Gultossan, amassing a personal fortune in cinnamon, nutmeg, and saffron spice deals and single-handedly rescuing the dwindling family fortunes by traveling around Sembia striking up deals (with pirates, say envious and slanderous tongues). Lady Amadreiz frets openly about the example he sets her boys, but all of the Gultossans know they need his outgoing manner, business wisdom, and energy to keep them from sinking into penury. Longtime acquaintances of the family say that Lady Amadreiz quietly married Huehm years ago during a period when Adelbaert was missing and presumed dead, and that Naekol is actually Huehm's son; the truth, if any, of this rumor is something the Gultossans keep very much to themselves (the last person to speculate on the matter openly was shanghaied that very night, shipped to the far side of the Sea of Fallen Stars, and told to walk back). Whatever the truth, all three are very close, and those few who have been admitted to the family circle describe how the entire household warms up, like moths fluttering around a flame, when Huehm rolls in from his latest exploit.



Hawkdragon

Motto: "Seeing deeper, knowing more"

Rank: Baron

Badge: A staring reptilian eye, face-on, the slit-shaped pupil black with a tiny scarlet flame leaping at its center, the rest gold

The Hawkdragons, who maintain a Ravenian residence but aren't allied with the city, have always maintained diverse business interests throughout the Vast, from horsebreeding on their estates to being extensive landlords in both Tantras and Calaunt. In recent years, they've profited greatly by underwriting blacksmiths, prospectors, and miners all over the southern Vast—allowing some of these business partners to grow into great business successes and earning the Hawkdragons a good country-wide reputation as helping-handed friends. Hawkdragon Hall is a splendid, soaring castle surmounting a rocky knoll in the midst of three-





hundred-odd acres of farms and rolling pastureland studded with woodlots. Their other major property, Stonebow House, is a walled inn some miles northeast of town used by many travelers who don't quite make Highbank Forest by nightfall; in addition to the highly regarded inn itself with its live-in staff of thirty-four, the property includes a private lodge and fishpond for the Hawkdragons at the far end of the woodlot from the inn and a barracks for the garrison of twenty diligent and highly-trained armsmen (the "Battleworthies").

In Ravens Bluff, the Hawkdragons have always been seen as "great folk; pity they won't join with us in justice and common cause" (in the words of Charles Oliver O'Kane). Of course, those opposed to Ravenian government and its regulations see the Hawkdragons as shining examples of why the city would be better off without the current laws and "parasitic" government; they are championed by folk sickened by Ravenian taxes, rules, and politics. Luckily for the Hawkdragons, their senior family members have always been shrewd judges of character able to tell which folk turning up asking for work are rogues and which will work out well as inn staff, foresters, or cartfolk in the ever-expanding Hawkdragon business empire. The wealth of the Hawkdragons rivals even that of Lady DeVillars—and though their influence in Ravens Bluff is far less, the nature of their wealth commands a lot of workers, vehicles, and outposts. For themselves, the Hawkdragons buy only the best—the best clothes, armor, weapons, and even wine—but spend far less frivolously than lesser nobles or socially-climbing merchants trying to make a show. They enjoy a reputation as great businessfolk, good hunters, and superior folk who deserve their high status.

The current head of the house, Lord Korliannus Hawkdragon, has three sons by his first wife (the half-elven Lady Elindalae, dead sixteen years) and two daughters by his second (the human Lady Tishantra). There are also two aged Hawkdragon aunts of a previous generation, Lady Blortha and Lady Desreene, who keep to their own perfumed and flower-bedecked cottages on the family estate of Hawkdragon Hall, writing endless volumes of memoirs that servants say read like the very worst Rundigo Ranstorm or Gaspra Waftpetal romance novels. Korliannus is a gracious, quietly humorous man who views the world around him as entertainment he's paid for and wants to stop and properly watch; Lady Tishantra is a woman of quiet steel that flares into fire when she doesn't get her own way—thankfully, she genuinely loves her family (husband, daughters, and stepsons alike) and thus escapes becoming a tyrant. The Hawkdragon sons, the heir Lord Derrin and his younger brothers Lord Baltheamus and Lord Roaryndel, are cheerful, athletic, "let's go gallop the countryside" types, who enjoy the company of like-minded young ladies, fast-spending gamblers, and good hunters of both genders and all ranks of society. Lord Korliannus approves of their essential natures but is becoming exasperated at their refusal to "grow up" beyond this pleasant, carefree lifestyle they've adopted and begin taking some interest in the family business affairs (after all, Korliannus and his loyal business agents aren't growing any younger).

The Hawkdragon daughters, Flarathae and Baundiliya, are romantic, dreamy young ladies who hope some handsome knight will ride in and carry them off to a life of languid luxury, somewhere in Faerûn where it's slightly warmer in winter. They adopt a very good "fluffy-headed dithering" act whenever someone suggests they learn anything about the family business or even a handcraft to while away hours by the fireside. Lord Korliannus is beginning to suspect just how clever they really are. He's privately toying with the idea of hiring some adventurers to "kidnap" his daughters and then allow them to "escape" somewhere in the wilderness where they'd have to fend for themselves in the countryside for a few days (carefully observed via some scry, of course), just to see whether they're still capable of acting and thinking in a crisis or if their backbones have entirely dissolved into an endless languid doze of chocolates and gossip and dreaming of handsome young knights. Lord Korliannus would view the emergence of any two of his children as capable, interested, enthusiastic administrators of the family concerns (which to him means the retainers and the bounty of the land, not just coffers full of coins) as the pinnacle of his life. If only he could see a road to that pinnacle . . .



Hawkynfleur

Motto: "Light-hearted but fire-hearted"

Rank: Exalted

Badge: A hawk's open talon, descending from the upper dexter, silhouetted across a slim silver crescent moon, its points to the dexter

The Hawkynfleurs have always fulfilled the stereotype of the drawlingly arrogant, unnecessarily monocled, flashily dressed, casually carefree noble. Hawkwing, riding, hunting, and gambling occupy their days and thoughts; they are seldom without drinks to hand and fresh jokes (brought by hired minstrels) on their lips. To a man they are openly and frankly bored by politics, commerce, and "the grubby initiatives of the lower classes" (such as just about anything any Ravenian merchant tries to do). Hawkynfleur ladies may wear revealing gowns to revels, but by day they adopt the riding breeches and boots of their menfolk and curse just as casually and stylishly when their horses throw them or their prey gets away. Hawkynfleurs love to hunt deer and boar with lances from horseback, without benefit of dogs or "beaters"; many have paid a final price for this down the years in extremely hard collisions with trunks, boughs, stumps, or rocks.

Hawkynfleur House, their country manor, sits on twenty-two acres of rolling wooded grounds, eight of which were burnt over in the war and are now being tilled as farmland to feed the family. The forty-six resident retainers keep the place spotless; the Hawkynfleurs are one of the few noble families who have more grooms for their horses than maids and valets for themselves. The newly-installed garrison of twenty guards continually patrol the borders of the estate for poachers but frankly take more care to avoid being mistaken for a deer by some enthused Hawkynfleur than in actively repelling trespassers. Seen as frivolous by many Ravenians, the family enjoys a measure of influence only in matters of fashion. The customary Hawkynfleur total lack of attention to finances would seem to make them prime targets for dishonest servants and agents, but such pilferage has been surprisingly minor down the years due to deep loyalty on the part of most of the servants (who know just how easy their own lives are, under such masters, who simply laugh away minor thefts).

Saer Rhalidan Hawkynfleur heads the house and with his wife Saeress Hesmelerde (who has a long, distinctive mane of curly auburn hair) has produced a family that are all long-boned, slim, and good-looking: Lord Lindalan (his heir, called just "Lindal" by everyone), Lord Sarger, Lady Shurune, Lord Delbrun, Lady Athalae, Lord Presger, Lady Delbra, and Lord Imrin. Hawkynfleurs regard adventuring as a lark and will sometimes accompany or rescue adventurers "just for the bloody fun of it." However, they have no stomach for long expeditions, "mucking about underground," or deliberately stirring up trouble just to win "a few grubby coins." They sometimes challenge encountered adventurers to hunting contests; anyone who beats a Hawkynfleur fair and square at one of these (a difficult task) more often than not wins a friend for life.



Indemmer

Motto: "My honor my shield"

Rank: Baron

Badge: Three golden four-pointed stars, in a diagonal row from high dexter to low sinister

Investors *par excellence*, the Indemmers are the sort of folk who grow very wealthy without anyone noticing; they invest through agents, placing money carefully and waiting patiently for many years before reaping any return. They are a small family but have grown tremendously wealthy without ever acquiring the hauteur and splendid stuff (clothing, wines, furniture, horses, and so on) that define "noble living" in the minds of many. Indemmer House is a pleasant, unassuming country manor with an acre of ground enclosed within its neat brick wall; the eighteen resident servants are joined by twenty guards who are allowed to supplement their salaries by training interested passersby in the use of weapons. Their city mansion, Marlinspur Manor, is surrounded by a high wall enspelled to repel intruders.

"Cautious, careful, and drab of garb, thought, and deed" was how one noble once described the Indemmer clan. "Gray-faced and boring; timid as mice in a cat's lair," another offered. They're not far wrong; the Indemmers dress as common merchants, never go out in public without bodyguards, and rarely join in revels (though they do attend temple dedications and other official events where nobles are on display"). Despite this, the In-



demmers certainly do regard themselves as noble, are firm friends with Lady Lauren DeVillars and (surprisingly) with the Gultoss family, and on very rare occasions flex their financial muscles in a way no commoner could and few nobles would dare. Once, for example, they became embroiled during a summer heatwave in an argument with a ship captain who wanted to renegotiate his contract at the eleventh hour. The captain scoffed that without his ship they'd never be able to get a herd of cattle to Sembia before all the beasts died from the heat. Instead, the Indemmers bought sixteen smaller boats up and down the Dragon Reach in a matter of hours, hiring their former owners to converge on the Ravenian docks and whisk away the herd by sunset—and the next morning's sunrise saw the cattle safely in the hands of Sembian buyers.

There have, of course, been flamboyant Indemmers and may be again. Lord Flymdrin, eldest son and heir of Lord Malthulas (the current head of the house), once astonished all attendees at a quiet soiree by donning a borrowed gown and heavy, clumsily applied makeup to deliver a devastating full-voiced parody of a certain warbling noblewoman twice his age who is under the unfortunate delusion that she can sing. Social prominence is not, however, the House Indemmer style. Lady Tierune Indemmer, despite her delicate beauty, is almost never seen in public, and her daughters Rythindele and Isbra are only slightly less reclusive. Lord Malthulas himself spends so much time inspecting properties and discussing investments that he can hardly recognize his youngest son, little Chelstryn Indemmer, a lad of only three.



Leorduin

Motto: "Still standing at battle's sunset"
Rank: Baron
Badge: The snarling head of a manticore, face-on

Once far too haughty to pay any attention to commerce, the Leorduin family was reduced to a penniless state some thirty years back, about the time of the Champions Games. When old Lord Thuldass died at the funeral of his wife, Lady Aglamme, his prim and cruel son Augirt became ruler of the house and plunged into a whirlwind of shady deals, bargains with adventurers, and currency speculation that ended in the first three farm purchases that have since cemented the family fortunes. Today Augirt has fully renovated Sevencrown Keep, a castle with thirty acres of land protected by its walls, placed at the center of eight farms that together total 18,430 acres. The Keep and each farm officially have a garrison of twenty guards apiece, but neighbors say at least another forty of the staff or laborers on each property are fully armed, highly trained troops; in the recent war, House Leorduin fielded six hundred and sixty-eight troops and lost only fifty-six.

Many of their fellow nobles privately sneer at the Leorduins for being "just cabbage farmers now, eh?"—but none dare do so openly. Few clans among the Ravenaar nobility are as arrogant, and the Leorduins have always been swift to draw steel and begin quarrels but slow to forget grudges. They used the recent war as a convenient excuse to settle scores with anyone who'd crossed them in the last decade or so, and sworded more than a few "traitors to the city" before Field Marshal Blacktree bluntly told them that sentencing criminals (and, ah, trying them first) was for the courts to carry out, not Leorduin blades. The war did purge the Leorduins of a year's revenues (few crops survived the enemy armies), but they've built up gold and personal larders enough in the hidden storage caverns beneath Sevencrown Keep to easily ride out a lean year or three. They also own several up land mills in the Vast and collect a tidy sum each year grinding flour from the wheat raised by others farmers, most of whom escaped the invading army's depredations.

Urgrave Augirt is watching the rise of the merchants within the city and investing in the ventures of the best of them. He is a cruel and exacting bargainer, as skilled as any law-proclaimer in the government at navigating the details and comers of the Ravenian legal code, and seldom loses a dispute—or a single copper coin. He cares not a whit if he loses the friendship or good regard of his fellows—because you can't lose what you've never had. He's already planning to hire adventurers (through intermediaries, of course) and trick them into repeatedly raiding the halfling village of New Hope, thereby eliminating those rival producers of vegetables for Ravenian tables. The few halflings who survive can come to work for him or go underground and grow mushrooms for all he cares, so long as the potential threat is no more. No one stands in the path of House Leorduin.

Lord Augirt is married to a voluptuous but ill-tempered Tantran shipwright's daughter who's much given to tantrums and hurling hairbrushes at servants. Urgrava Onchantra is rich in her own right and loves her husband with almost embarrassingly hungry affection, but she's never shown love or tenderness to anyone else. They have three children: sons Eldryn and Imbron and daughter Milyth. Under Augirt's guidance, Eldryn is turning into a miniature version of his father: all cold calculation and leashed menace, awaiting just the right time to lash out and deeply wound a business rival—or ally. A certain older noble was recently heard to say grimly, "If I ever catch Lord Coldheart or that vicious little weasel of a son he's rearing in anything they should be fined or jailed for, I'll challenge them over it when I've got a dozen archers concealed nearby. If they draw steel on a doddering old man, they can enjoy the taste of a dozen arrows. If I hang for it later, I can take pride in the good service I've done Ravens Bluff, with one or two fewer Leorduins fouling its air." When these words were uttered, no one rebuked the speaker; everyone was too busy nodding and murmuring agreement.

Little is known of the two younger children, except that Imbron is reportedly a rather creepy youth with great potential as a wizard if he could but convince his father to let him enroll in the Wizards Guild. Milyth is said to be a budding priestess, but no two stories agree as to which faith she follows—certainly none of the ten approved ones in the Civic Religion. A prophecy holds that as these two grow older, they'll have considerable impact on the city, but whether for good or ill none can say.



Liontower

Motto: "Vice avenged"
Rank: Baron
Badge: A face-on, snarling golden lion's head (with long mane outflowing, all around), above a stout and crenellated silver stone tower, on a circle of royal blue

Lord Liontower, the twelfth of his line, is another of the "Aloof lords" who keeps a house in Ravens Bluff but isn't allied to the city. The Liontowers are country gentry in the Cormyrean sense of the term: lords loved locally who guard and tend the land they hold with loving care without bothering themselves with the politics of folk who live elsewhere. Stormshield House is a castle in all but name, with over four hundred resident retainers, of whom some two-thirds are trained and equipped to bear arms in full battle. It sits at the heart of an estate of seven hundred acres of woods, farms, and pastureland watered by no less than six streams that rise on Liontower land and flow down to the Fire River. Quietly and honestly wealthy, the Liontowers are content to watch their worth growing slowly with land acquisitions and careful breeding additions to large herds of cattle, pigs, and deer. Their influence in the city has never been great, but they are much respected in the countryside for their care of the land and fairness in dealings with others.

If the Leorduins produce most of the vegetables on Ravenian tables, the Liontowers provide the lion's share of the Bluff's meat. Where the Hawkdragons expand into a hundred different concerns and holdings, the Liontowers concern themselves with nursing and ever-so-slowly expanding their land holdings, farm by farm. Herbs are their newest interest and the results are beginning to appear in Ravenian markets in bulk. Lord Leorduin is angry over this sideline but hasn't yet dared to openly pick a fight with the Liontowers over it—Liontower archers have too deadly a reputation for anyone to welcome an open fight, having reportedly slaughtered hundreds of orcs and hobgoblins in Warlord Myrkysa's army.

Lord Amandas Liontower, the head of the family, is a blue-eyed, weatherworn, middle-aged man of kindly looks and simple but elegant dress. He's seldom out of his saddle these days as he tries to oversee everything going on across all his lands. His wife, the often-laughing Lady Meralde, is said by some to be a weredragon, but this may be no more than a minstrels' rumor. She regularly beats her husband at chess and other games of strategy and always joins his archers in their practices.

The Liontowers have a son, Lord Jerald, and two daughters, the Lady Nantclio and the Lady Aereven. All of them are thoughtful, plain-spoken folk who help in farmwork and show no signs of "lording it over" the retainers they work alongside. Only once has the family harmony been broken, when Lord Amandas ordered his heir to hide in the cellars of Stormshield House when the estate was attacked during the war rather than risk his life defending their borders. Lord Jerald seemingly obeyed, albeit with vast reluctance, but Lord Amandas was outraged to hear a report





a short time later that his son's armored figure had been seen galloping out to join the battle. The armored warrior's arrival rallied the archers, who had been reeling from hobgoblin reinforcements, and prevented the estate from being overrun. Amandas's anger turned into astonishment when he discovered that the returning hero was Lady Nantclio, who had donned her brother's armor so that at least one family member would fight alongside their retainers. A family argument that was more earnest debate than angry shouting spilled through the rooms of Stormshield House that night, listened to with rapt fascination by all the retainers who could assemble. In the end, family stances on the need for adherence to duty, mutual appreciation of everyone's needs, practicality, and so on had been settled. Everyone on the Liontower lands now know how the Liontowers think and what they stand for. As one farmer muttered, "A comfort, that is. Good people, them I serve. Some folk aren't half so lucky as me—they don't even know if *their* lords *can* think."



Longbottle

Motto: "Vigilance married to caring"

Rank: Baron

Badge: The foreshortened prow of a white ship trimmed with gold, a dripping blue mermaid clinging to its bowsprit (which points to the upper dexter), on a field of green

The newest hereditary lord of Ravens Bluff, former Regent of the Harbor Lord Calvin Longbottle, has just managed to prove his descent from the Longbottles who settled up the coast from the Bluff over a century ago and were long thought to be extinct. The Council of Lords examined the evidence assembled by Lord Calvin over many painstaking years (including papers hidden in a lockvault in Saerloon by his father, Baldric Longbottle, decades ago) and pronounced him to be "of the blood true." Calvin is now entitled to bear the Longbottle arms and to all the rights of lordship (as is his brother William and William's daughter, Marina). No ancestral lands accompany the title, having passed into other hands long ago, but Lord Calvin did uncover some wealth he hadn't known his father had hidden away, enough to keep him "comfortable" (in fact, he's worth about as much as a solidly successful merchant and owns his own modest home). Already a Life Lord by virtue of his office and a knight in his own right (a founding member of the Order of the Golden Rooster, in fact), he has of course overnight become one of the most enticing bachelors in the city, with rich merchants elbowing each other aside to throw their unmarried daughters at him. Sometimes, Calvin wishes he'd never found his father's papers . . . but his niece Marina is reveling in the unexpected attention.



MacIntyre

Motto: "Patience tempers the sword of fury"

Rank: Exalted

Badge: A boar's head, coupéd at the neck, facing sinister with jaws agape

The MacIntyre family have teetered on the edge of obscurity in recent decades but have refused to disappear. The family home, Kinthorl Keep, is a small castle in the last stage of decrepitude set on a beautiful estate of a hundred and twelve acres of rolling woodlands, maintained by a score of loyal retainers who serve as gamewardens, guards, grooms, castle staff, and whatever else might be needed. Maldridge Manor, their town house, is a simple but elegant small mansion filled with good-quality but worn furnishings.

The title was established four generations back by Maldridge MacIntyre, a mage of some accomplishments, in return for unspecified "services to the city." Maldridge's daughter Lueitha married the dashing adventurer Otell Roland and together they built Kinthorl Keep with their combined wealth. Their son, Lord Ondercot Roland, was a cheerful, good-natured man—very good at hosting feasts and revels but with absolutely no interest in business nor skill at managing money. By the time he and his wife, the lovely but unworldly Lytha, drowned a decade ago in a boating accident (murdered by pirates, some say) the family fortune was almost gone. Young Russell Roland, their son, was only thirteen at the time and his younger sister Bevis a child of only four. Their appointed guardians quickly looted the last of the family treasury and ran up huge debts on the strength of the MacIntyre name, but a year later Russell (with the aid of his tutor, Grimalkin the sage) managed to expose his guardians and regain control of the family finances.

In the years since, the "boy lord" has built friendships with important nobles and civic officials; a surprising number of the most powerful people in the city enjoy dining at Maldridge Manor, from Chief Constable "Sunny" Sunriver and Alcides Von Tighe to Chancellor Kothonos and Lady Lauren DeVillars. Lord Russell inherited his father's seat on the Advisory Council and has cast a number of decisive votes, slowly developing a reputation as a quiet, incorruptible young man who keeps his thoughts to himself and only speaks up when he feels he must.

Lord Russell is a keen hunter of monsters, terrifically strong (Strength 18/00, but it's not obvious just by looking at him), and occasionally joins adventurers on expeditions to slay some beast that he thinks poses a threat to the region. The debts have now all been paid and the empty family coffers are slowly being filled by a scheme thought up by Russell, Grimalkin, and Bevis.

In return for steep fees, Ravenian merchants and visitors to the city can rent Maldridge Manor for a few days, complete with the services of Challot and Aubergine, an elderly couple devoted to the Rolands who act as impeccable butler and incompatible cook. A patron who pays extra can even pass the estate off as his or her own to out-of-towners. Kiltborl Keep is also available for rent, either to merchants who want to play noble-for-a-night or to would-be adventurers who want to sharpen their dungeon-delving skills; in either case, illusions either hide the dilapidation or enhance it, according to the circumstance. For an extra fee, a night in Kiltborl Keep can come complete with

monsters, traps, mysterious strangers, etc. (all illusions, of course, cast by illusionists specially hired from the Wizards Guild for the purpose). It's becoming quite fashionable to "do" Kiltborl Keep in this fashion, and the Guild illusionists compete eagerly to outdo one another. It's also become a tradition to convert Maldridge Manor into a "haunted house" several times a year, complete with very realistic ghosts and authentic secret passages built by Russell's great-grandfather. One sneak thief who stumbled upon a "haunting" fled in such terror, and spread the story so widely, that it tripled the demand.

All this is widely known. What fewer realize is that the family is no longer penniless. People have become used to the idea that when the Rolands aren't at the Keep they must be at the Manor and vice versa, enabling Russell or his sister to slip off for days at a time when they feel like it. They enjoy doing little acts of charity with a flourish, vanishing into the night before anyone can recognize or thank them. Russell's style is typically to come to the rescue of someone beset by unfair odds, pummel a few malefactors into unconsciousness, and then withdraw (aided by a magical cloak of *etheralness* he discovered in a cache of his great-grandfather's). Bevis—an impish tomboy all too skilled at lurking and eavesdropping—prefers slipping into the upstairs room of some penniless widow and leaving a month's rent on the table. Brother and sister actually live in small rooms at the top of their manor (formerly servants' quarters) and can come and go as they please via secret exits that open on any of a number of nearby alleys. Bevis's favorite excuse when she has to make a quick exit is that she has to go look for her cat, Sparkle; Russell's is that he needs to go see about his sister.

The Rolands hold a unique position in Ravens Bluff society—most of the haughtier nobles pity them as poor folk who happen to hold an empty title and look down on them for renting out their family estates. Most of the merchants avoid them (except when renting their properties) out of the instinctive aversion of the fiscally minded for the bankrupt. By contrast, Russell's good sense has won him much respect among those who run the city government and he also has many friends among the city's adventuring population. Through Grimalkin the family is on good terms with the Wizards Guild, especially its illusionists, and the nameless alter egos of the brother and sister are beloved of the city's poor. It can't last—someday someone is going to realize what a good catch Lord Russell Roland is (smart, handsome, noble, and imminently eligible) or what an attractive young woman Bevis is growing up to be. Until then, the Rolands intend to keep a low profile and enjoy their illicit good deeds.





Minstrelwish

Motto: "Where one coin becomes three"

Rank: Baron

Badge: A brown upright lyre, upon a circle of gold ringed with vivid blue

The Minstrelwish family is the only halfling Ravenian noble line. Unlike almost all of the human nobility of Ravens Bluff, its members are numerous with no less than nine active branches of the family. Minstrelwishes are tireless workers in small cobblers' shops, laundry services, or as chamber-cleaners to wealthy merchants or other nobles. Most are jovial, happy-go-lucky, "just plain folks" sorts, dismissing their nobility as a joke of birth that means little or nothing in everyday life. Their hard work has made the family wealthy and growing wealthier, one transaction at a time, with a far broader range of skills and business interests than most other noble families. The family lacks a grand country seat or private army, preferring instead to invest the majority of their profits in purchasing run-down residences, which the clan rebuilds and rents out, leaving some family members behind as live-in landlords.

The head of the house is Obelarth "Oldwrinkles" Minstrelwish, a maker of spectacles, monocles, spyglasses, and specula (magnifying lenses) who's now at least 121 years old. He needs a cane these days when he hobbles about and wheezes continuously but is still alert and bright-eyed. He's named as his heir Lady Cassandra Minstrelwish, a Knight of the Hawk and Deputy Guildmaster of the Silent Network, who recently married Harold Pierre, proprietor of the Crescent Moon Inn. Other prominent family members include the plumbing brothers Noblar and Nundle Minstrelwish (always dirty, sarcastic, agile wise-cracking types who work in a state of endless cheerful chaos) and young Amaranda Minstrelwish, a seven-year-old who can often learn things about objects she handles (receive scenes—or sometimes words and names—in her mind; treat as a *legend lore* spell).



Moonbrace

Motto: "No trail neglected"

Rank: Baron

Badge: A needle-blade (stiletto) dagger, point to the lower sinister, surrounded by an irregular cluster of nine many-pointed blue-white "winking" (some bright, some dim) stars

The Moonbraces are an old noble family, but they've always been considered minor nobility, lacking influence or the desire to push into politics and win any clout or reputation. They could care less. What brightens a Moonbrace heart is the call of the unknown, the chance to map and venture where there are no maps. Unfortunately, in the Vast this has meant the orc-infested Earthfast Mountains and a drow-haunted subterranean world, and many a Moonbrace has gone off adventuring and never returned, finding unmarked graves grow in plenty.

In early years, that meant little to the survival of the Moonbrace name; a fast and efficient fleet of merchant vessels pumped heaps of coins into family coffers, and fertile Lady Moonbraces produced successive families of six, eight, eleven, and fourteen sons. More recently, however, smaller families, adventuring losses, and the Moonbrace love of battle (that took members of this fearless family into the "little wars" between various noble houses, fighting—and dying—for others), led to the near-extinction of the line. When Lord Erolustar Moonbrace died a few days after the Champions Games (a month to the day after the death of his wife, Lady Melsura Moonbrace), he left behind only one son, Lord Riol, and three daughters: Lady Emmera (just beginning to dabble in magic, and dreaming of mastering sorcery); Lady Shione; and Lady Vesharla. He also left financial ruin: only one aging merchant caravel still flying the Moonbrace colors and the family estate sold to pay debts, leaving only a modest house and a few thousand in gold.

Emmera confronted Riol and ordered him to stay home, take a wife, and father heirs. When he refused, she waited until he was sleeping and used what little magic she knew to topple a bookshelf onto Riol's bed, breaking both his legs. Citing the state of family finances, she refused to bring in priests to heal him, tending him herself while her two sisters scoured the city for suitable wives and brought Riol a string of young lady visitors. Not-too-clever, pleasant girls from prolific commoner Ravenian families were sought and found in plenty; the sisters kept on bringing them until Riol hit it off with one Lultara Starnboot, daughter of a greengrocer in Crow's End.

The three sisters practically dragged in a priest to marry them and heal Riol's legs properly, hustled him out again, and—almost—stood over the marriage bed until heirs were fathered. Vesharla took over watching Riol while her two older sisters went adventuring, following maps left by earlier Moonbraces. They made some modest finds of dwarven gold and veins of ore, selling a half-share of the latter to eager Sembian speculators. Slowly the Moonbrace fortunes started to turn around—especially after the canny Emmera learned how merchant shipping worked and began issuing orders to the ship captain herself. Soon there were two ships, and then a third, slowing rebuilding the family merchant fleet.

As the years passed, the initially resentful Riol took his measure of what was going on and started to work willingly with his three sisters as they managed family affairs. All three seduced adventurers and then married them to bring tutors into the family fold for Riol's sons, thus seeing to it that the next generation of Moonbraces would be accomplished guides, caravan escorts, and adventurers in the Vast. Today Lord Riol is still the nominal head of the house (though the real ruler is the Lady Emmera, now a formidable mage despite her failing health), and his four strong sons are all accomplished adventurers: Rathdan, Beldar, Mrakan, and Erol. Under the direction of their aunt Shione they have begun to undertake profitable commissions from other Ravenian families, such as driving monsters out of ruins abandoned after the war or hunting down orcs and hobgoblins who still lurk and raid in the Fire River uplands. Riol's two daughters, Dimrae and Habranta, and his wife (who once feared and hated Emmera but now sees the "Lady Tyrant" of the Moonbraces differently) are being trained in magic as fast as Emmera can push them and herself. House Moonbrace has again become a force to be reckoned with.



Moonglow

Motto: "Night's peace always at heart"

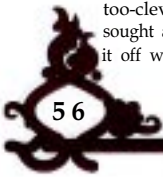
Rank: Exalted

Badge: A white crescent moon, horns uppermost and with six small silver droplets falling from its curve, on a purple-black circle

Of Cormanthan origin, this small but active family of moon elves inhabited the bankside woods along the Fire River before Ravens Bluff was settled, having originally been posted there to keep watch on the dimension gates of Lost Sarbreen (see page 9). They always aided arriving humans against orc raids, using deadly accurate archery and a family-developed spell that enables Moonglow elves to briefly take on wolf-shape. The passing years saw the Moonglows lose control of the woodlands to human settlers, but the canny elven family decided this was inevitable and sold what they were going to lose anyway in exchange for much coin and for the buyers agreeing to spare certain stands of trees. Imparting their sense of the value of the forest, the Moonglows managed to prevent too much clearing for farmland, with the results that great stands of trees have survived virtually untouched down to the present day.

The original Moonglows are all gone now, having slipped away to Evermeet one by one over the years, leaving the younger generation to deal with their human neighbors. The Moonglows in Raven Bluff today are slim, elegant magic-wielders, most only a century or two old. They're apt to be a trifle arrogant, deadly with thrown daggers, and protected by small personal magics that enable them to evade most sudden dangers. The Moonglows don't court strife, preferring to spend much of their time making bone flutes, handpipes, lutes, and other musical instruments that are largely or wholly carved from living things.

The head of House Moonglow is Lord Erendriel, an archer of uncanny skill (he can hit a moving target as small as an orc's eyeball a quarter-mile off). He leads his sisters Lady Belinda (a Dean in the Wizards Guild; see "The Wizards Guild" chapter for much more about her), Lady Muerlara (a musician of great skill on a wide variety of instruments), Lady Nambra (whose magical skills are considerable), and a much younger brother, the hot-headed Lord Nieven (whose chief accomplishment thus far seems to be acrobatic escapes from brawls he's started).





Moorland

Motto: "Standing alone but embracing all"

Rank: Lord

Badge: Three white stars in a horizontal row in a silver night sky above two bare gray hills, with the black silhouette of an upright sword driven into the ground, point first, in the foreground

One of the founding families of human settlers in the Ravens Bluff area, the Moorlands have a long history of simple stewardship of the land and have always been involved in Ravenian politics and government, but as king-makers adept at reconciling opposing factions rather than leaders who forced others to accept their will. Recently the aging Lord Phineas Augustus, his elven wife Lady Arlayna, and their eldest two children (Lord Ehnndo and Lord Ahlivaer, who'd just returned from the Elven Court, where they'd been for some years to learn more about the elven side of their heritage) were all killed in savage fighting in the countryside as the army of Myrkyssa Jelan swarmed towards Ravens Bluff. That left Lady Katharine Marie Moorland, the most popular member of the family, the head of the house (Lady Katharine had come to be well-known and well-liked by Ravenians of all ranks through her work as Lord Speaker of the Council of Lords). She and her two younger sisters, Lady Cortalyn and Lady Dhannas, have grown very close since the deaths of their elder kin; all three share flame-red hair, bright green eyes, pleasantly beautiful features, and a preference for simple dress and lack of ceremony.

The Moorlands are unambitious, more concerned in protecting the land and people fate has entrusted to their care than in wringing the last copper of profit from them. This attitude is reflected in Moorstones Manor, their family estate—a tasteful country mansion surrounded by twenty-six acres of rolling woodlands; the outlying cottages for their six resident retainers and the four guards (all female, by an old family tradition) are better-maintained than some merchants allow for their own families' quarters. A deep well and freestanding kitchen were provided at family expense. The Moorland sisters are currently looking to assemble a private band of adventurers on a permanent basis to reside on the estate and supplement the garrison, especially in carrying out their more dangerous duties (coach-escort, cross-country errand-riding, and the occasional monster-hunt to repel ma-

raiders). They have been screening applicants very carefully, seeking those who are both capable and good-hearted yet without divided loyalties.

While the Moorlands are an old and well-established family, they are only moderately wealthy, relying on a few rather conservative investments. Fortunately, they are not extravagant and their resources amply meet their needs. Their current prestige derives mostly through the personal fame of Lady Katharine, and observers have expressed much curiosity about what will happen to House Moorland now that Lady Katharine has married Lord Charles Blacktree. Some feel that the two houses will merge, permanently uniting two of Ravens Bluff's oldest and most respected families into one (assuming that the marriage lasts). Other feel that Lady Cortalyn and Lady Dhannas will soon be snatched up by eligible young bachelors and that the Moorland name will essentially disappear, noting Cortalyn's growing friendship with Russell Roland (Lord MacIntyre). Russell and Katharine were once much taken with each other but neither knew of the other's interest, and Lord Blacktree "snatched Katharine away" (as Russell puts it) before the younger man worked up his courage to pursue the matter; these matchmakers believe that Cortalyn will "manage things better." As for Dhannas, a very few—including those who know the three sisters best—have said that she is one of those rare people who is completely self-contained, knowing exactly what she wants and how to get it. Perhaps the only person in her confidence is her friend Bevis Roland, but that young lady is telling no tales; for now gossipmongers and well-wishers alike can only watch and wait.



Norwood

Motto: "Endure always, rise ever"

Rank: Lord

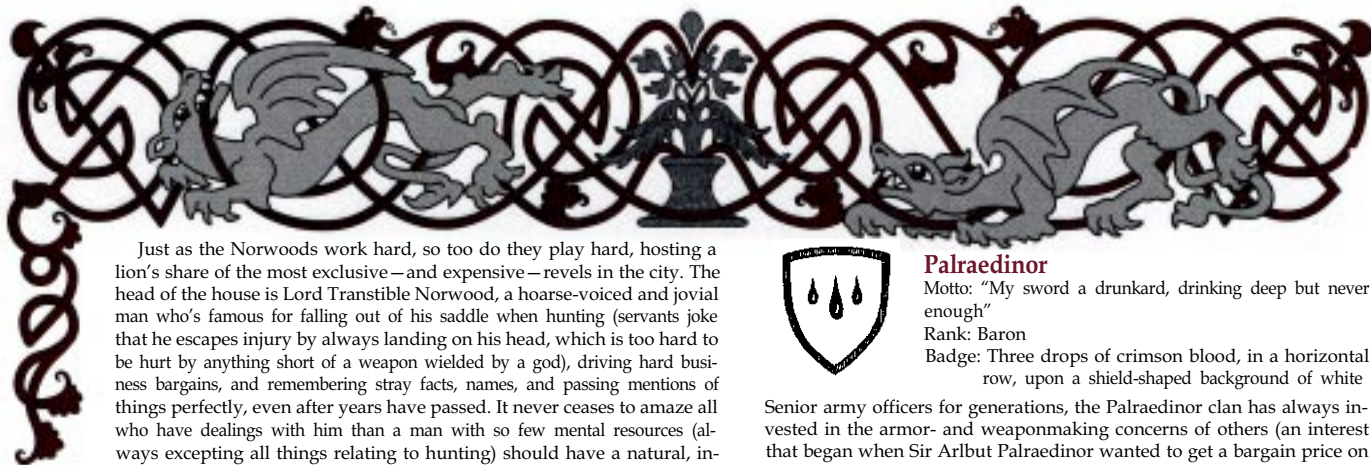
Badge: An upright silver double-bladed axe (a labys) on a crimson circle

Another of the old Ravenaar noble families, the Norwoods are known for quiet, calm hauteur and inflexible views regarding social changes and the "rightful place" of such underlings as merchants and common laborers (oddly enough, they exempt adventurers from this obloquy). They possess great wealth that only grows greater with each passing year. One source is the holding of many a Ravenian mortgage—loans to merchants and laborers that are secured by collateral and carry a stiff rate of interest. Those who can't make their payments lose their collateral (usually their houses or shops) and wind up as Norwood employees or tenants in what was once their own property. Those unable to pay rents or without valuable skills tend to end their days working the coppice groves and picking mushrooms and herbs at Blackboughs, a Norwood hunting lodge surrounded by seventy-two acres of mostly dense forest that is home to twelve groundskeepers and a garrison of twenty guards (whose main duties are to keep poachers off Lord Norwood's prize hunting preserve).

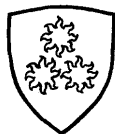
The Norwoods have two other estates: Sarpentar House and Churthryn Hall. Sarpentar House is a palatial sprawling castle that entered the family when the current Lord Norwood married the last of the Sarpentars, Lady Penelope, and it became her dowry; he had it lovingly restored and then presented it to her as an anniversary present. Today it stands on three hundred and forty acres of farms, formal gardens, and woodlands, with a staff of two hundred and seventy-six (mostly old Sarpentar retainers, supplemented by a fair number of bankrupt debtors), protected by a garrison of twenty. Churthryn Hall is quite a different matter: a country mansion whose modest grounds are completely surrounded by a high wall. The Norwoods seized it for debt from its former owner and now run it as a leper-colony and private madhouse for noble families, adventurers, and others who have the gold to pay the stiff monthly fees that ensure a comfortable home for difficult or embarrassing relatives or friends. The facility has a staff of sixty who oversee the eighty-six patients, each of whom has a private room. A garrison of twenty efficient veterans keep the patients under control and the curious at bay.

Nor is this all: the Norwoods do daily battle with mounds of paperwork associated with the complex web of Norwood businesses (furniture refinishing, tanning, and the importing of seeds have all been ongoing successes), part-interests in the businesses of others, loans to guilds and mortgages to individuals, and "windfall buying" of goods at various Inner Sea ports, for later sale when local shortages occur and asking prices are high. Simply keeping track of all the goods in Norwood warehouses or on Norwood ships at any one time, so as to know where to send it when it'll get the best price, is a time-consuming business in itself. Small wonder, with all these activities, that the Norwoods fiercely oppose the rising power of the merchants, so far without effect.





Just as the Norwoods work hard, so too do they play hard, hosting a lion's share of the most exclusive—and expensive—revels in the city. The head of the house is Lord Transtible Norwood, a hoarse-voiced and jovial man who's famous for falling out of his saddle when hunting (servants joke that he escapes injury by always landing on his head, which is too hard to be hurt by anything short of a weapon wielded by a god), driving hard business bargains, and remembering stray facts, names, and passing mentions of things perfectly, even after years have passed. It never ceases to amaze all who have dealings with him than a man with so few mental resources (always excepting all things relating to hunting) should have a natural, instinctive knack for shrewd business dealings. Transtible is married to Lady Penelope Norwood, the Dean of Invocation and Evocation in the Ravens Bluff Wizards Guild (see page 24 for more about her), and remains touchingly devoted to her even thirty years later. They have two rather stolid and slow-witted sons, Lord Jethrar and Lord Laeremar, and a daughter, Lady Stelma Seirie. Stelma is already an accomplished bookkeeper who can simply sense when accounts are wrong or incomplete, having apparently inherited something of her father's uncanny knack. Her two older brothers haven't shown any aptitude for mastering even the basics of contracts, budgeting, making estimates, or looking ahead at anything. Lady Penelope is now looking for clever wives for both of them, to keep the Norwoods from sliding into financial ruin the moment her guiding hand no longer holds the keys to the family vaults.



Paerindon

Motto: "My dragon, my destiny"
 Rank: Exalted
 Badge: A triangle (equal sides, point to top) of three yellow way-rayed suns

This house has produced a succession of outstandingly handsome, raven-haired men who have melodious voices, flashing eyes, agility and grace, good swordsmanship, and an eye for the ladies. Not surprisingly, given all of these talents, ladies also have an eye for them. Most Paerindon men maintain a half-dozen or so mistresses among the common folk and court a noble Ravenian lady they deem suitable while themselves being pursued by a half-dozen other noble ladies. Long ago, a Sir Ramyrel Paerindon slew a green dragon (with the aid of six retainers, luck, and desperate swordwork), and the deed has been told and retold down the years until the mantle of "fearless dragonslayer" sits squarely upon all Paerindon shoulders, no matter how inappropriate.

Unfortunately, the daring reputation and determined philandering hasn't won the Paerindons many friends among mothers and fathers noble or common. When Lord Claerindon Paerindon and his son Lord Eltaun were killed in the war (behaving with conspicuous, not to say foolish, gallantry), the Council of Lords stripped the family of its Council seat, leaving the widowed Saeress Paerindra, her daughters Lady Bethenten and Lady Sheareida, and her lazy and ill-behaved son Saer Vilyburt little better than titled shopkeepers. Their country seat was completely destroyed beyond any hope of rebuilding, their guards slain to the last man. What little money they have left is invested in papermaking, printing, and book-binding.

Paerindra has been reduced to a shattered woman, endlessly weeping, and Vilyburt has withdrawn into pleasant daydreams, ignoring the gauche realities around him. The moderately attractive Lady Bethenten, however, is made of sterner stuff and has become an icy-faced spinner of intrigues, working to win herself a rich, powerful, and noble husband and regain the prestige—and Council seat—of her family. She wants Ravenians to respect the Paerindons once more . . . and she's not above a little deceit to accomplish her goals. One of her plots is to offer a good life, great food and clothes, and the privileges of nobility to any handsome, rich, and formidable adventurers she can find. All they must do is swagger and do bold deeds and impress Ravens Bluff—all the while swearing they're the long-lost Lords Tamnen and Raeretar Paerindon, the younger brothers of her late father who went overseas adventuring years ago and never came back.

Meanwhile, her sister Sheareida has plans of her own. The only surviving member of the family with the true Paerindon personality, she's decided to gather a band of six trusty adventurers and then seek out and slay a dragon, just as her ancestor did when he founded the line. She then plans to marry whichever of the six most impresses her, re-entending the family fortune from the beast's hoard. She's already begun practicing with her ancestor's sword; all she needs now are six companions and a dragon . . .



Palraedinator

Motto: "My sword a drunkard, drinking deep but never enough"
 Rank: Baron
 Badge: Three drops of crimson blood, in a horizontal row, upon a shield-shaped background of white

Senior army officers for generations, the Palraedinator clan has always invested in the armor- and weaponmaking concerns of others (an interest that began when Sir Arlbut Palraedinator wanted to get a bargain price on several suits of armor several generations back). Other than that, their only major investment has been to always lay down superlative wine cellars—they have no country estate, no private army, or diversified investments. The Tuigan invasion enriched this family greatly, when they were able to sell every last scrap of old and ill-fitting armor, every warped polearm, every uncollected customized weapon in their warehouses. But wild-spending ways and a complete lack of business sense—plus prolonged periods of drunkenness, which encouraged dishonest servants to abscond with thousands of gold pieces simply scooped out of the unguarded vaults—have made that once-huge fortune disappear. With the end of the revels also came the end of any Palraedinator influence on other nobles or the city as a whole—not that the Palraedinars cared a bent copper piece for that state of affairs. One can't go broke selling swords and armor in Faerûn these days, however, and the family coffers are now full again and ripe for another splurge of spending.

Lord Faurel Palraedinator (a stout and balding man who sports a magnificent white walrus mustache) and his son Lord Oblaedin (identical to him in every way except for the smaller bald spot and browner mustache) were both wounded during the war but have since recovered. They sit around under beast-head hunting trophies toasting each other's valor and retelling old tales of battle until the exasperated women of the clan storm out into the streets and go buy something—anything, so long as it's frivolous. The impish Lady Taerimel, the oldest daughter, has been tempted to hire some adventurers to stage a mock attack on Palraedinator Manor, just to see what a great fighter her father really is (she suspects his roaring stories greatly outstrip reality). She tried inviting other war veterans to visit in the hopes that they would soon expose her father's and brother's exaggerations, only to be regaled with hours upon hours of war-stories in which each survivor made it sound as if he personally had saved the Bluff. She's so bored that she's itching to go off adventuring herself and might just join anyone who asks her to—not that she has any skills to offer them other than her sharp, observant mind and access to the best equipment money can buy. Taerimel's two younger sisters, Joaloana and Drispea, are fascinated by the parade of "war heroes" that now nightly visit the house, much to her disgust; their rather tart-tongued and bony mother, Ugrava Khobronta, spends her days in a more or less permanent state of exasperation, completely ignoring the intruders as if they were beneath her notice. Surely, Taerimel feels, there's more to noble life than *this*?

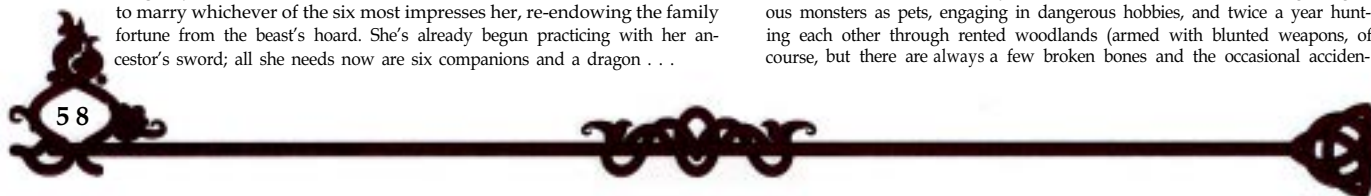


Quelemter

Motto: "Patient roots move mountains"
 Rank: Baron
 Badge: A clenched human (right-hand) fist, rising out of the cut center of an old, large brown tree stump

All Quelemters have distinctive snow-white hair from birth and tend to adopt affectations such as monocles, hookahs or improbably long and slender perfumed cigars, and extreme arrogance. Many Quelemter cousins marry each other, and more than once nieces or nephews have married aunts or uncles whose mates had died. Bloodlines of outsiders who marry into this clan seem to get swallowed up: the offspring always have the "Quelemter white" hair and other attributes (large green or amber eyes, dark brows, lithe build and grace, good looks, and a taste for dark clothing and dramatic flair). The clan is comfortably wealthy, its income rising and falling gently as losses in wicker-work and barrelmaking are offset by increasing investments in weaponmaking and in development ventures in northern Sembia and neighboring Dales.

The Quelemters have always been considered odd, often keeping dangerous monsters as pets, engaging in dangerous hobbies, and twice a year hunting each other through rented woodlands (armed with blunted weapons, of course, but there are always a few broken bones and the occasional accident).



tal fatality). They constantly hire adventurers (“that’s what they’re there for”) to go on missions for them, train them at arms, and carry out pranks for them designed to annoy rival nobles (“that’s what they’re good for”). Recently, the growing dislike other Ravenian nobles hold for this clan was reflected in the loss of the Quelemter seat on the Council of Lords. For a month the Quelemters shut themselves in their rented mansion and drank their sizable wine cellar to the dregs, shattering much furniture and shouting vengeance against those who served them with “this deadly insult.” Then they seemed to collectively shrug, ignore the minor loss of influence (which is all they truly suffered), and turn to other things—notably outrageous behavior at revels and a flurry of new investments and interest in things mercantile. The Quelemters may be a bit crazy, but no one ever got anything but grief from underestimating their collective and individual intelligence.

The house is headed by Lord Bahronstavel (“Bron”) Quelemter. His wife, Lady Faeleena, is reputed to have an eye for any male who passes within reach—and at revels, preferably all such males at the same time. The wild-spirited couple has a son and two daughters, all equally independent and daring: Lord Aervaun (noted for breakneck riding across country, which has killed a fair number of horses but—miraculously—not yet their rider); Lady Shauntene (a witty temptress who has several nobles, both young and not so young, hopelessly in love with her); and Lady Amantindra (who’s developed a taste for sponsoring adventurers to carry out daring thefts and deceptions on her behalf). In addition to the main line, there are some two dozen Quelemter aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, and the like who come and go as they please but have been known to wander as far west as Waterdeep and as far south as Zakhara.



Raphiel (sometimes rendered Raphael)

Motto: “Fly on forever”

Rank: Lord

Badge: A raven flying, black wings spread and talons clutching a silver fish, on a circle of gold

Once headed by the greatly respected Lord Regent Thomas Raphiel, whom some in Ravens Bluff hailed as “the perfect statesman,” this noble family was decimated in the recent war. Almost all of its retainers and many family members were slain, including Eron, one of the Lord Regent’s two sons, who’d just returned to the city (the other son, Lord Evro, has been traveling in distant lands for years). Before the hostilities, disease ravaged the elder Raphiel aunts and uncles, putting Lord Thomas in his grave. Perhaps a dozen branches of the family are scattered around Faerûn, but all that remain in Ravens Bluff today are 23-year-old Sir Argent and his three nieces: Lady Erendra, Lady Cliothene and Lady Paerle. They are currently guests of Lady Lauren DeVillars at Campopegasus Hall, where Argent, who fought with distinction during the war, is still recovering from the severe wounds he took during the fighting.

All six of the Raphiel country estates were ravaged and burnt during the war. Their largest estate, the eight-hundred-and-eighty-acre Sunder-side Hollow, formerly held six farms and two mansions in wooded gardens; of its over six hundred retainers, only three survived. Formerly wealthy, the family lost virtually all its holdings in the conflagration and today has only a modest fortune in vault deposits remaining. Over thirty Raphiels died fighting in more than two hundred skirmishes and battles. Of all their losses, however, the one that cuts deepest is the loss of their traditional seat on the Council of Lords, which was taken away at the end of the war. An outraged Sir Argent made an impassioned speech before the Council, asking for them to reverse this decision in recognition of his family’s long heritage of service to the city and recent losses in its cause; he argued that the size of the Council should have been increased to accommodate the new merchant representatives rather than stripping noble families of their seats—but all to no avail.

The future of the Raphiels in Ravens Bluff is uncertain. Sir Ardent has not claimed the title but demands that his absent cousin, Lord Evro Raphiel, not be deprived of his rights. Privately, Sir Ardent holds that the city has lost its honor and that dark days lie ahead. He has made it his business to trace that darkness to its very core. In the meantime, the figure of the wounded knight pleading eloquently for his family’s honor has profoundly stirred the city’s imagination. Whatever his griefs, Sir Argent remains a handsome, spirited, and eligible nobleman; most in the Bluff regard him as a hero, and many young feminine eyes are looking his way. The Raphiels lack the arrogance of many nobles; all four surviving

family members could well marry common-born partners.

There are plans (vehemently opposed by the Leorduins) to rebuild the Raphiel estates as large, efficient farms to feed the growing population of the city. Towards this goal, the Wizard Guild’s Dean of Conjuraton, Jerrod Korbandor, has put Sir Argent in touch with the hin (half-ling) elders of Luiren; the first of many immigrant halfling families have already arrived in response to his invitation and scouted out suitable locations on the Raphiel estates for villages. Eventually it should be possible for Sir Argent to build a modest family mansion . . . but if he were to die or lose heart, the family would essentially disappear from Ravens Bluff.



Skyhawk

Motto: “Dare all, see the sun, die laughing”

Rank: Exalted

Badge: An open book, in flames

This once-mighty family has fallen on hard times and is recovering in quiet seclusion on its country estate: Castle Skyhawk, a full-blown fortress that crowns Rooksroost Crag. Its grounds—one hundred and sixty acres of rugged wooded ridges and small lakes fed by racing, foaming streams—are famous for their deer, and the Skyhawks reap a tidy profit from fees paid by nobles, adventurers, and wealthy local merchants for the privilege of hunting here. Castle and grounds alike are maintained by twelve retainers and a like number of archers, all of whom are expert foresters.

The family was founded by Lord Mandrak Shafir Sky, a famous Knight of the Dove of his day. Lord Mandrak’s son, Lord Rustran, married Lady Maraeve Hawkdiragon and changed the family name to Skyhawk. Their talents were well matched; he spent much of his time traveling Faerûn making mercantile deals (becoming in the process the first Ravenian merchant millionaire) while she proved herself an able politician in safeguarding the family’s interests at home. Their eldest daughter, Lady Caroline, was born just after their marriage; more than a decade passed before her, much younger brother and sister, Lord Sephton and Lady Rapheira, were born. Lord Rustran drowned at sea when Caroline was fifteen, and a heart-broken Lady Maraeve died of a winter fever soon after. Saeress Caroline sent her two siblings to Castle Skyhawk, to be raised in complete seclusion by faithful family retainers.

Throwing herself into her work, Lady Caroline rose quickly in prestige and rank, proving her exceptional skills as an aerial lancer and archer, while most Ravenians even forgot that she had a brother and sister. In time she became a highly-decorated Knight of the Griffon, created and became commander of the Griffon Ride of Ravens Bluff, and even became something of an ambassador for the Ravenian armed forces. Then something happened: Lady Caroline Skyhawk, one of the city’s most noted knights, turned to evil for reasons that remain obscure, falling from grace and ultimately being slain by adventurers. She inherited not just her father’s fortune but her mother’s free-spending ways, so the family coffers were largely empty upon her death. A proposal to confiscate the “abandoned” Skyhawk holdings after her death came to an abrupt halt when the youthful Lord Sephton chased the survey team off Rooksroost with a crossbow!

Sephton and Rapheira still keep much to themselves, although they have reopened Rosepillars (the family mansion in the city) and are beginning to regularly attend the less rambunctious revels. They both display the quick, clear Skyhawk intellect but say little and choose their words carefully, displaying little of the boldness for which their older sister was famous. They are sensitive to insults and reminders of Lady Caroline’s fall. Lord Sephton is carefully managing Rooksroost as a hunting preserve for



the wealthy, and his sister seems to be on the verge of making the Skyhawks very wealthy indeed. For years Lady Rapheira has experimented with using mint and berries from Rooksroost to flavor cheap imported wines and so produce flavorful vintages that can be sold cheaply and widely; her first offerings, Rooksroost Redshar and Moonmint Cordial, are swiftly gaining popularity among Ravenians. Sales are growing so swiftly that Rapheira is thinking of building a workshop to distill mint and berry juices in bulk. She already keeps three glassblowers working full time to produce the “teardrop” bottles that Skyhawk vintages are already making famous.

Unknown to anyone but themselves, both brother and sister are quietly investigating the circumstances of their sister’s “fall” and death. If outside forces were responsible for the one, or if they decide the other was not justified, they will take revenge upon the parties involved, no matter who they may be nor how long it takes. They would like to have Caroline returned to life if she could be restored to her former self, and thus give her a chance to redeem her own honor, but they will not take this step until they are sure of the results.



Sinaran

Motto: “Endure in patience, for the patient endure”

Rank: Exalted

Badge: A green leaf upon a circle of sky blue

The Sinaran moon-elf clan came to the Vast in the early days of Ravens Bluff, by ship from somewhere else around the Sea of Fallen Stars. They seemed to be fleeing from something and have never spoken of their past. From the outset they adopted human ways and customs, even to the extent of living within the city. The only forest they own is a tiny courtyard at the center of their city mansion, an open-air area crammed with large old trees set around a placid central pool. They worked as merchants alongside Ravenians, establishing a family statuary business that also produced wonders of small ivory or amber carvings. They were welcomed at the revels of the fledgling Ravenaar nobility for their musicianship, fine dancing, and sense of fashions, until they came to be regarded as nobility themselves.

Lord Amaether and Lady Jhavasspeira, the founders of the family, still hold their posts, elegant and apparently ageless. They have eight children, but it is rare for all eight to be in Ravens Bluff at the same time. From eldest on down, they are Lord Emlaer, Lord Imbrel, Lady Ilithma, Lady Aeone, Lord Amaerst, Lady Sarrauda, Lord Rahlerael, and Lady Silva. All of the family are sculptors and fine-carvers except for the two youngest. Rahlerael is a falcon-tamer and sometime adventurer who enjoys training others in rock-climbing, falconry, and swordplay, while Lady Silva recently joined the staff of the *Ravens Bluff Trumpeter* as a society reporter. The most prominent member of the family is Saer Amaether’s sister-in-law (the widow of his long-dead elder brother), Lady Delshandra Sinaran, the Dean of Wizardry at Ravens Bluff’s Wizards Guild and a Knight of the Raven.



Taldavar

Motto: “See the dawn, and ride beyond”

Rank: Exalted

Badge: A leaping stag with a saddle on its back, on a field of emerald green (the pose and facing of the stag change often)

This influential family has a reputation for being level-headed, far-sighted, and dispassionate in matters of trade. Their long-standing investments in lumber, quarrying, and stonecutting serve not merely Ravens Bluff but also Tantras and the western cities of Sembia, providing a lucrative and stable source of income. That building expertise is showcased in Crownrag Hall, a sprawling, palatial mansion at the center of floral gardens surrounded by a ring of trees. A ring-road encircles the trees, and a ring of farms beyond that complete the estate, the whole encompassing some eighty acres worked by seventy-six lucky retainers and a garrison of twenty trusty guards.

A succession of wise Lords Taldavar have made this seat one of the most respected on the Council of Lords—when a Taldavar speaks, other lords listen. The current Lord Taldavar, Saer Preilock, is one of the few nobles to actually personally draft legislation, go over regulations and forms with civic officials, and continually suggest improvements in the ways things are done and the services provided by the city. A serious man with a reputation for being humorless, he relaxes in private and regales his family and retain-

ers with devastating mimicry of folk he’s dealt with in recent days. Lord Preilock’s three unmarried brothers oversee the family businesses: Lord Thaelver the quarries, Lord Emmark the stonecutting, and Lord Phoraul the timber. Thaelver (“Thael”) is thin, witty, and acerbic; Emmark (“Em”) and Ploraul (“Raul”) both stout, hard-drinking, hearty fellows fond of women and all innocent pleasures.

Preilock himself (“Prei”) is married to Lady Vaevrem Taldavar (“Vaev”—a prim lady who lets down her hair in private; restricting her laughter and playfulness to occasions when she’s with her husband or her two personal maids), and they have four daughters: Lady Belevreena (“Reena”); Lady Hamathra (“Athra”); Lady Brethna (“Na”); and Lady Lorimel (“Ri”). All are cool, golden-haired beauties who can maintain a dignified facade when it suits them but are given to eye-rolling and giggling when alone—for example, when discussing each other’s latest dance partners. They delight in revelry and dancing and have begun searching for suitable young common-born men who’ll agree to take the Taldavar name. Scoundrels need not apply, and the four ladies employ spies and informants to make very sure of the true natures of anyone they become serious about—dancing and dallying is one thing, but an interesting companion one can trust is quite another.



Therogeon

Motto: “Unlock the heart but lock the castle”

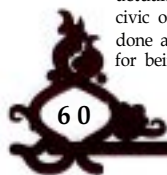
Rank: Lord

Badge: A crossed golden key (head to lower dexter, barrel to upper sinister) and silver sword (hilt to lower sinister, point to upper dexter) on a white circle

The Therogeons have always been disciplined military commanders and monster-hunters. The troops of old Lord Basaltheus Therogeon formed a good third of the first army established by Ravens Bluff and included the talents of young Lord Koran Therogeon. Lord Basaltheus abdicated the title some years ago due to chronic ill health and, although an invalid, enjoys playing the role of family curmudgeon. Lord Koran now heads the family, having risen through the ranks to become general of the city fortifications and commander of all Ravenian troops within the city walls, reporting directly to Field Marshal Blacktree. A dedicated military man, Koran has never been seen in public out of uniform. He constantly plans defensive improvements—rebuilding the Ravenian army, magically probing the loyalty of hired adventurers and mercenaries, seeking ways whereby notoriously independent bands of adventurers can be incorporated into an overall structure of command, arranging allegiances with other cities in the Vast, etc. Lord Koran is a highly-respected and much-decorated Knight of the Raven, a diligent and devoted commander whose troops love and trust him. His duties as a general and as an influential member of the Council of Lords (where he carefully champions the concerns of those whose serve under him), and the strict regimen of weapons-practice and fieldwork (running in armor, jumping on and off horseback, and scaling walls) he sets himself occupies virtually all his waking hours.

From time to time he flees to Trumpetgates, a newly purchased three-hundred-acre walled estate which boasts three keeps and a fortified mansion, a huge cattle farming operation, and a garrison of sixty highly trained, well-equipped elite warriors (a special law passed by a grateful city allows Lord Therogeon to declare the three domiciles “separate” estates for purposes of garrison size). There he indulges in his one hobby: flying, either by means of a pair of enchanted boots he owns or on the back of a secretive silver dragon befriended by his father long ago who’s been Koran’s closest friend for as long as he can remember. It’s said that Trumpetgates was stocked with cattle for this dragon’s sake, so that it could dine upon the Therogeon herd whenever it felt like it.

If there’s one area of General Therogeon’s life where he’s a failure, it’s as a parent. Not that he’s stem or cruel; his duties simply cause him to neglect his wife, Lady Ambara, and their six children: the story goes that he once asked to be introduced to one of his own daughters at a dance, not having recognized her. Instead, his aged father, ninety-three-year-old Lord Basaltheus (universally known within the family as “Aged Parent”), has essentially filled the role as the one to whom everyone comes with his or her troubles, hopes, and complaints. Lady Ambara has thoroughly immersed herself in managing the estate, the servants, and her beloved gardens. The three oldest sons—Lord Ossan, Lord Maertan, and Lord Saltheus—all show promise as warriors and have enrolled in the Ravens Bluff military, following in their





father's footsteps. Both Therogeon daughters, Lady Daereedrim ("Dree") and Lady Mororna, write sultry novels rumored to be directly based on their own romantic exploits; several have been adapted for performance at the Ravens Bluff Playhouse with great success, and steamy excerpts sold on the streets in broadsheet form regularly sell out. When not writing, the two sisters like to perform duets (one is a harpist, the other a master of the song-horn) and chase eligible young noblemen in a thoroughly romantic and reckless way. Once the Lady Dree even snatched a young man up across the saddle of a warhorse borrowed from her father's stables and galloped across the city with him to a revel—a story that has only grown in the telling. The youngest son, Lord Foraeven, has a rebellious streak and has refused to join the local army (feeling, with some cause, that his father's, grandfather's, and elder brothers' shoes would be rather hard to fill). After some prodding by old Basaltheus, the general offered to sponsor Foraeven as an adventurer or mercenary captain operating out of Battledale or Harrowdale; the young man is very excited over the prospect but wise enough to know he needs to gather some trustworthy and capable companions as henchmen and future officers and is currently making the necessary contacts.

see her as a younger Lady Lauren DeVillars, a harbinger of the new rather than a champion of the old ways. Embraced by the merchant classes, within a short time she founded her own order of knights (the Knights of the Lady) and found herself the Bluff's first Lady Mayor. Her personality has remained something of a cipher: kindly towards those in need, intelligent and capable in negotiation, scathing to those who try to deceive her, but always reserved. Even during the height of the war she would sometimes withdraw to her country estate for days at a time to immerse herself in solitude, a luxury she can no longer afford. She is much loved by those who know her but has no close friends, relaxing only among her knights. She has taken no husband and has no known suitor or even habitual escort. She is well-liked by the gnomes, but some of them say that "she always seems to be searching around Clearsprings for something—she's going odd, like her father" and Lady Lauren once remarked, "She doesn't look, act, or speak like either Baerdrim or Claethra; she hardly seems like a Thoden at all." That she has long-term plans for the Bluff no one doubts, but so far she has taken no one into her confidence.



Thoden

Motto: "My hand holds my heart, honor, and the future of my city"

Rank: Baron

Badge: An upright human right hand (sometimes in black silhouette) with fingers and thumb spread, and an irregular white star or spark floating above each fingertip, on a circle of royal blue

This noble house had been prominent in Ravens Bluff's early days but gradually declined in prestige and numbers until its holdings shrank to one estate—Clearsprings, a manor set on forty wooded acres and staffed by thirty retainers and twenty guards. For years the family's sole representative was the eccentric bachelor mage Baerdrim, who preferred adventurers as friends over his fellow nobility (or "those grasping, thieving dogs," as he liked to call them). Baerdrim eventually wed an apprentice, Claethra Snowdrael, but she left him with their infant daughter after his increasing eccentricity led her to fear for her life—among other things, Baerdrim dismissed most of their living retainers and employed animated skeletons to dress and tend both Claethra and little Amber Lynn. Baerdrim dwelt entirely alone in seeming happiness for some years, slowly descending into madness. In his final days, his animated skeletons became free-willed killers who strangled or stabbed folk for miles, until the gnomes who dwelt nearby appealed to other Ravenian nobles for armed aid against the perils coming out of Clearsprings.

In the end, adventurers who'd been Baerdrim's friends (and often his guests) fought their way through a multitude of monsters to slay the mad wizard in his favorite chair. Although a druid, Lady Debi Griffin, laid claim to the Thoden lands (a large part of which had been seized from her own family's holdings), the lands and title passed to Baerdrim's brother, Jaer Thoden. Eventually Jaer and Debi married, much to the surprise of all who knew them, only to have the union end in tragedy a few years later when both were found dead, each apparently having murdered the other. In the absence of any heir stepping forward the line would have been declared extinct, had not one of the adventurers who had been Baerdrim's friend gone to retrieve Lady Thoden and her daughter from Tsurlagol. He found that Claethra had been devoured by wolves a winter earlier and that Amber Lynn was now a quiet, moody young lady working as a milkmaid. She was brought back to Clearsprings (long since cleared of monsters, save for a few skeletons said to still be lurking in its woods and secret passages of the manor) and installed as a Ravenian noble. From the first she enjoyed the support of the gnome community, who wanted what they'd once enjoyed under Baerdrim: a lord who could distribute their wares (chiefly well-made coffers, furniture, hinges, doors, and windows) to the shops of Ravens Bluff, taking a percentage of the profits and saving them the costs of maintaining and staffing a shop or business.

Lady Amber Lynn Thoden settled in quietly and lived in relative seclusion, only gradually attending more revels and Ravenian functions and building up the same sorts of friendships with adventurers as her father had enjoyed. She was obviously both a keen observer of Ravenian society and a saver of every last copper, living as frugally as before and saving large sums which she generously donated to the city in its hour of crisis (see the "Local History" chapter). She stepped forward to help Ravens Bluff when war threatened, speaking and acting capably in public for the first time. Many



Velgath

Motto: "Chase brilliance; win wisdom"

Rank: Baron

Badge: A right-hand gauntlet, fingers spread and reaching to the upper sinister (wrist at lower dexter), limed in gray on a scarlet field

A cautious noble house with investments in textiles and in bridgebuilding, the Velgaths have always been followers, not leaders, who owe their noble status to supporting the right people at the right times. They've never had much influence or been prominent in anything and doesn't seem to want to ever stand in the forefront ("heads that stick above the crowd get chopped off" is a favorite old Velgath saying). They host revels, give money to appropriate causes, and support others when their instinct tells them they're backing a winner but always remain in the background, directing their passions into collecting books or breeding and betting on horses. Velgaths love the texture of silk and the color purple and always include some item of that material and hue among their outfit (that's as close to an eccentricity or "mark" that the family ever gets).

The two eldest sons of the house, Lord Theldin and Lord Paeter, were both killed in the war. Their mother Lady Phaerilla took to her bed and hasn't left it since, grieving day and night in shuttered gloom. Her despairing husband Lord Gharraen, the head of the house, has begun to set up mistresses in various corners of the city and to even openly escort some of them to revels. The two surviving Velgath children, Lord Esmer and Lady Shildra, seem to wear the sadness of their mother like a heavy cloak. Esmer initially turned very serious and stopped hunting, racing about on horses, or going to revels—but when a friend suggested turning the family horsebreeding enthusiasm into a commercial stables Esmer plunged into the enterprise with an almost fanatical drive and now talks about nothing else, whatever the circumstances. Shildra, for her part, has sought solace in religion but apparently not found it yet. She has become a regular at Cult of the Raven meetings and has visited all of the Ravenian temples once or twice, even the recently opened shrine to the drow goddess Eilistraee (see the end of the "Temples & Religion" chapter). Oddly enough, the Silent Network (hired by the Lord Chancellor to gather intelligence on which nobles were acting suspiciously and might have ties to the missing Warlord Myrkysa Jan) reported that someone—or rather, an organization of someones—is spying on Ugrava Shildra Velgath but not contacting her or any of the other Velgaths. Who, and why, remain mysteries as of this writing.



Yarvandar

Motto: "My own hand is my shield"

Rank: Baron

Badge: A black, long-clawed-toes upright pawprint of a bear, on a white circle

Another of the "Aloof lords" who aren't allied with the city, Lord Yarvandar has always been a polite but firm law unto himself. He's able to do so partly because the family seat, Vandarmere, is so self-sufficient. This wooded two-hundred-and-forty-acre estate consists of a fortified manor house built between two crags (each honeycombed with cellars, secret tunnels, and defensive strongholds). The manor overlooks a private lake



stocked with fish, beyond which lies the farm that grows mixed food crops for seventy-four retainers and a garrison of seventy-five armsmen (built back up from a force formerly one hundred and twenty strong that was decimated during the war). House Yarvandar keeps to itself, hunting game in its lands, rearing pigs, sheep, and goats for food and patrolling Vandarmere's borders to keep out poachers and trespassers. This gives the Yarvanders no influence in Ravenian affairs whatsoever, but it seems to be privacy rather than influence that they seek. Lord Yarvandar has been known to turn back even mages with the aid of a wild magic field centered on a twisted piece of tom metal (said by some to be a relic brought out of Myth Drannor) that he carries around with him, and intruders are simply shot full of sleep-poisoned darts from hand crossbows, only to be awoken later in some uncomfortable and inconvenient spot far away (e.g., on an island five miles out in the Dragon Reach, atop the highest spire of some Civil Temple, etc.). Official Ravenian patrols, groups of enterprising thieves, bands of foolhardy adventurers—all met with the same ignominy, until finally people quit trying to find out why the Yarvanders guarded their privacy so carefully and just left them alone.

The Yarvanders have always been mysteriously wealthy, suspected of being smugglers, slavers, or harborers of outlaws. From time to time they'll hire adventurers to escort closed-wagon caravans from various locations in the Vast to their walled manor in Ravens Bluff, but no one could ever discover who they were helping to move around unseen (one adventurer who tried to peek was struck blind for his pains before he could see anything). Special agents of the City Watch, neighboring nobles, and even the Vulture (a.k.a. the Regent of the Exchequer Vernon Condor) kept a close-skulking watch of the Yarvanders and found no shred of evidence to suggest smuggling, kidnapping, or unlawfulness of any kind.

It's only in recent days that the emergence of a shrine to Eilistraee with clergy and materials that came in wagons whose rental was traced to Emmelt Yarvandar has made the source of this family's prosperity clear. The crags upon which the house of Yartowers sits contain tunnels that link with the Underdark—in particular, with lightless regions controlled by drow who worship the Dark Dancer and desire a return to the surface world. The family mansion in Ravens Bluff, Yarnar Close, provided drow who arrived in the closed wagons a chance to see, hear, and watch human society (through nightly rooftop, cellar, and sewer skulkings), and Vandarmere itself gave the drow room to dance to the goddess under the stars in relaxed safety. In return, the drow gave the Yarvanders cartloads of succulent mushrooms, glowing fungi of the Underdark prized by alchemists, and quantities of salt-sweet black drow wine to sell, splitting the profits. The prudent Yarvanders used Ravens Bluff merely as an outpost and not a market, so the goods were sold in Sembia, Telflamm, and Turmish with no traceable home port of origin.

Since these revelations, Yarnar Close has been attacked twice by those seeking to drive these "drow lovers" from the city. There have been calls upon all four Councils (the Lords, Merchants, Advisory, and Knights) to mount a concerted military expedition on Vandarmere to destroy the mansion and shut the tunnels forever. So far, nothing of the sort has been agreed upon, and the Yarvanders have ignored demands to explain themselves, let alone give up their city properties or open their lands for inspection.

House Yarvandar is headed by Lord Thoront and Lady Baelmaera Yarvandar, a tall and striking couple. Thoront's hair is turning silver, but his lady's dark-eyed and buxom beauty seems untouched by the passing years; now, of course, there are the inevitable rumors that this is due to "dark drow magic." They have three sons and two daughters—Lord Astiger, Lord Emmelt, Lady Emjhelia, Lord Dreir, and Lady Lamuthra—all graceful, tall, and thin. They favor dark clothing, never go about unarmed, and have demonstrated mastery of the longsword and rapier on many occasions. Since the drow rumors began, Lord and Lady Yarvandar have stopped attending revels, but their children have continued to make appearances (pleasantly refusing to utter a word about dark elves), although both Astiger and Emmelt have been forced to fight duels with young bucks who they felt questioned them too rudely.



Zorden

Motto: "Steadfast in the storm"

Rank: Baron

Badge: A silver anchor, touched at its top by a red lightning bolt zigzagging from the upper dexter, on a blue circle

This nautical family has always been involved in fishing and merchant shipping. In recent years their fleet has come to number over sixty vessels, most of them operating out of Sembian ports (as well as Spandeliyon and Tsurlagol). Increasingly the Zordens have worn the fashions of foreign ports, lived almost exclusively aboard their ships, and had less and less of a presence in Ravens Bluff. They recently reaped the "reward" for this drift away from Ravenian life by being stripped of their hereditary seat on the Council of Lords (one of the four seats handed to "Merchant Lords"). Lord Naurostor Zorden's fury on hearing the news was met with shrugs and some sly reminders of the long-term rumors of Zorden involvement with the pirates of the Sea of Fallen Stars. He turned on his heel, somehow neglecting to make his latest tax payment, and left Ravens Bluff before the sun set. Civic officials trying to contact the Zordens since have been met with armed and hostile crews aboard Zorden ships and a similarly unfriendly (and fully armed!) staff of servants at the Zorden mansion. Written inquiries have been answered by the terse message: *"House Zorden will do business only with the lawful government of Ravens Bluff—which is, and shall forever be, a government whose policies are solely determined by a Council of Lords having thirteen seats—no more and no less—held by those of the blood of DeVillars, Fleetwood, Gultoss, Leorduin, Moonglow, Moorland, Norwood, Paerindon, Quelemter, Raphiel, Taldavaar, Therogeon, and Zorden. All impostors who presume to speak for the city are hereby urged to surrender themselves to the lawful authority of Lord Naurostor Zorden, incumbent member of the Council of Lords, for his decreed justice."*

When an attempt was made to magically compel the servants at Zorden Hall to stand aside and allow civic officials to enter, the spell was twisted into an unintended effect: the teleportation of a pile of rotting fishguts out of nowhere onto the head of the spellcaster. This effect has recurred each time magic has been cast into or at the property, or at any person within or on the grounds of the property; obviously part of some sort of magical ward that could only have been laid by a very powerful archmage. The present whereabouts of Lord Naurostor Zorden, his wife Lady Everdeira, his heir Lord Maelkhom, and his eldest daughter Lady Neveira are unknown; they are all presumed to be aboard ships at various locales around the Sea of Fallen Stars or at houses in Sembian port cities. The two youngest Zordens (Lord Nornmael and Lady Lalrauvane), however, have been glimpsed recently in the streets of Ravens Bluff by night, although they have not attended any revels or public functions. The Watch very much desires to speak with them, but so far they have remained elusive, as has their reason for remaining within the city. They may have broken with their father and taken on new identities, or they may be undertaking some mission on his behalf that bodes no good for the merchant lords and current city administration—only time will tell.



The Authorities

The government of Ravens Bluff has evolved into a machine both cumbersome and complex. Lack of stable central leadership resulted in a civic body that was haphazardly organized at best. For decades, the city was administered by Lord Protectors and Lord Treasurers appointed by the nobles and answerable only to them. Most of these men were venal puppets less interested in good governance than in pleasing their masters while simultaneously siphoning off the maximum amount safe from the public coffers. This changed when adventurer Charles Oliver O'Kane (LN hm F15) became the city's first Lord Mayor by winning the Championship Games sponsored by Lady Lauren DeVillars in the Year of the Gate (1341 DR). His strategy was to divide city functions into three departments and place capable administrators over each. He placated the nobles by asking them to form a Council of Lords to discuss and approve all legislation for the city. Retired officials and lesser nobles formed a prestigious but powerless Advisory Council, "taking full advantage of available experience and wisdom," in O'Kane's diplomatic words. Two other advisory bodies have arisen since, one for religious matters (the Clerical Circle) and, more recently, one to address issues of the arcane (the Ministry of Art). The foundations of modern government were laid.

Given the heritage of independence verging on chaos; suspicion from nobles unwilling to surrender traditional rights; adventurers chaffing at restriction (as adventurers will); class friction between nobles, merchants, and laborers; and a volatile mix of citizens and visitors flocking from around the Realms (and beyond), it was inevitable that the government would have its problems. Most controversies arise from disputes between factions—with each civic regency, lord, and advisory body jealously guarding its powers and prerogatives. Any encroachment on these results in quarrels and conflict, often bitter, though the average citizens sees or hears little of these disputes. It's a tribute to O'Kane's skill as a leader that even when fists are pounding and voices are shouting behind closed doors, the bureaucracy he created continues to smoothly run those parts of the government that interact with the public. The current Mayor has continued O'Kane's policy of private debate and quick public votes on important matters.

The Mayor

The leader of the city government and its most visible representative, the Lady Mayor is responsible for the daily decrees of running the city, presenting policy options to all three Councils (the Council of Lords, the Advisory Council, and the newly created Merchants Council), seeing to the organization involved in the city's defense, formulating and promoting foreign policy, and many other things besides. Though the Council of Lords and the Merchants Council between them share the authority to make laws, it's the mayor who enforces those laws and there's much a judicious mayor can do without direct Council approval—creating most city policy by decree and the wording of her public pronouncements and unofficial remarks at reveals; the trick to the office is to do this without having more than one of the major power groups out for your blood at any one time.

This office was created and defined by Charles Oliver O'Kane, who filled it for nearly thirty years until being recently unseated by Lady Amber Lynn Thoden. To prevent the mayor having complete control of government, the mayoralty has no say in who sits in any Council seat. However, all the highest civic officers are chosen by the Mayor, and O'Kane saw to it that most were his friends as well as being capable. A number of these people either died or disappeared in the recent war—a suspiciously high number, some say, claiming conspiracy at work. Given the shocks the city has received this year, even those glad to see a new mayor in office are relieved that Lady Thoden has made few changes as yet beyond filling a few vacancies, allowing the city to feel a welcome sense of "normalcy." It's too early to say if she'll continue this hands-off policy once she's fully settled into the office, but it seems likely that she'll follow the age-old politician's prerogative of removing at least some of O'Kane's associates and replacing them with "her people"—associates she trusts and who owe her personal loyalty.

The Deputy Mayor

The Council of Lords has the sole right to appoint the Deputy Mayor (a check against the influence of the Lord or Lady Mayor). The Deputy Mayor fills in for the Mayor when the latter is indisposed as well as managing the Mayor's day-to-day schedule. He or she receives and analyzes reports from the various departments, presenting the Mayor with a succinct account of how things are going. He or she also runs the city's intelligence network.

For years this office was held by Howard Holiday, O'Kane's right-hand-man, but like O'Kane's real arm Holiday has gone missing. Rumor has it that Holiday never returned from a secret mission he undertook shortly before the war, having heard disquieting news from his chief spy, the doppelganger Chaney, that he felt he should investigate in person. The assumption is that he somehow caught wind of Myrkysa Jelan's mustering of a humanoid army and had the bad luck to fall into her hands; certainly she would have found his extensive knowledge of the city's secrets of extreme interest. No confirmation of Holiday's fate turned up in the war's wake; officially he is listed as missing but the majority of his fellow citizens presume he is dead, and he is greatly mourned. Curiously enough, rumor has it that Chaney has recently returned to the city but has not reported in, instead avoiding everyone associated with the mayor's office with a skill that borders on desperation. The exact reason for this is of course unknown, but the topic remains the subject of intense speculation among the few who are aware of it.

Holiday's replacement, the charismatic elf Belanor Fenmarel, became Acting Mayor upon Charles Oliver O'Kane's kidnapping. Even in death he remains a figure of great controversy: his enemies claim he was put into office by the very forces that arranged for O'Kane's disappearance, in order to undermine the war effort from within. Belanor's supporters claim just as loudly that he was framed, an innocent victim of those forces who wanted to get rid of O'Kane and replace him with a new mayor (although most believe that Lady Amber was not the intended beneficiary of their plot but the guileless and more easily manipulated Lord Charles Blacktree). Belanor died in prison before he could either clear his name or be proven guilty beyond any shadow of a doubt—silenced to keep him from telling all he knew, many believe. He thus re-





mains a mystery—was he a traitor to the city, the chief confidant of the woman who hurled an army against Ravens Bluff, or a tragic figure who lost his good name and died in disgrace for crimes he never committed?

In the wake of these events, the office of Deputy Mayor is currently vacant. Just to make matters more interesting, the Merchant Council has recently announced that it will take over the right of appointment to this office. When the Council of Lords demurred, the Merchant Council declared they would appoint its own Deputy Mayor if the Council of Lords doesn't agree to give up its right of appointment. At this point the Lady Mayor, faced with the prospect of having to work with not one but two Deputy Mayors, stepped into the breach and managed to get both sides to table the matter, deferring any decision until she can refer the matter to the Advisory Council. All Ravenians who take an interest in things political are awaiting with interest the expected full-blooded battle within and between the Council of Lords and the Merchants Council over who will be appointed to this key position—and who will do the appointing.

The Council of Lords

The Council of Lords is the oldest surviving policymaking body of Ravens Bluff. Its members are drawn from the ranks of nobles who have agreed to accept the city's authority and received its guarantees of protection. In addition, the Lord Chancellor, the Lord Magistrate, the Lord Marshal, the Lord Speaker of the Advisory Council, the Chief Prelate, and the First Seat of the Ministry of Art are all Council members. With its newly-created "sister" assembly, the Merchants Council, the Council of Lords makes all law for the city and has the unlimited right of debate on public questions (Lady Katharine Moorland in an unguarded mood once characterized it as "a right to unlimited debate" so far as some of the windier lords were concerned). In practice, the Council works out all disputes in private session; public debate is brief and votes are quickly taken. Council members vie with each other and make deals when necessary, as none wants to lose position or wealth through the ongoing business of running the city.

The Council of Lords elects a Lord Speaker from among its permanent members (one representative from each of the thirty-two aligned noble houses). Formerly the Mayor or Deputy Mayor set the agenda for Council meetings, spoke first in both public and private debates, and cast a tie-breaking vote where necessary, with the Lord Speaker presiding when neither O'Kane nor his current Deputy could attend. Lady Thoden has altered this system, not having time to administer both the Council of Lords and the Merchants Council in this fashion and being unwilling to associate herself with one at the other's expense. Therefore the Lady Mayor now invites the Council to consider specific items but the Lady Speaker sets the actual agenda and presides at all meetings. The Lady Mayor may attend any session without invitation and may exercise the right to speak first or break ties if she wishes, but otherwise these rights devolve to the Lady Speaker. The current Lady Speaker, Lady Katharine Marie Moorland Blacktree, is enormously popular with the Council and has just been elected to a seventh consecutive term. She takes her duties seriously and carries them out conscientiously and well.

In addition to the six civic officers listed above there are thirty-two hereditary members (who traditionally can only be deprived of their seat by a unanimous vote of all the other nobles—a very rare thing). Most of these seats are filled by the head of the house or a responsible member of his or her immediate family; some are noted for the rarity with which they attend Council sessions. Recently four noble families lost their seats, displaced by an unheard-of occurrence: the Lady Mayor decreed that, given the current emergency (a threatened revolt by the combined Merchant Houses), she had the right to reform the Council. With the unanimous support of the six civic Councilors and a majority vote of the other lords, she then deprived the Paerindon, Quelemter, Raphiel, and Zorden families of their seats and gave those forcibly vacated seats to four Merchant Lords. That her actions avoided a civil war on the heels of Warlord Jelan's invasion was small consolation to the deposed nobles, who feel deeply betrayed by their own city after having suffered and died in its defense. Many of their fellow nobles agree and are beginning to shift monies elsewhere, considering Ravens Bluff no longer the friendly and suitable home for their children and grandchildren that it once was.

The four Merchant Lords who benefited by this event, each of whom was already a life Lord as well as a very wealthy man, are Tomalass Bloun-

trae, Khauldan Risimmer, Subrask Swylythe, and Yustable Tarthree. None belong to one of the city's sixteen recognized Merchant Houses, and they are forbidden to join or knowingly invest in one so long as they hold their Council seat (that is, they cannot purchase shares or ownership in a house or become partners of any merchant house in a trade deal; they can of course still buy goods from a merchant house like any other citizen or visitor to the city). No Merchant Lord can accept a seat on either of the other Councils without forfeiting his membership on the Council of Lords. Each is described in some detail below:

Tomalass Blountrae (LN hm F2) is a thoughtful, even-tempered, calculating man who can readily see the probabilities of profit and of loss in any situation. He buys cargo space on ships belonging to others, arranges for trades of one cargo material for another, and generally contrives to get goods to wherever there are shortages and demand. He always gets the highest possible price and never deals in perishables. Blountrae has been quietly trading like this for two decades now, amassing a vast fortune which he has been using to quietly try to dominate two markets: sail- and canvas-making in the Dragon Reach and the purchase of all possible lands along the roads around Tantras (most of which are being worked by tenant farmers). Some folk suspect Tantras is the true center of Blountrae's interest and future plans—and there are already mutterings, even among his fellow merchants, that he should be removed from the Council because of this.

Khauldan Risimmer (LN hm F6) looks more like a down-on-his-luck veteran mercenary warrior than a power among merchants. His hair is an unruly thicket of gray and white; his nose is large, red, and many-warted; his hands are like large red rakes, the joints knotted by many old and ill-healed breaks; and his customary expression is somewhere between sullen and grim. He looks like he's already seen too many battles and expects to die in one any day.

Khauldan can't abide people who weasel out of obligations or into money by using the letter of the law and not its spirit, or who insist others follow those rules that benefit them personally and conveniently ignore those that don't. He is popular among the common working folk of the city, second only among his fellow Merchant Lords to Yustable Tarthree (see below), because he insists on fairness and adherence to simple bargains. He stands for dumb honesty, and folk love him for it.

His fortune has been built by driving hard bargains (usually for his procurement of rare or valuable goods and delivery of them to a certain place or person at a particular time) and forcing the more slippery of merchant-kind operating around the Reach to honor their ends of the deals—even (or especially) when they never had any intention of doing so. In a deal, Khauldan specifies penalties for non-performance on both sides; if someone fails him, he collects—with the aid of his organization of nondescript, anonymous old ex-mercenaries: men too old to win open battles but not too old to follow orders or strike from an alley or be fiercely loyal to the man who's kept them from a beggar's death of winter cold and starvation. Khauldan can muster seventy armed and capable trusty men in an hour—some may be missing a limb or an eye, and most will lack beauty or refinement, but all can operate with a teamwork many thieving guilds of Refeürn would envy . . . and like their leader, they never give up. One thief fled to the Utter East with his loot, only to have a pair of old men rise up out of the shadows one night a dozen years later. They politely but firmly demanded the missing funds or his immediate payment of the penalties: his right eye, left hand, right foot, and tongue. The thief paid on the spot and the men thanked him and vanished, bothering him no more.

As a Councilor, Khauldan is deeply suspicious of both fast-rising merchants and hidebound nobles, both of whom may want to get their own way more than they want to see Ravens Bluff best served. In his simple but worldly wise way, he looks for treachery, dishonesty, and scheming that may lurk in every proposal, every debate, and every vote. Sometimes he calls on his cronies to investigate a fellow Councilor, or a noble, or a merchant; when this may prove perilous duty indeed, he gets one of his trusties to hire adventurers (advancing the money himself), so that little can be traced back to him. Those who think he'd better serve Ravens Bluff as a silent corpse than an alert Councilor are warned that for ten years Khauldan has purchased magic items useful in battle and that would-be assassins tend to show up very, very dead, usually chopped into unrecognizably small pieces.

Subrask Swylythe (NE hm T7) is the Bluff's foremost small-loans dealer, and as such he is vitally necessary to (and deeply hated by) thou-



sands of citizens. A small, lithe man with blond hair now turning white, he habitually wears a crooked smile and has startlingly dark and bushy black eyebrows with glistening black eyes beneath them that seem to see everything and miss nothing. Swlylthe maintains his own network of spies and informers and always knows when big shipments have arrived on the docks or when particular merchants are in trouble. Soft-spoken and silent in his movements, he's always in the right place at the crucial moment, drifting up to the elbow of someone who needs a lot of coin, fast, and murmuring, "Perhaps, friend, we can do business this day?" That sentence has found its way into a dozen Ravenian jokes, mocked by minstrels city-wide . . . but it is a sentence burned into the memories of all too many rueful Ravenian merchants.

Swlylthe invests in the misfortunes of others, and he always does well by it. Whenever one of his debtors dies or spends his last copper, his spies seem to know about it before anyone else and descend in gangs to seize and carry off all that unfortunate's remaining belongings as "forfeit." He seems able to call forth huge sums of coinage out of empty air—*pockets or pouches of holding*, perhaps? Those who have tried to kidnap or menace him, or trail him to wherever he keeps his money, simply disappear. Naturally, tales tend to collect around anyone with a reputation like that: one swordsman insisted he saw Swlylthe, in a tavern cellar, approach "a grotesque floating ball, with eyestalks, like those 'beholders' things the bards are always babbling about. One big red eye in the middle and a mouth that could swallow a man whole, and a stink about it like a slaughterhouse midden. Mold grew on it, and tatters of stinking flesh hung from it, and it was dead . . . yet it moved, and opened that mouth for him, and vomited forth a river of shiny coins, backing away and letting him gather up every last copper!"

Yustable Tarthree (CG hm W4) is an always-babbling, agile man who's forever laughing and greeting folk. He's everyone's friend (even remembering their likes and dislikes and jokes they'll probably enjoy) and never forgets a face or a name. Once seen, it's tamped down forever in a mind as vast and as quick as a winter gale howling across Anauroch. If he ever applied himself to study, Yustable could probably rank among the best sages or most powerful mages of Faerûn or stand as a veritable prince among heralds, engineers, or philosophers—anywhere that wits can master, he could choose to excel. Instead, he chooses to juggle a thousand unfolding situations, making a small purchase here, a large sale there, and so on, in a vast and endless patchwork that does nothing overly dramatic but always nets him a few coins more at the end of each day than when he started.

Tarthree knows perhaps half of the Bluff's 40,000 or so folk personally—and in a tenday he'll probably meet about a quarter of those folk he does know, dropping them little gifts, doing errands for them (even toothless beggars and aged crones who can never hope to repay him with anything), and making them feel noticed and important. Totally lacking in either malice or pride, he's trusted with more secrets and imprudent opinions and dreams than any dozen priestly confessors and thus can gauge the mood and desires of the common Ravenian citizens better than any other Councillor. He irritates some of the nobles beyond belief, but most of them can't help but like him—and they're beginning to realize just how useful and knowledgeable this little man truly is.

The Lord Chancellor

The Lord Chancellor has two distinct yet related responsibilities. First and foremost, he manages the departments concerned with the city's economic life. These departments include the harbor and customs, the treasury, and the guilds. The Lord Chancellor's subordinates, called Regents because they act in his stead, are carefully chosen so as to need little supervision. His second responsibility is to handle the city's foreign policy. A mercantile power such as Ravens Bluff relies heavily on strong ties to nearby cities (mainly in Sembia), and the Chancellor is kept busy in negotiations and disputes. He appoints ambassadors to serve where good relations are most important but handles all of the most critical issues himself. His results are frequently so beneficial to the city that the Councils often approves treaties he's negotiated with little debate.

With these responsibilities, the Lord Chancellor is one of the most powerful men in the city. Often the Council of Lords has debated over whether one man should have this much power, but Mayor O'Kane always managed to keep the post intact. It will be interesting to see what the Merchants Council does, or tries to do, to this office. The current Chancellor's record argues powerfully in favor of retaining all of the powers and latitude for de-

cision-making that has developed in the Chancellery over the years. Arvin Kothonos (LN hm F9) is so respected a man that he was the unanimous choice for Acting Mayor during O'Kane's captivity and Belanor Fenmarel's imprisonment—and the only citizen to be nominated for rightful candidacy to the mayoralty by both the nobles and the merchants (he refused to stand for election). A skilled, tough negotiator who's known as a ruthless businessman (those who oppose him invariably run afoul of small accidents until they think better of it), Kothonos is careful to always appear completely honest and respectable; he never jokes or engages in revelry.

Brown-eyed, overweight, and graying, the Lord Chancellor carries himself with dignified confidence, always dressing expensively, conservatively, and immaculately. In crises he turns to the good judgment of his devoted wife Charlotte and to whatever his *medallion of ESP* can learn. In his younger days, Kothonos was a spectacularly successful pirate captain (operating under the name "Garnet Smithson"); he was smart enough to quit while he was ahead and use his booty to buy his way into respectability, rising first to head the Merchants Guild and then to his current position. Now his past is a secret known only to his wife and children. The reason for this care is that there's still a reward out for Captain Smithson, although after all these years it would be extraordinary bad luck for anyone to recognize this aging pudgy statesman as the young, slim, bearded, daring, and dreaded Captain Smithson. The few times any member of his old crew have shown up in Ravens Bluff Kothonos has had them quickly killed in apparently random knifings before they had any chance to discover his secret. To Charlotte, however, he's still the dashing young pirate who protected her when the ship she was on was captured by his crew, wooed her, and gallantly reunited her with her family—only to return in his new respectability a few months later to claim her hand.

Arvin and Charlotte have two children. The elder, a ne'er-do-well son named Biphester ("Biff") left Ravens Bluff some months ago to travel Faerûn seeking his fortune (in fact, he's followed in his father's footsteps and run off to sea, where he's assembling his very first pirate fleet under the name "Captain Fish"). Their daughter—the quiet, observant, studious, flame-haired Miriam—rarely speaks but is perhaps the most forceful personality in the family and has increasingly become her father's confidante. In addition to being a loving father and husband and the most successful expatriate in the Bluff, Chancellor Kothonos recently became the sole owner of the Blue Star Trading Company, a luxury-goods shipping company with ex-





tensive Sembian and Cormyrean contacts. If it were collectively owned, it would be considered one of the richest (though not the largest) Merchant Houses of Ravens Bluff; as it is, the extent of his wealth is just another of his little secrets. Kothonos hates open confrontation and strife, preferring the quietly murmured exchange of words between folk of power—one of whom should always be himself.

Regent of City Works

The least romantic but most necessary of all civic officials, this Regent is responsible for the city's sanitation system and water supply; its municipal records of births, deaths, indentures, purchases, loans, mortgages, tenancy agreements, treaties, and property deeds; its cemetery; its heraldry office (the Regent fulfills the heraldic office of "The Ravencoat" and is entitled to the maroon-and-gold, black-wing-adorned tabard and trumpet that go along with that post); and its building inspection service (which for decades picked up after the senile but meddlesome former building inspector of the city, Ambassador Carrague).

For years this office was ably (if corruptly) filled by Bundrigo Dalastarra, a sly, jovial halfling who ran the largest, slickest system of bribes, kickbacks, and informants Ravens Bluff has ever known. The officials under him had to work hard to cover all the duties of this busy Regency, but Bundrigo compensated them well (largely, some sources say, with pirate wealth) until his untimely death during the war. Bundrigo never went near any fighting—but a mysterious someone brought a very private war to him and left him a smoldering pile of ashes after hacking him repeatedly with a heavy blade. Since almost all of his closest aids and associates were implicated in the following scandal as crime after crime came to light, Lord Chancellor Kothonos had some difficulty finding anyone experienced within the department untouched by the scandal. He finally appointed the hitherto low-ranking and unknown but extremely capable Lastraeya Indomurr (CG hf F9) to the Regency on an Acting basis. This dusky-skinned Chessentan former tavern dancer is not only wholly fair and honest, she's one of the fastest and hardest workers Ravens Bluff has ever seen. It's said her tongue never sleeps, and she's shaken up the staff of this Regency, swept all possibility of bribery and cozy deals out the doors, and set to work with such vigor that she's actually impressed both Kothonos and Lady Mayor Thoden, who recently confirmed her in office.

Regent of The Exchequer

The Regent of the Exchequer has several major responsibilities. He supervises the city mint and regulates the amount of precious metal in each coin (gold, silver, copper, and platinum), fights counterfeiting and coin clipping, collects taxes, licenses banks and moneylenders, and sees to the safety of civic strongrooms and the treasury. His department includes an ample number of clerks and collectors to enable it to fulfill its responsibilities. In addition, he has his own police, the Treasury Defense Force. Its duties sometimes overlap with those of the City Watch, but the Watch usually defer to the T.D.F. in such cases—nobody wants to wind up on the bad side of the "taxmen," as they're colloquially called. Treasury Defense Force officers carry a scalloped gold coin as their badge of office and are often armed with hand crossbows (dart guns) and belts of sleep-poisoned darts.

The Regent of the Exchequer is Vernon Condor, universally known as "The Vulture" (LN hm W12). He looks as birdlike as his name suggests, with a long, beaky nose, black eyes under arched brows, and a completely bald head. A perennially suspicious man who can almost feel financial deceit, Condor has magic items in plenty concealed about his person to defend himself against would-be kidnapers and murderers. His diligence (in concert with the powers granted him to confiscate property belonging to tax evaders, until they make proper payment in full) has made him a feared and hated man among the dishonest—but the honest and hard-pressed find some comfort in the fact that with The Vulture in office, every copper paid in goes where it's supposed to and not into someone's pocket.

Recently The Vulture has become concerned over the Tempest Rose Merchant House's coinage of their own money—especially since their coins (called "roses") are proving more popular than the coin of the realm (called "ravens" from the namesake bird which appears on its front; the back depicts a merchant ship). The chief reason for this is that their gold is alloyed with copper to make a harder metal that resists wear (and shaving) better than the almost-pure gold of the "ravens." The Regent, wary of tangling with a force like Lady Lauren DeVillars (a woman whose acumen he

much respects), is pondering his options: to outlaw the private coinage, change the composition of the official coins, or simply require all official business to be conducted in "ravens." Decisions, decisions . . .

Regent of Guilds

This official is the liaison between the many guilds in Ravens Bluff and the government. It is, therefore, one of the hardest, busiest jobs in the city. Some may dismiss that claim, picturing an endless round of revels and wine-soaked backroom meetings, but in truth this Regent's life often most resembles the frantic scramblings of a kitten trying to cross a street choked with hurrying carts and folk afoot. Various government initiatives to investigate, regulate, or curb the guilds clash constantly with deliberate attempts by the guilds to all act up at once and therefore escape prosecution or put a lot of pressure on the investigators. It is simply second nature for merchants to circumvent, ignore, or outright break the existing laws, rules, and regulations so as to conduct business freely in the manner they see fit—and, of course, to frustrate all government initiatives as a matter of principle. This Regent's main weapon is the threat to revoke, suspend, or "review" any guild charter (i.e., tinker with its details—the most dreaded threat he can bring to bear on a recalcitrant guild).

The current Regent of Guilds is "Salty" Emmer Sauphertaus (NG hm F3), an overweight, wheezing, scuttling ex-sailor who darts about like a nibbling ship's rat, worrying at first this problem and then at that one, always on the move, never able to get anything finished, and always late, running hard, and under pressure. Most individuals would snap under the stress of this posting or give up and merely try to maintain a facade of competence while letting the guilds do as they please (the exact solution eventually adopted by all of Sauphertaus's predecessors), pocketing their bribes all the while. Salty Sauphertaus, however, realized early on what the guilds were up to, deliberately trying to bury him in paperwork, conflicting meetings and demands, and must-have-without-delay decisions and decrees. Now he uses the maneuvers of the guilds back against them, much to their dismay, by always being "too busy, too busy" to render a decision before he's good and ready, always being on the move, and using his power to inspect guild officials, premises, ledgers, and goods to tie up vital documents or tradewares for "examination"—in effect, confiscating such items and keeping them until the guilds are forced to come to terms with him just to get their necessary working papers back.

Several guilds have tried to eliminate Old Salty and thereby win a swift end to their problems: he once staggered into the Lord Chancellor's office with no less than three daggers sticking out of his back ("must have been dining with friends" was one merchant's trenchant remark). The Lord Chancellor quickly let it be known that any guild suspected of involvement in any violence against the Regent of Guilds will be so thoroughly inspected that all of its members will effectively be put out of business for months, their goods and assets locked away in government vaults all that time. Anyone convicted of offering violence to this or any other city Regent will be fined 700,000 gold pieces per occurrence and exiled from the city if they can't pay within a month. All their goods and properties will be confiscated until their exile ends and only returned when the fine is paid in full.

Regent of The Harbor

The Regent of the Harbor oversees all harbor operations and proposes harbor regulations, which must be approved by the Councils. These operations include operating the city's lighthouse, patrolling the harbor, collecting tariffs, inspecting and handling cargo (and arranging for the removal and disposal of spoiled or dangerous cargoes), and fighting piracy and smuggling. The Regent commands six subordinate harbor masters, who handle daily operations. A small fleet of ships manned by the Harbor Patrol support the harbor masters. Though nominally under the command of the Chief Constable, the Harbor Patrol takes orders primarily from the Regent of the Harbor. In time of war, the harbor defenses are supposed to be provided by the Ravens Bluff navy and the harbor fleet placed at its disposal; unfortunately, the navy was destroyed by suspiciously timed pirates raids just before the recent war and has not yet been rebuilt, although shipbuilding is currently underway.

One oft-broken regulation states that ships may not conduct any business whatsoever between the hours of dusk and dawn. The frequent violations keep harbor masters and their men quite busy. Another important and oft-violated regulation is that any ship, docked or on the water in the har-



bor or standing off the city, must have a customs inspection before its crew disperses or any cargo is unloaded.

For many years the Regent of the Harbor was Lord Calvin Longbottle (LN hm F7), but he recently acceded to the nobility (see page 56). Chancellor Kothonos, who always disliked Calvin Longbottle, would prefer shifting the post to some less inquisitive family but Lady Thoden supported the appointment of the keeper of the Ravens Bluff lighthouse, Calvin's half-brother Lord William Longbottle (NG hm R9). As a compromise, Lord William has been named Acting Regent while Kothonos and the Lady Mayor watch to see how he does during a trial period, after which the appointment will either be made permanent or the job offered to someone else.

Lord Magistrate

The Lord Magistrate is responsible for the city's justice system, courts, and prisons. This is a full-time responsibility, requiring many subordinates. The current Lord Magistrate is Tordon Sureblade (LG hm 11th-level Paladin of Torm), who is described in the "Law & Order" chapter (see pages 70-71).

Lord Marshal

The Lord Marshal is empowered to maintain the defense of Ravens Bluff, both internal and external. He commands the armed forces, including the army, navy, and special units. He oversees the city's knightly orders, which serve to bolster the military forces in time of crisis. Most of the troops come from the personal armies of the city's lords; these lords are expected to serve as officers over their own men or to appoint a Seneschal or Captain to do so. Because command of an army is such a time-consuming task, during wartime the Lord Marshal appoints a Field Marshal (currently Lord Charles Blacktree) to assist him and to actually command the army in the field. The Lord Marshal is also nominal commander of the City Watch, though the Chief Constable actually handles this task on a daily basis.

This post is currently vacant. The previous Lord Marshal, eighty-three year old Lord Gaius Varro (LG hm F12) was still a capable and personally impressive professional warrior despite his advanced age and increasing vagueness. He disappeared during the war, possibly a captive of his traitorous cousin (Glora Varro, at that time Minister of Wild Magic for the Ministry of Art). There's currently some debate as to whether a replacement should be named for the Lord Marshal. Many argue that old Varro must be presumed dead and the rebuilding of the Ravenian military can't be neglected any longer. Others, weary of war and anything to do with it, say just as vigorously that other concerns must come first and replacing Varro can be left until later. Lord Blacktree is known to covet the position but many feel him to be temperamentally unsuited for what is essentially an administrative position. For now, the Councils have taken a "wait and see" position, hoping that Varro will turn up sooner or later. In his absence, Lady Amber has embarked on a quiet reorganization and recruitment program that draws on the Bluff's vast adventuring population, converting them into a part-time militia that can be called on in times of emergency. Should a new threat face the city, Field Marshal Blacktree would be recalled to duty and put at the head of such troops.

The Advisory Council

The Advisory Council is composed of retired high-ranking city officials, nobles who choose to serve on the Council, and anyone appointed by the Lady Mayor; its size varies, but it tends to be twenty to thirty strong. The Advisory Council has no policy-making powers; its sole function is to debate public matters and make recommendations to the Council of Lords, the Merchants Council, and the Lady Mayor. Despite its lack of power, the Advisory Council has a great deal of prestige; those who serve on the Council gain a reputation (not always deserved) for being well-connected elder statesmen of the city.

This Council has varied greatly down the years, pretending to have firm rules and ancient traditions while in truth doing whatever the assembled members feel like at the time. The Advisory Council elects its own Lord Speaker to run the meetings and attend Council of Lords meetings. Undoubtedly the worst Lord Speaker in recent memory was Charles Frederik LaVeme Blacktree IV (NG hm F10) a lazy, selfish fop who cared little for his duties and blatantly played favorites when he bothered to come to meetings at all. He lost this post a few years back to the active and attractive druidess Mellisa Eldaren (N hf 7th-level Druid of Silvanus) who served capably for

three years. Currently the post is vacant, but Lord Russell Roland has been sitting in as Acting Speaker.

The Advisory Council seemed in danger of being overshadowed by events with the establishment of the Merchants Council, the election of a new Lady Mayor, and the whole upheaval caused by the war and its aftermath. That no longer seems likely to happen, however, since ex-Mayor Charles Oliver O'Kane recently accepted a long-standing invitation to join the Council if ever he stepped down as Lord Mayor. O'Kane's presence has revitalized the assembly, especially his recent proposal (still under consideration by Lady Amber) that the city's adventuring community be allowed to elect a representative to the Council from each of the major character classes.

The Clerical Circle

The Clerical Circle, made up of representatives from each of the ten temples that make up the city's civic religion, began as an advisory body on religious matters. It has evolved into a regular department of the government with authority over the licensing of new sanctuaries, the prices to be charged for casting clerical spells on injured adventurers, and similar matter; it is detailed in the "Temples & Religion" chapter (see page 26ff).

The Ministry of Art

This recent addition to the government, dating back only a few years, has quickly become an important fixture. Most attribute its importance to the prevalence of magic-wielding adventurers in the city. The Ministry was founded to advise the Council of Lords and Lord Mayor on all matters arcane, just as the Clerical Circle addresses all matters religious. From the very start the Ministry has frequently meddled in issues outside its original brief; members have been known to take precipitous action on problems instead of merely making recommendations. This is not surprising, considering the independent natures of most wizards, but Lord Mayor O'Kane had to caution the Ministry on several occasions against acting without approval. The new Lady Mayor and the Merchants Council haven't yet publicly clashed with the Ministry, but disputes seem likely in the near future: the Ministry has refused to recognize the Merchants Council's claim to an equal voice in appointing new Ministers to replace those lost during the war unless the Merchant Council in turn allows the Ministry to send a voting representative to their Council. Lady Thoden, for her part, has kept the Ministry's representatives at arm's length and expressed a clear preference for dealing with the Wizards Guild instead. She is reportedly considering revoking the Ministry's charter, a move the Merchants Guild supports (preferring to deal with a Guild rather than yet another government department) but which the Advisory Council (urged on by ex-Mayor O'Kane) strongly opposes.

All members of the Ministry are residents of Ravens Bluff, though some are recent arrivals. Most were members of the Wizards Guild before taking office, but the oath of loyalty each takes upon joining the Ministry requires him or her to put loyalty to the city above loyalty to the Guild and therefore effectively constitutes a resignation from the Wizards Guild. Ministers are theoretically chosen for their knowledge of their particular area of magic, but politics plays an important role here as in other governmental branches.

The Ministry consists of one seat for each of the eight major schools of magic, plus one for each of the four elemental magics, one for wild magic, and a fourteenth seat for those generalist mages who follow no one school. Some say this last chair was added to avoid the perils of having thirteen chairs, as everyone knows that is the tally known as the number of misfortune (said to derive from the thirteen names of Beshaba, Maid of Misfortune). This fourteenth seat is referred to as the Seat of Wizardry (the thirteenth is the Seat of Wild Magic, since many consider wild magic to be unlucky anyway); none of the other seats are numbered. The fourteen Ministers elect one of their number to serve as "First Seat" for a two-year term, and this person runs the Ministry meetings and serves as the Ministry's representative to the Council of Lords.

There is a history of bad blood between the Ministry of Art and the Wizards Guild going back to the founding of the former. Not only are the two organizations in direct competition but Ministry members are expected to spy upon other wizards in the city, including their Guild counterparts, and to report any abuses of the laws governing spellcasting within city limits (see pages 74-75) to the proper authorities at once. Since the Ministry members are often then authorized to set things to right, and because it's often necessary to move swiftly and ruthlessly to stamp out magical recklessness, the Ministry's



wizards have grown accustomed to taking matters into their own hands. The two organizations merged during the war, under the overall leadership of Archmage Alcides Van Tighe (the leader of the Guild), but splintered again once the crisis abated. Nevertheless, the experience severely weakened the Ministry, as many of its members chose to stay behind and remain "Guilders" when the two organizations separated. Today relationships between the two are less strained, largely because the Ministry has been forbidden to spy upon the Guild's activities (any spying done today is ostensibly "for personal interest only" and had better be both subtle and sparing).

The Ministry is also in disarray because of the number of Ministers who chose to stay behind with the Guild, leaving an alarming number of vacancies. None of these can officially be filled until the dispute between the Ministry and the Merchants Council is resolved. In the meantime, their posts are being filled by "Junior Ministers" who are supposed to report to the senior Ministers—a command structure the "Juniors" openly disapprove of and ignore whenever possible. This has given the Ministry something of the atmosphere of a club or merchants' cabal riven by strong rivalries, casting its future effectiveness in doubt. In the meantime, however, it's providing solid employment for adventurers as various Ministers hire agents to spy on the other Ministers and on their Wizards Guild counterparts. A First Seat hasn't been chosen since the recent "junior" appointments were made, and the Ministry seems unable to agree on who should fulfill that role. Seemingly oblivious to the conflict (and, increasingly, to everything else in Faerûn around him, as his senility advances), Ambassador Carrague has serenely continued acting as First Seat, unaware that his term has long since expired. His descriptions of Ministry proceedings and decisions bewilder actual participants in those events, who see rancor and chaos where Carrague sees only business as usual.

Seat by seat, the changing situation in the Ministry of Art can be summarized thus:

Abjuration: formerly held by Harasiim the Blue (a charismatic Turishman whose nickname comes from the blue dots on his forehead and a blue gem worn at his left ear; NG hm W13 [Abjurer]; gone over to the Guild); now held by "Junior Minister" Sam Shock (a shy, short, burly, flame-haired veteran adventurer who's willing to train and aid good-aligned adventurers; he loves to devise spells pertaining to lightning; LG hm W12 [Abjurer]).

Alteration: Emellin of Ravens Bluff (an aged half-elven retired adventuress who despite her assumed appellation has dwelt in the Bluff for only a handful of years; a senior Minister, she finds the authority of an official post comforting after a hard, lonely, and rebellious life; NG h-e f W16 [Transmuter]).

Conjuration: Alskander of Chessenta (a charismatic orator who is flawlessly handsome and muscular, with striking golden-brown eyes, enjoying the constant companionship of many Ravenian ladies; a senior Minister;

Divination: formerly held by the man known only as Oracle (a thin, quiet, shrinkingly soft-spoken NG hm W10 [Diviner]; gone over to the Guild), this seat is now filled by "Junior Minister" Nuelman the Oracle (a rich, hawk-nosed ex-adventurer whose business is answering queries for hire, with the aid of his extensive library, his *medallion of ESP*, and his *crystal ball*; N hm W12 [Illusionist]).

Enchantment: formerly held by Cluhurach Fair-Eyed (a blue-eyed gold elf of great age but surpassing vitality who enjoys assuming an air of great antiquity and wisdom; NG em W15 [Enchanter]; gone over to the Guild) and now by Cordwainer (a highly competent magical researcher and alchemist whose impatience and bad temper often lands him in difficulties but whose successes have brought him a *crystal ball*, a *ring of spell turning*, a *wand of polymorphing*, a *ring of protection +5*, a *robe of protection +5*, and a small host of other enchanted items; CG hm W12).

Illusion: formerly held by Marilene DeVillars (an elegant and politically astute society lady who is second cousin to Lady Lauren DeVillars; CG hf W17 [Illusionist]; she left her post, the city, and high society altogether, and has chosen to dwell in a small cottage near the village of New Hope) and now by the somewhat testy Grimalkin (a sage of exotica, curiosities, and "ghost-talk," with specialties in divination and dweomerwork; the longtime tutor Lord Roland Russell and Lady Bevis Russell of the noble MacIntyre family; LN hm W10).

Invocation: Variance Klane (a scar-faced former, War Wizard of Cormyr who left that realm after a failed romance with a superior, gaining the Bluff an able military tactician and a fearless battlemage; a senior Minister who delights in being in a position of authority, no longer an underling, and never misses a revel if she can help it; NC hf W16 [Invoker]).

Necromancy: Begoas the Inquisitive (a soft-spoken southerner who claims to study necromancy to combat those who use it for evil but is often disbelieved; a senior Minister whose curiosity about how the human body works is said to know no bounds; CN hm W18 [Necromancer]).

Fire: formerly held by Lorraine Blacktree (aunt to Field Marshal Charles Blacktree; a severe, active, and responsible NG hf W15 of some sixty-odd years of age; gone over to the Guild) and now by Azoth Malishar (CG hm W12 [Fire Elemental]).

Water: formerly held by Sylvia Dawnwatcher (NG hf W14; a devoted worshiper of Lathander and careful-over-details administrator who grew tired of complaints that she was promoting the aims and interest of her faith and went over to the Guild), this seat is temporarily vacant.

Earth: formerly held by Old Mag (a grubby, aging woman who deliberately plays the role of the rural hedge-witch and whose apparent age fluctuates; a LN hf W21 of mysterious origins and aims; gone over to the Guild), this seat is temporarily vacant.

Air: formerly held by Indigo Suris (a mysterious southerner—some say he's from fabled Halruaa, the Land of Mages; many have heard that he's a fugitive from justice; some say he had a dark connection with former Lord Mayor O'Kane—this NG hm W18 went over to the Guild, apparently welcoming a return to reclusive privacy), this seat is temporarily vacant.

Wild Magic: formerly held by Glora Varro (now missing and suspected of treason against the Bluff; she was tall, thin, deep-voiced, and mercurial of humor; formerly CN [now CE] hf W19), this seat is currently held by "Junior Minister" Gideon (of whom little is known save that he is handsome, young—or appears so—and enjoys being mysterious; CG hm W10).

Wizardry: Ambassador Carrague (NG hm W19, 123 years of age and increasingly absent-minded; the most senior of the "senior" Ministers, and currently acting First Seat; one of the best-known, and most affectionately regarded, citizens of the Bluff).

Civil Service

The city is always looking for qualified men and women to run its bureaucracy. Most minor functionaries gain their positions through an auction, in which applicants who have been approved by the Deputy Mayor are allowed to bid for a job. The winner pays the government for the privilege of holding the post. This system gamers quite a bit of money for the city, and though there are abuses it guarantees that those who have time and some aptitude for government service win jobs in government. It also frees the upper echelons of civic officials from having to personally hire every government worker. The typical government employee is dedicated to the city and to making his or her own position secure, carefully holding onto power and working hard to keep out competitors and to win promotion.



Law & Order



In a city the size of Ravens Bluff, enforcement of law and provision of justice is a big job. Upon taking office, Lord Mayor O'Kane began to revise the old feudal court system and the extremely lax City Watch organization he'd inherited from his predecessors, the Lord Protectors and Lord Treasurers. His aim was to encourage a climate where trade could prosper. This involved first ensuring the people's safety and then giving the government an image of integrity. The lords were initially opposed to the changes, fearing a new system would give commoners power over them. The Lord Mayor worked to build a system that respected their historic rights, eventually persuading all but a few lords to agree to submit to the authority of city courts.

The City Watch

The Watch is the enforcement arm of the legal system, a force of capable and dedicated officers. Nominally the Watch reports to the Lord Marshal, but the Chief Constable runs its day-to-day affairs; hence the current Lord Marshal's extended absence has had no real effect on the Watch's efficiency or operations. The Watch is divided into nine branches, each responsible for different areas of enforcement activity.

- The City Guard is the basic patrol-and-arrest branch. Officers in this division work throughout the city.
- The Nightwatch is a special branch that supplements patrols when the Veil spreads across the city. The Veil, legendary in Faerûn, is a thick, impenetrable cloudbank that descends on the eastern coast of the Dragon Reach twice a year. The intense fog for one tenday in spring and another in autumn always brings on a marked increase in criminal activity.
- The Canine Corps (of trained dogs and their Watch-officer handlers) works to detect illegal contraband and help rescue kidnap victims. This branch works closely with the Harbor Patrol.

- The Harbor Patrol is responsible for patrolling the harbor, the docks, and the surrounding district. This branch specializes in fighting smuggling, capturing pirates, and detecting violations of harbor regulations. It owns and operates a fleet of small coastal vessels in the course of its duties—and at present, these constitute the only navy Ravens Bluff still commands.
- The officers of the Sewer Brigade fight smuggling and deal with the unusual monsters that occasionally appear in city middens.
- The Scout Rangers, attached to the army, work as a branch of the Watch; their main duties are to patrol and investigate crime in the lands immediately surrounding the city, including the estates of the lords pledged to the city government.
- The I & N (Intelligence and Negotiations) Team is responsible for undercover investigation of ongoing illegal activities (intrigues, espionage, and planning for future crimes) and for negotiations in hostage situations, which are thankfully rare. This team currently has a healthy but intense rivalry with the Silent Network, pushing themselves to prove they can uncover plots before those "amateurs" can. Occasionally they even succeed.
- The Investigative Unit is a standard deployment of officers to investigate any crimes that can't immediately be solved by Guard officers at a crime scene. This branch conducts long-term investigations and searches, leaving the Guard free to patrol and prevent crime on the streets.
- The Advanced Specialist Patrol, or ASP, is used only in the most delicate and dangerous situations (for example, crimes involving city lords, guildmasters, ambassadors and their staffs and families, visiting heads of state, and powerful adventuring bands). The officers of this branch are selected from other branches and serve for only two years, resuming their former duties at the end of their terms. Outstanding officers often serve multiple terms—but never consecutively.

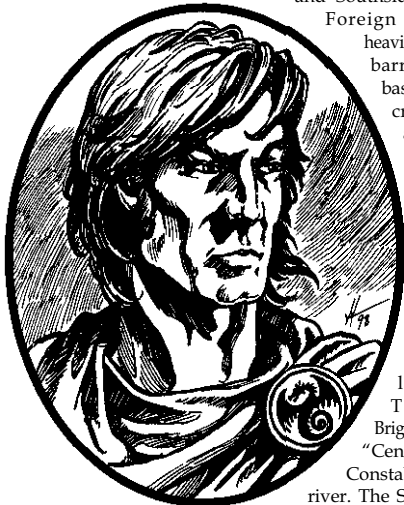
Any officer of the Watch who has prior experience of a particular crime investigation (for instance, seeing a suspect or witness and thus having a fair chance of being able to recognize him or her again) may be temporarily borrowed by another branch of the force with the approval of superior officers to "assist in the investigation." This is the origin of the old Ravenaar joke of referring to anyone who can't be found as



“gone on assist” (the full phrase is “gone on assist, somewhere that serves bread and beer”).

City Watch members are stationed at district barracks in six of the city’s seven districts: Harbor, Temple, Market, Uptown, Crow’s End, and Southside (the exception is the

Foreign district, which while heavily patrolled lacks its own barracks). These serve as bases for daily patrols and crime investigation; they are divided into sleeping areas for the officers, an office (with attached armory) where policework is conducted, a small jail for holding prisoners prior to their first hearing, and a district court. The central office of the Watch is located in City Hall.



The ASP and Sewer Brigade branches work from “Central,” as does the Chief Constable, Rolf “Sunny” Sunriver. The Scout Rangers have their own headquarters just outside the city

walls. Except for ASP members, Watch officers have ranks similar to those in the army. Promotions are based on merit and service.

City Watch Ranks

Watch Rank	Minimum Level	Rank Cost	Monthly Pay
Private	1st	1,000 gp	2 gp
Corporal	2nd	1,000 gp	5 gp
Senior Corporal	3rd	2,000 gp	10 gp
Sergeant	5th	4,000 gp	15 gp
Watch Sergeant	6th	4,000 gp	25 gp
Master Sergeant	6th	8,000 gp	50 gp
Captain	7th	20,000 gp	100 gp

Note: costs are cumulative; an officer pays 1,000 XP to become a private, an additional 1,000 upon becoming a corporal, and so forth. PCs cannot join at any rank other than Private; the maximum rate of advancement is one month per required PC level (thus a Sergeant must serve a minimum of six months before advancing to Watch Sergeant and another six before becoming a Master Sergeant).

Officers do not hold other city offices. To maintain its image, the Watch polices itself as well; any officer found to be conducting himself or herself in a manner unbecoming his or her position is dismissed. Watchmen found guilty of crimes are turned over to the Lord Magistrate for trial (the phrase “Watchmen” applies to female as well as male Watch officers; while female officers are in a minority, gender is no bar to advancement within what is sometimes affectionately or sardonically called “the Patient Service”).

The Courts

In the old days, justice was administered by the Lords or their appointed representatives. The current judiciary system grew up slowly over the years out of an arbitration court set up by the nobles to sort through conflicting claims—initially those relating to finances and contracts, but gradually including criminal disputes as well. Decisions were based primarily upon custom and precedent, but since enactments of the Council of Lords affected rulings the judges and clerks of the courts had to keep track of new laws as they were passed. Eventually the layers of regulations became so complex and unwieldy that only the officers of the court could untangle the maze of laws and thus became the *de facto* interpreters of the law. O’Kane’s reforms were aimed less at how the courts worked and more at replacing corrupt judges with less bribable magistrates and reorganizing which courts had authority over which cases. True reform came later, when Lord Magistrate Tordon

Sureblade embarked on a thorough revision of the criminal code. The massive work, still not finished, codifies all the current city laws and their specified punishments in clear, unambiguous language. The first seven volumes are already in use and have streamlined court procedures remarkably; three more are promised before the set (simply known among Ravenian judges and legal clerks as “the Codex” or, more familiarly, “Tordon’s Law”) is complete.

Today, six district courts dispense “low justice” in the city. Each district court is located in a City Watch barracks and overseen by its own magistrate. These judges pass sentence for small crimes, chiefly defined as those not important enough to attract the attention of the lords. For example, a person who murders a criminal, vagabond, or adventurer in Crow’s End will face the district magistrate, but the same person would face the High Magistrate if he or she stole the silver from the house of a noble or city official. Since the establishment of the Merchants Council, the District Judges have been referring more and more crimes committed against merchants to the High Court, pleasing the merchants and easing their own work load at the same time (although as time goes by some merchants are specifically requesting to have their cases decided quickly in the lower courts as the backlog of cases awaiting trial at the High Court grows and grows).

“High justice” is dispensed at the High Court in City Hall. Four High Magistrates serve on this court, each in turn in regular rotation, and the Lord Magistrate hears the most important cases himself. The crimes for which a character would come before the High Court include treason, high murder, piracy, rape, and any crime that attracts the attention of the lords for some reason. The High Court also has the option to review any case brought to a district court and to call any case away from district courts, although this is rare (Lord Tordon preferring to trust the judgment of his people). Occasionally, however, the High Court uses this privilege to make an example of a particular crime or criminal. All executions and long-term confinements (for periods of more than five years) must be approved by the Lord Magistrate; he reviews all such sentences within twenty-four hours. Such approval is usually forthcoming; only convincing proof that witnesses have committed perjury, evidence has been faked, or compelling new evidence has emerged is sufficient cause for a retrial; Lord Tordon presides over such retrials personally whenever possible. The Lord Magistrate meets regularly with the High Magistrates and District Judges to discuss their current cases, workload, any trends they may have spotted, and other matters judicial.

Some persons are immune to prosecution in the courts. Priests of the civic religion are handed over to the Clerical Circle for judgment; similarly, the Wizards Guild punishes minor infractions among its members itself and most of the trade guilds police themselves in matters relating to their trade, with the offending guildmember punished by his or her guidemaster. Lords of the city are rarely prosecuted and generally fined rather than imprisoned, except on charges of treason or piracy. Lastly, City Watch members cannot be tried for crimes relating to their work.

The Lord Magistrate

The widely respected Tordon Sureblade (LG hm 11th-level Paladin of Torm) grew up in Ravens Bluff and is fiercely dedicated to eradicating the capriciousness of lords (or anyone else in a position of rulership) to provide a fair and safe city for all, with a strong and complete system of justice in place. This requires, in his view, that laws be simplified, comprehensive and yet flexible. Toward this goal, he has devoted years to a thorough reform of the criminal code; he tirelessly makes new proposals to the Council of Lords that are rarely refused. The new joint council system delays this process, but Sureblade is a patient man. He believes that a measure of increased power for the merchants is necessary and even good, so he’s prepared to tolerate the obstacles the current “adjustment period” has thrown in his path—and he’s always available to soberly explain his reasoning and the necessities (as he sees them) for this or that change in the comprehensive legal system he’s been so patiently building.

Tordon is a solemn, reserved man of about fifty-two who avoids small talk and takes pride in hiding his emotions. Seemingly tireless and always alert, he’s known to those who’ve fought alongside him in younger days to be fearless in battle and able to make well-considered decisions swiftly in the heat of the fray. On rare occasions, Tordon will let a very



dry sense of humor briefly show through his polite, urbane “public face.” Deeply religious, Torm often aids the Ravenian temple of Torm with his services and always donates at least a quarter of his pay each month to the temple for use in helping the poor; he also secretly spends a considerable portion of the rest aiding the wives and children, or widows and orphans, of those whom he must condemn. Tordon is that rarest sort of paladin: one with a broad and deep tolerance for other faiths. He reserves his passion for the work of his office, working continually and diligently to improve civic laws, fine-tuning this regulation, looking at that clause from all sides, and keeping an eye on how too-clever lords, merchants, and officials twist and misuse the letter of the law to win past its spirit. More than once, Tordon has likened himself aloud to a sailor patching leaks in an old boat under sail in stormy seas, all the while building a strong new ship down in its hold.

Tordon remembers the lawlessness and harsh, overreaching authority of the nobles that characterized Ravens Bluff in his youth. When other youths joined gangs or fled to the countryside, Tordon spent his early years in libraries, learning all he could about history, politics, and religion. He considers his appointment to the chair of Lord Magistrate a direct gift from Torm and long ago decided not to marry or even seek female companionship until he receives a sign from the god to do so. Some women find him cold or consider his disinterest an insult, but others are glad to find a male friend with whom they can discuss intellectual matters at noisy revels—without a hint of flirtation or the frivolous games of scoring social points in which all too many nobles, socially climbing merchants, and civic officials indulge. So far as is known he has no secret vices or hobbies beyond a mastery of chess and the memorization of heraldic devices and the faces of nobility from everywhere in Faerún that enter Ravens Bluff. His habit of fixing faces in memory has served many a thief ill when they’ve been brought before Tordon in court and made claims about their past careers that he knew to be false. Tordon also makes it his business to gather rumors and intelligence reports on adventuring bands who come to Ravens Bluff and occasionally warns the I & N Team or the ASP of potential dangers they should beware.

The Lord Magistrate dresses neatly and conservatively at all times (wearing clothes of somber hue, especially grays and browns), taking great care over his appearance. He always has weapons concealed about his person save when it would be blasphemous or unlawful to do so, and always has armor plates strapped under his clothing to protect vulnerable areas (the gut, groin, kidneys, and throat in particular—his gorget-

plate has thrice saved him from strangling attempts). Those who believe that his years on the bench have softened him find out too late that nothing could be farther from the truth; he once defeated three would-be assassins with his bare hands, ignoring repeated stab wounds until he had subdued all three assailants and escorted them to the nearest Watch station, where he turned them over to the astonished Watch Sergeant on duty.

There are some who think Tordon is “too good to be true.” It was probably someone with this view that started the rumor among court officials that the Lord Magistrate secretly reads the most lurid and trashy chapbook-serial novels, keeping them in boxes in his office prominently labeled “Court Exhibits/Evidence/Not To Be Removed Or Tampered With”—and, in fact, no one has ever caught him actually tampering with them. One imaginative young noble lady insists that Tordon only scans these salacious serials to keep an eye on his rivals and that he is really the most prolific author of them all, “Rundigo Ranstorm,” the infamous scribe of *While Wheloon Watched* and the eighty-eight-episode (and counting) *Sorry Sighed The Sylph*.

Punishment

Upon conviction, a criminal faces a number of possible punishments. In the days when the lords dispensed justice, death was the most common punishment, providing both a vivid “example to others” and a swift end to any troublemaker’s potential career. Besides, feeding prisoners required money the lords felt could be put to better uses than in keeping criminals alive. Lesser crimes might be punished by maiming (for example, the removal of a hand) or, for very minor offenses, a few days in the stocks. Fellow nobles, of course, were either forgiven their peccadilloes or, if this would cause too great an outcry, simply exiled.

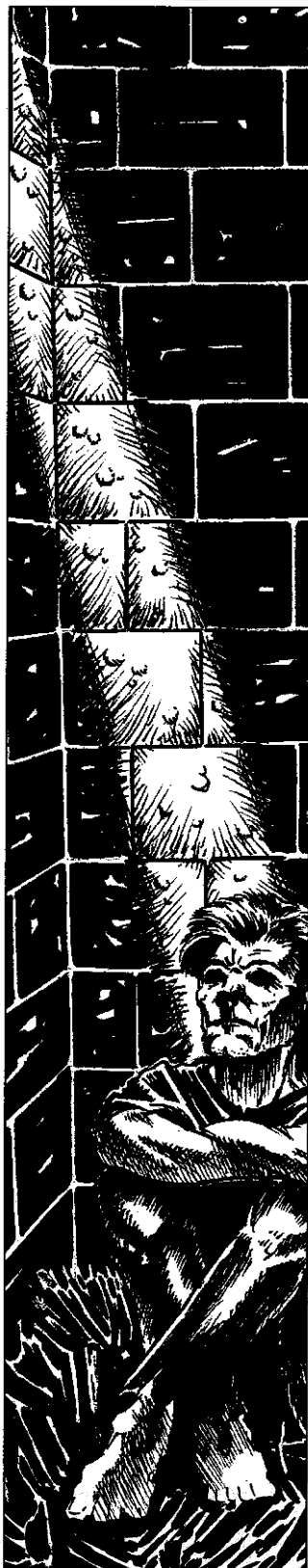
Under the current legal system, which replaced what’s sometimes referred to as “the bloody Lords’ bloody justice,” execution is reserved for the most serious offenses. Offenders are more likely to face heavy fines or imprisonment. Before the city’s prisons were built, prisoners were kept in the lords’ dungeons. These dank cells were the site of many a timely death of political rivals—timely, that is, for the lords. Bards who had the foolhardiness or misfortune to write ill-considered satires also had a habit of disappearing, never to be seen again. The lords are still allowed to maintain small dungeons for their own use but may legally hold only one of their own retainers there. Trespassers, known fugitives from justice, and prisoners of war can be detained on an overnight basis in these private prisons, but anyone who falls into the hands of a sworn enemy had better hope that someone else knows of his or her location to make sure the one-day *habeas corpus* limit is enforced.

All public cells are administered by a Prison Commission, headed by Commissioner Cleander of Torston. Cleander first entered government as an advisor in the train of Lord Varius, where he excelled in the art of flattery. His glib and oily tongue concealed many flaws—including a dull, plodding mind, rampant greed, and a gross appetite for all pleasures of the senses. Always quick to take credit for the good work of others, he demonstrated only one talent besides base flattery: an astonishingly deft ability to shift blame for his mistakes onto the shoulders of others. How he was chosen as Prison Commissioner almost twenty years ago is unknown, but upon his appointment the Lord Mayor observed that Cleander was “the most unscrupulously ambitious man I have ever confirmed in office.” Cleander has no idea that Lord Tordon’s eye has fallen upon him and that the Lord Magistrate intends to reform the prisons as soon as he finishes reforming the laws; it should make an interesting battle to see these two champions of rectitude and corruption squaring off against each other somewhere down the line.

Making Crime Pay

Of the various branches of the legal system, the prisons are easily the most corrupt. There’s money to be made running a Ravenian prison if the warden’s got a creative mind, and most of them squeeze as much as they can from both the system and the inmates.

By law, the Exchequer pays three silver pieces per prisoner per month to the warden. However, there’s nothing in the law that says all three silver pieces have to be spent on food, and the average warden pockets two silver pieces out of every three. Some of the savings are legitimate, such as bulk food purchases, but most come from cutting corners. Stale biscuits,



rotted fruit or fish, mealy flour, and maggoty meat or none at all are common fare. From these ingredients prisoners get two meals a day: a thin gruel served cold every morning and an evening stew (the main meal of the day; old vegetables and rancid pork fat boiled together). Those who live purely on prison food become undernourished and can't heal wounds or recover from diseases; such prisoners must save vs. paralysis at the end of each month of imprisonment or lose one point of Constitution.

There are other ways for a clever or venal warden to profit. Wealthy prisoners can buy their way out of the hulks or even Ill-Water into the relative comfort of the Compter. This is not a cheap choice; such a transfer typically costs 5,000 gp or more. Further, all prisoners are encouraged to work while serving their sentence. For those at the Compter this is usually a trade, while aboard the *Golden Ball* it is hard labor. The money earned from prisoners' work goes to the guards and trustees, who thus have a vested interest in wringing as much labor out of each inmate as possible. How much they give in turn to the prisoners depends on things like the prisoner's clout, the rarity of his or her skills, and how well he or she gets along with the jailers.

Another source of profit is the exit fee. Just serving the time doesn't get a felon out of prison; he or she must bribe the guards for his or her release. It looks legal—almost—when cast into the guise of claims to replace broken dishes, missed payments for lodging, interest on loans, and the like. The amount of the exit fee is carefully calculated to bleed an inmate dry; the more useful and profitable the prisoner, the higher the exit fee is likely to be.

In addition to all these, the jailers have perfected a whole string of petty grasping tricks. There are bribes for everything. Packages can be smuggled through, unusual visitors allowed in, even faked writs to give a criminal temporary "leave of the city" can be arranged. All that's needed is enough gold.

The Prisons

Ravens Bluff has three main prisons: the Compter, the *Golden Ball*, and Ill-Water. None are particularly pleasant, but prisoners at the Compter suffer more from neglect than active abuse, while the *Golden Ball* (and its sister ship, the *Lasher*) are for violent criminals doing "hard time." Little is known about conditions inside Ill-Water, as no one who enters ever comes out again; it is reserved for those who are considered so dangerous for one reason or another that it's necessary they never see the light of day again.

The Compter

Nevin Street Compter (to give it its full name) is a three-story stone shell with a wooden interior. All windows are fitted with iron bars, those on the ground floor being particularly strong. The stout wooden doors and walls are sufficient to hold a common prisoner of average skills and determination. Escape is difficult but not impossible. Nevin Street gets the convicts deemed least dangerous by the sentencing magistrates. There are no special cells for wizards, priests, or master rogues, although naturally adventurers imprisoned here are deprived of their spellbooks, holy symbols, and "tools of the trade." It's not unknown for guards to come by and prod a sleeping spellcaster every hour or so, preventing him or her from getting a decent night's sleep and memorizing spells, just in case.

The warden of the Compter makes most of his money by selling better lodgings. Some canny rogues use their time in the Compter as a vacation or a refuge from enemies, paying for good lodgings and living in style. There are several levels of accommodations:

- The Lord's Ward. Here one hardly feels like a prisoner at all. The "cell" consists of several rooms, which outsiders can freely visit. An inmate can bring in all the comforts of home, including a private servant to cook and tend to his or her needs. Some prisoners are even joined by their husband or wife and children. The Lord's Ward costs 100 gp per tenday.
- When a prisoner can no longer afford the Lord's Ward, he or she typically steps down to the Knight's Ward. No servants are allowed and a cell is a single comfortable room, but guards provide good food for the prisoner. One visitor is allowed per day, for a small gratuity. The Knight's Ward costs a mere 50 gp per tenday.
- The next step down is the Common's Ward. Here a prisoner bunks with six or seven others in a single room. Meals are poor fare served in a dining hall, but for an extra silver piece per day a prisoner can buy decent meals. Visitors are limited to once a tenday. The Common's Ward costs 5 gp per tenday.
- Worst of all is the Hole. Light comes from a lone high window, water from a single greasy bucket. One hundred bodies are crammed into vaults ten yards on a side. There's barely space to lie down—if a prisoner can stand to sleep in straw crawling with lice, fleas, and rats. Some three to ten prisoners in the Hole die each tenday from heatstroke and suffocation in summer, pneumonia and frostbite in winter, and starvation at any time. No visitors are allowed, and few would have the stomach to make a visit in any case. The Hole is a decidedly cheerless place.

The warden of the Compter, Gilcrain Vast-Rider, is a short, hulking man with a single thick eyebrow and customarily slackjawed expression. Gilcrain was a lieutenant in Lord De Sheer's private army until lamed by an orcish spear. Unable to pay for proper healing at the time, Gilcrain invested all his savings in this commission, with an eye toward eventually raising the funds he needs. Gilcrain is cold-hearted and efficient but not evil by nature. His actions are driven by his need to heal himself and to restore the small fortune he's already spent. Under Gilcrain's command are twenty jailers (known as "sticks" to the prisoners), five cooks, and a fluctuating number of runners, attendants, potboys, and grooms. These all watch over an everchanging population of over four hundred prisoners, of whom about three-quarters are men, the remainder women.



Golden Ball

The *Golden Ball* is the largest of two old, worm-eaten ships moored on the river. The other hulk in the prison fleet is the *Lasher*, a galleon seized for unpaid wharf taxes (a third prison ship, the *Broadback*, was sunk with all hands aboard in the pirate raid that preceded the war). When in port, these ships can be found moored at a sagging wharf just inside the mouth of the river. To the criminal deemed guilty it doesn't matter which ship he or she is sent to; a sentence to the hulks is as good as death.

Convict work here is brutally simple: dredging the harbor. Silt carried down out of the Vast by the waters of the Fire River continually threaten to choke off the harbor channels to ship traffic. Convict labor is the cheapest way of solving the problem, so each day the prisoners drag iron scoops across the harbor bottom, raising buckets of muck by the sheer sweating strength of their straining arms and backs.

Golden Bull receives common murderers, rapists, arsonists, muggers, highwaymen—men who have killed and robbed their fellow man. The few women (known as "Tough Tessies") who come here are thrown in with the men to fend for themselves; most either join into a gang for mutual protection or ally themselves with one of the guards or male prisoners. All convicts bound for the *Golden Ball* who can afford to do so buy their way into the easier accommodations of Nevin Street. The warden is only too happy to arrange such a move . . . for a price.

A typical prisoner's day on the hulks starts before dawn, when drumbeats awaken the bone-weary groaners, signaling a breakfast of cold gruel. Once all the bowls are handed out, bowl collection begins (those who break, throw away, hide, or otherwise slow the return of their bowls are treated to a tenday of trying to catch gruel in their cupped hands). The moment the bowls are all reclaimed, the work begins: endless back-breaking dredging. Any prisoner deemed strong, agile, or dangerous is neck-manacled to some part of the ship by a long chain; the rest merely have both ankles shackled together. Unruly prisoners, or those who scream in pain (usually from trying to work with broken bones), or those who talk back to guards get fitted with gags made of rotting leather stuffed into the mouth and held there with metal jawbands. When night falls, prisoners get another meal of gruel (warmed if they're lucky or the jailers are feeling charitable). Then they are herded back into the lightless holds and chained together (by both neck and ankle) to sleep with the all-too-wakeful rats and lice. Life on the hulks is savage, ugly, and brief. There's no rest or healing here; those unable to work are simply thrown overboard to drown, weighed down by their shackles.

The warden of the hulk fleet, Stavra Lashon, is a former sea-captain with a reputation for efficiency marred by the fact that her crews kept mutinying to protest their harsh treatment (she is secretly a worshipper of Lovitar, goddess of pain). She is happy to have finally found a "crew" that can never escape her tender mercies and often whistles as she strolls about on deck, coldly eyeing her charges for any misbehavior that might call for a lashing or other punishment. Like most wardens, she has found ways to make a profit from her charges. Besides shorting rations (to punish "insubordination"), she sometimes hires out one or the other of the hulks to dredge private piers or tow grounded ships free of the Bar. She also exploits an old Ravenaar law: the right of salvage. This legislation is brutally simple: the cargo of any wrecked, grounded, or abandoned ship can be claimed by whoever clears the obstruction. With their equipment and convict labor, the hulks are well-suited to such tasks. Since she can claim as salvage any wreck she boards, most merchants find it easier to buy her aid in salvaging their wares than to risk losing all. It's only a matter of time before somebody sticks a knife in her back; until then, she's the only happy person aboard the prison fleet.

Ill-Water

Ill-Water is a massive pile of cyclopean stone just offshore of the most southerly streets of Ravens Bluff. Sealed inside are the most powerful, savage, cunning, and hated prisoners. There are no cells, no exercise yards, no mess halls, no kitchens. Guards need not patrol the halls, and prisoners never see visitors from the outside world. Once put in, no one is ever released. Escape is considered impossible.

Special criminals end up here. Traitors top the list, sometimes joined by powerful, overly ambitious individuals who others found it politic to classify as traitors. Another class of Ill-Water prisoners is comprised of the

extremely inconvenient. Blackmailers who learn secrets about the lords and are unfortunate enough to get caught wind up here, as do faithful assassins who are no longer needed and spies who have delivered their secrets, since death is no promise that such secrets will stay buried. In the past, unwanted spouses and disgraced heirs sometimes wound up here, but this is no longer the case—although there may still be some living on in unmarked cells from before the practice was discontinued.

There are persistent (and true) rumors in the Bluff that certain capable prisoners are from time to time invited by the Mayor or other powerful city officials to undertake dangerous missions from which they're not expected to return (either through death, or because freedom in a very remote part of the Realms is their reward, should they survive). Some of these missions involve double-crosses, wherein enchantments or slow-acting poisons guarantee the death of the prisoner after some time has passed, but most are legitimate—if wildly reckless—forays into the heart of the jungles of Chult or through newly discovered dimensional gateways; voyages to investigate Nimbral, Evermeet, or fabled lands beyond; overland expeditions to map new trade routes south to Zakhara or east to Kara-Tur; jaunts below seeking to map routes through the Underdark. Spells such as *quest* and *geas* are always placed on such "walking dead hero" prisoners at the outset of the mission to ensure that they at least begin the agreed-upon task and don't escape to lurk in the Vast or another nearby locale, where they might do future harm to those who imprisoned them or to Ravens Bluff as a whole. There is no known case of a prisoner making his or her way back to the Bluff after surviving such a mission, but the people caged here are so dangerous that it's considered prudent to take all possible precautions.

Changes, Always Changes

As with everything else in Ravens Bluff, there have been recent and dramatic changes in the administration of justice in the city. Respected Judge Rupert T. Hangman was recently assassinated; the controversial prisoner Belanor Fenmarel (Deputy Mayor of the city at the time) was killed while in custody; the Lord Marshal has been missing since the war and is increasingly presumed to have died in the conflict; gangs ran riot in the streets while most of the populace was out beyond the wall fighting to defend the city, causing upheaval in the Watch. The Commander of the City Watch, Chief Constable Rolf "Sunny" Sunriver, went so far as to tender his resignation over his failure to quell growing gang-related thefts and street violence with the skeleton crew of wounded veterans, old men recalled from retirement, and half-trained youths at his disposal. Lord Chancellor Kothonos refused to accept the resignation, praised Sunriver for the amount of work he has been able to accomplish, and endorsed Sunriver's nomination of Captain Aven Elonis (LG hm F10) to head a special task force investigating gang-related violence.

Raising the subject of who killed Hangman or Fenmarel, and why, remains one of the best ways to start a heated argument in Ravens Bluff. It is fair to say that those who may know the truth about Hangman aren't talking, so those who do have things to say are building entire realms on the heated air passing their own tongues—a colorful array of contradictory theories regarding dark conspiracies grows with each passing month. There are even those who say they have seen the late Judge Hangman stalking through the city like some grim spectre of justice. Rumors aside, what is known is that before his untimely demise Judge Hangman appointed his clerk, Tury, to the post of Deputy Librarian of the Courts. This official is responsible for judging if citizen concerns and complaints are worthy of Watch investigation, a request for guild consideration of the matter, or merely instructions to local Watch patrols to be aware of something and keep an eye on certain potential future problems. The Deputy Librarian also serves to look up laws, past decisions, and who within civic government should be contacted about specific matters, for any citizen who approaches him. He is authorized to charge from 5 sp to 50 gp for this work, the highest rates applying to cases where the citizen requires written copies of laws or judgments. Hangman appointed his bailiff, a Tyr-worshipping male drow by the name of Deseant, to replace Tury as clerk, but this appointment has not yet been confirmed by Lord Tordon.





Lawgiver Changes

The establishment of the Merchant Council and its insistence on equal standing with the Council of Lords (many observers suspect that this is in reality a bid for total power, with the nobles' council eventually being relegated to the role previously played by the Advisory Council) included a specific demand that any new laws, or modifications to existing legislation, be approved by majority vote of both councils. The insistence of both bodies on the right to alter proposed laws brought before them (and the subsequent back-and-forth succession of votes, the exchange of amendments, additional votes, and a certain amount of brinkmanship on the part of both councils) has meant that almost no new laws have been passed. Out of sheer practicality, more power has fallen into the hands of the Lady Mayor and civic officials (especially Chancellor Kothonos and Lord Magistrate Tordon) while debates rage on in the councils. In the wake of a disastrous fire caused in part by the storage of everburning oil ("Greek fire"), however, the Council of Lords and the Council of Merchants were moved to finally pass their first joint law, outlawing the ownership, use, transportation, and storage of everburning oil within the city walls (see below).

The Laws of Ravens Bluff

Crime

Treason
 High Murder
 Murder
 Low Murder
 Attempted Murder
 Piracy
 Rape
 Kidnapping
 Arson
 Counterfeiting
 Bribery
 Fraud
 Assault
 Theft of Mount

 Theft (Larceny)
 Fencing Stolen Goods
 Selling Slaves

 Blackmail
 Extortion
 Conspiracy

 Polymorphing Others
 Magically Influencing Others
 Using Harmful Magic
 Unlicensed Monster

Punishment

Life Imprisonment or Execution
 Execution
 Execution or 30 years Imprisonment
 5 years Imprisonment and/or Fine
 10 years Hard Labor
 Execution
 Life Imprisonment (Hard Labor)
 5 to 10 years Hard Labor
 10 to 20 years Hard Labor
 10 years Hard Labor
 3,000 to 50,000 gp Fine
 500 to 2,000 gp Fine
 20 to 5,000 gp Fine
 Fine equal to thrice mount's value, plus 3 months Imprisonment
 1 year Imprisonment
 1 to 5 years Hard Labor
 1 to 5 years Imprisonment and 1,000 to 5,000 gp Fine
 3 to 5 years Imprisonment
 3 to 5 years Imprisonment
 Half of related Imprisonment term and full Fine, if applicable
 20,000 gp Fine
 1 year Imprisonment and 5,000 gp Fine
 100 to 10,000 gp Fine
 Confiscation of monster and 500 to 5,000 gp Fine

Everburning Oil: Possession 1,000 gp Fine per flask
 Everburning Oil: Use 5,000 gp Fine per incident and 3 months Hard Labor

Assault: An attack where "serious bodily injury" is inflicted on the person attacked, or an attack exhibiting particular depravity or atrocity, or an attack committed intentionally during the commission of another crime.


Conspiracy: A combination of two or more persons to plan a criminal or unlawful act, or a combination of two or more persons who by concerted action accomplish an unlawful purpose.

Everburning Oil (Possession and Use): The most recent law passed in Ravens Bluff (the first legislation enacted jointly by the Council of Lords and the Council of Merchants) officially banned the ownership, use, transportation, and storage of Everburning Oil (called "Greek Fire" in some wizards' tomes) within the city walls. Only one merchant is currently allowed to store and sell the oil, Old Marve, who has a small, purportedly flame-proof shop just inside the North Gate. Old Marve is required to furnish civic officials with a complete, ongoing record of who purchases the oil. Possession of the oil within the city walls is now punishable with a 1,000 gp fine for each flask in the offender's possession. Use of the oil in the city will result in a fine of 5,000 gp and a three month sentence on the *Golden Ball*.

Harmful Magic: It is unlawful to cast harmful magic within the city boundaries. Spells such as *cones of cold* and *fireballs* can harm innocent people and cause considerable destruction to city and private property. There are varying degrees of harmful magic. For example, a *magic missile* is not nearly as damaging as a *lightning bolt* — unless, of course, the *magic missile* results in the death or injury of an innocent citizen. The more potentially harmful or recklessly cast the spell, the larger the fine — for example, a spell cast into a crowded street is judged more harshly than if cast in the same street in the depths of a midnight rainstorm when few or no persons are present. Castings that cause injuries or deaths are usually accompanied by charges of Assault, Low Murder (a death caused by a person displaying a reckless state of mind), Murder, or even High Murder, depending on the circumstances. Spellcasters who are obviously casting spells to defend the city or protect its officials are not subject to this law. Self-Defense or the protection of a patron the accused is hired to protect is not an acceptable legal defense against a charge of Harmful Magic.

A list of damaging spells that can land their casters in trouble includes, but is not limited to, *Bigby's clenched fist*, *Bigby's crushing hand*, *Bigby's forceful hand*, *Bigby's grasping hand*, *blade barrier*, *burning hands*, *chain lightning*, *chaos*, *chill touch*, *cloudkill*, *cone of cold*, *creeping doom*, *death fog*, *death spell*, *delayed blast fireball*, *disintegrate*, *energy drain*, *enervation*, *Evard's black tentacles*, *explosive runes*, *feeblemind*, *finger of death*, *fire trap*, *flume arrow*, *flame strike*, *flaming sphere*, *flesh to stone*, *ice storm*, *incendiary cloud*, *lightning bolt*, *magic missile*, *Melf's acid arrow*, *Melf's minute meteors*, *meteor swarm*, *monster summoning*, *move earth*, *phantasmal killer*, *power word*, *pyrotechnics*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *shadow monsters*, *shutter*, *stinking cloud*, *summon swarm*, *vampiric touch*, and, in some circumstances, *wall of fire*, *wall of force*, *wall of ice*, *wall of iron*, *wall of stone*, and *web*.





High Murder: The unlawful killing of another “person” (intelligent being) with malice aforethought; that is, a premeditated intent to kill plus an element of hatred. No one accused of High Murder is ever released from custody before trial. Malice aforethought is not required in the presence of one of the following conditions:

1. A person is guilty of High Murder if he or she knowingly causes the death of a law enforcement officer or civic official of the rank of Regent or above (this includes all Lords who serve on either the Advisory Council or the Council of Lords or who are heads of noble houses but not other members of their families or—yet—members of the Merchant Council).
2. A person is guilty of High Murder if he or she knowingly causes the death of another by hiring someone to carry out the killing or after having been so hired to kill someone for personal monetary gain. Such persons would also likely be charged with Conspiracy.
3. A person is guilty of High Murder if he or she knowingly causes the death of another after being sentenced to life imprisonment.

Defending oneself from clear and immediate likelihood of death is a defense against all degrees of murder. For example, if the accused did not begin hostilities with an assault, pursue and strike a fleeing opponent, or strike a disarmed foe, then he or she probably did not knowingly cause death but killed in self-defense in the course of trying to survive. The authorities have been known to supplement the testimony of witnesses by resorting to mind-reading spells (cast by random mages called in from the Ministry of Art) to determine the true intent of an accused just prior to the time of the death, rather than trusting in a slick or eloquent plea or testimony.

Lords’ Laws: Certain lesser-known decrees address details of the rights and status of nobles, and of their conduct and relations regarding each other and the city and its officials. Many dusty details of these are lost and forgotten in scrolls locked in this or that noble’s vaults, to be triumphantly produced only if needed. A few general laws are outlined in the chapter on “The Nobility” (see pages 46-47). Most of these laws only apply outside the city while on the grounds of the noble’s estate.

Low Murder: The killing of another person but without premeditation. Charges of Low Murder generally apply where the killing was impulsive and unplanned or where death is caused by dangerous recklessness (berserk rage, drunken carelessness, or a hacking spree of assaults with a weapon on a succession of persons or property).

1. A person is guilty of Low Murder if he or she knowingly causes the death of another.
2. A person is guilty of Low Murder if he or she causes the death of another recklessly under circumstances manifesting an extreme indifference to the value of life.

Magically Influencing Others: It is unlawful to magically influence others. Citizens have a right to have their own opinions and to make their own decisions. The list of banned spells includes, but is not limited to, *charm person*, *confusion*, *emotion*, *hypnotic pattern*, *mass suggestion*, *mass charm*, and *suggestion*, as well as magical items such as a *ring of human influence* or a *rod of rulership*. If the accused can successfully convince the court that the influencing was performed to prevent the commission of a crime, preserve the public peace, prevent harm to property, or preserve the safety of another person (particularly one whom the accused is responsible for protecting), the sentence may be (and often is) reduced to the fine, with no imprisonment.

Unlicensed Monsters: It is unlawful to bring unlicensed monsters within the city boundaries (which are considered to extend from the rooftops to the cellars, and to include the waters of the Fire River, Lake Christina, and Clearwater Harbor). Monsters, from aarakocra to zombies, may not be brought into the city without a license obtained from city authorities. Permits are only available to those who demonstrate a legitimate need to have such a creature within the city limits. This ordinance specifically includes undead, both intelligent and created.

Murder: The unlawful killing of another person that is willful, deliberate, and premeditated. Satisfying the condition of Willfulness requires

intent to kill (and not merely to disable, hurt, or drive away). Deliberation requires a conscious consideration of the decision to kill (any evidence that the location of the murderous attack or the means used was deliberately chosen is, by itself, proof of deliberation). Premeditation requires that the intent to kill be fashioned prior to the killing (any use of disguise, or any procurement of weapons not directly at hand or not normally carried, is clear evidence of premeditation).

1. A person is guilty of Murder if he or she purposely causes the death of another.
2. A person is guilty of Murder if he or she knowingly causes the death of another before, during, or after the commission of another crime.
3. A person is guilty of Murder if he or she knowingly causes the death of an incapacitated foe within the City, even when that foe has been engaged in violent acts (or has offered a threat of violence) against the accused. For the purposes of this law, “incapacitated” includes foes who are securely bound, chained, or otherwise restrained (being held by another person may or may not be judged “secure,” depending on circumstances; being held by three or more persons, or by a being of great strength, is usually deemed “secure”), foes who are unconscious, and foes who are magically prevented from voluntary movement. A charge of murder applies not merely to direct attacks but to the creation of situations that the accused is judged to have known were likely to prove lethal, such as placing an incapacitated foe underwater or in a burning building, in front of a moving cart or galloping team of horse, under many sacks of grain, or balanced on a high ledge.

Polymorphing: It is unlawful to polymorph others. Wizards may not simply go around turning people into toads or frogs or any other manner of wildlife or furniture. This prohibition extends also to priests and persons of other professions who have access to magical devices and potions that yield the same effects.

The degree of polymorphing typically affects the punishment imposed. For example, a wizard who polymorphs someone into a goldfish and leaves that goldfish to die for lack of water will also face a charge of at least Attempted Murder. A wizard who polymorphed someone into a bird in order to smuggle him or her out of the city might face Kidnapping charges. A mage who polymorphs an annoying visitor into a dog will simply be fined.

Wizards are allowed to polymorph themselves (and/or willing companions) into any reasonable form with impunity, although wizards who polymorph themselves into the forms of monsters within the city limits are subject to fines and possible prison terms for violations of the “Unlicensed Monster” law. A “Harmful Magic” fine may be levied against any mage who polymorphs himself, herself, or an assistant or accomplice into the form of a domestic beast, if the presence or actions of the supposed beast lead others to be injured (in other words, charging along a hallway in the shape of a stallion, erupting onto a balcony as a snarling guard dog, or anything of the like that caused persons to flee into possible falls or harmful collisions).

Treason: Any person is guilty of treason who communicates, delivers, or transmits (or attempts to communicate, deliver, or transmit) any document or information relating to the City’s defense to any foreign government, or to any faction or party or military or naval force thereof, or to any representative, officer, agent, employee, subject, or citizen thereof, either directly or indirectly, with intent or reason to believe that said information or document is to be used to the injury of Ravens Bluff or to the advantage of said foreign entity.

A person is also guilty of treason who causes any civic official above the rank of Regent to be kidnapped, murdered, or confined and tortured or placed under duress by any means, including threats or wounding. Aiding other persons carrying out treasonous acts—by providing transportation, clothing, funds, or shelter, or opening a secured entry, or acting in any way to hamper law enforcement officials acting against such other persons—constitutes treason, so long as this conduct is performed knowingly (where a person of reasonable wits and perception would know, or could logically conclude, that those he or she is aiding were committing, or about to commit, a treasonous act).



Merchant Houses

Ravens Bluff has always been a city that owed its prosperity to trade. It was inevitable that one day the merchants who controlled that trade would band together and demand a voice in the city government. The recent establishment of the Merchants Council—seen by some as long overdue and by others as a harbinger of disaster—shows that these lords of trade are now the equal of the noble lords with whom they have begun to share control of the city.

The Rise of The Houses

The merchant houses that form such an important power block in the Bluff today began when clever merchants hit upon the idea of forming collectives, pooling their wealth to acquire what was beyond the grasp of a single entrepreneur. These merchant collectives were extremely volatile, springing up overnight and sometimes vanishing just as quickly, their funds disappearing along with an absconding treasurer. Still, their collective power proved that the idea would work if only the legal rights and obligations of each member could be codified into law. The resulting hammer-and-tongs backroom battles lasted half a year, and there were knifings in alleys as well as shouting and fist-pounding on guildhall tables before calm began to emerge from the chaos. The situation was made much worse by several unscrupulous merchants having joined the collectives, attracted by the prospect of getting their hands on large amounts of other people's money.

In the end, three merchants who nosed the greatest threat to their felloes were forcibly evicted from the city: Ambalest Suljack, a dealer in perfumes and wines from warmer lands along the southerly shores of the Sea of Fallen Stars; Traiyiken Trumbold, sponsor of many mining expeditions into the mountains all around the Vast; and Narbrest Ozondar, of Ozondar's Fabled House of Jewels. All three left amid threats, legal actions, and accusations of having hired agents to rob, beat, or vandalize business rivals (such vandalism was usually performed with a torch and a few bottles of oil). The three didn't go far: Ozondar opened an office in Calaut but then hastily relocated to eastern Sembia; the other two just went up the road to Tantras, where guilds are an on-again off-again thing, more a dream or on-paper authority than a reality.

Sobered by the idea that such men might have gained control over their businesses, the collectives met together and ratified a code of behavior that recognized certain collectives as "merchant houses." Each such house is authorized to operate as a bank, lending and changing money within strict limits laid down by the Exchequer. Each must strictly follow all guild regulations and city laws, open its premises to inspection by the Watch at all hours without prior notice, and report on its doings regularly and in detail. Some of the newly founded houses have been more diligent at fulfilling these main tenets than others, but even so a much clearer picture has emerged of exactly how business is being done in the Bluff (and with trading partners elsewhere) than ever before. A Merchants Council was established by the newly founded houses to make sure each follows these rules; the only hand that the Council of Lords had in this whole affair was to insist that each seat on the Merchants Council be held by a specific representative of a merchant house—in other words, a stable roster of folk and not a "faceless and everchanging array" of individuals. There are rumors that the four individual Merchant Lords who now hold seats on the Council of Lords pushed for this stance in order to cement their own positions and importance forever—and were supported in this by Lady Lauren DeVillars, always the merchants' best friends among the nobles, who pointed out that the decree amounted to an acceptance of the legal existence of the Merchants Council.

The Merchant Houses shrewdly consolidated their newly-recognized power in the city by winning the support of the common citizenry. They donated and imported food, clothing, and finally building materials to the war-torn city with almost embarrassing generosity. At one point the harbor was full of ships bearing their donations, with a few vessels even standing offshore awaiting docking space as goods of every sort were unloaded and distributed to the various Merchant Houses (some for free

distribution, and some for sale; the houses thus avoided public resentment at a "restocking run" for their shop shelves while some in the city were homeless and hungry due to war damage). Two large galleys even arrived carrying stone from the ancient cities of Netheril to rebuild sections of the city wall and temples destroyed in the fighting.

Support surged to almost fervent levels, but has since declined somewhat in the wake of a bitter dispute brewing between the city and the Merchant Houses over taxes—the civic officials want the merchants to pay "their fair share" for the massive reconstruction costs, while the rates suggested by the Exchequer have been rejected as "overly oppressive" by the Merchants Council. Lady Mayor Thoden is seeking to bring both sides together to agree on a single rate that will apply to noble and merchant alike.

The Council Houses

There are sixteen seats on the Merchants Council, representing all of the foremost Merchant Houses. Brief descriptions of these trading organizations follow. The reader should beware that they are involved in swiftly changing business deals, intrigues, and dabblings, with a vigor not seen among the noble families of Ravens Bluff in decades; the information given here may very soon be out of date.



Albrath's House: This house does bulk dyeing, dyes and sells towels and linen, and provides laundry services (including, for stiff fees, discreet goods and body removals from Ravenian premises). It has a solid financial base, is secretive about its acquisitions (which seem both offshore and few, these days), and is affably but underneath ruthlessly run by its owner and Council representative, the stout and somewhat pompous Embro Albrath—a mustachioed wearer of many gold chains and large rings who is the father of sixteen daughters. Its symbol is a gem winking on an open human (left) palm.

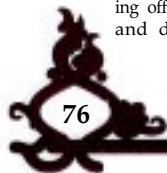


Blackblades House: This house is named for its founding and owning family, having nothing to do with pirates (as its staff grow all too tired of explaining). Its symbol is the badge adopted by its family (though they've never been ennobled): two parallel horizontal scimitars floating one above the other, the uppermost having its hilt to the sinister and the lower having its hilt to the dexter. Blackblades is a shipping house, concentrating on fast passages across the Reach between Ravens Bluff and various Sembian ports—its slogan is "taking the goods of everyone to everywhere." It has grown fast and prospered. Its owner and Council representative—slim, effete, black-mustachioed, icy-eyed Eldivvyr Blackblades—spends all profits buying shares in all the other ships plying the Reach that he can. His goal seems to be owning everything in the water between the Lis and the Pirate Isles that isn't already under a pirate flag.



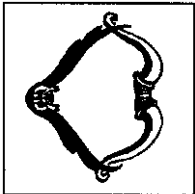
Bhuklyn's: This large and wealthy house specializes in ironmongery, selling a wide variety of everyday household goods—pots, pans, plates, trays, hooks, canisters, boxes, chests, and the famous "Bhuklyn's Boxes" (metal-sheathed rodent-proof cupboards that can be hung on a wall with hooks, stood on the floor, or turned on their backs and latched for use as wagonchests). The Bhuklyn's symbol (a joined rack of ox-horns) is everywhere on kitchenware used in Ravenian homes both grand and humble; indeed, the many Bhuklyn's dealers around the city have taken to chanting the saying, "Bhuklyn's is everywhere."

"Pappa" Aldimo Bhuklyn, the hugely-fat head of the owning family of the house, bought out the other shareholders of the collective known as The Raven Moon, transforming it into his own organization. Rather than a shop or two, he restructured the business to have many small street dealers selling sturdy, attractive, useful everyday things he'd seen on his travels through Cormyr, Sembia, and Amn. Bhuklyn's wealth and sales are vast, but he allows his sellers to keep a larger share of the profit than is usual, thus reducing his take but increasing their loyalty to his house; a fair trade,



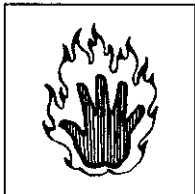


he believes. Pappa's rolling, thunderous laughter is heard often in Council meetings; he doesn't take anything too seriously—least of all the pop-in-jay antics that go by the term “politics” in the Bluff.



Doumath House: Until recently, this collective was known as Bentbow House. When the much respected Emryn Bentbow died, the young and ambitious half-elven woodcarver Ildryn Doumath bought the business, thereby becoming the first replacement seatholder ever on the Merchants Council. Doumath has continued the business that made Bentbow House famous, specializing in making and selling furniture, inlay

work, the procurement and carving of exotic fine woods, and the repair and refinishing of existing furniture. This last service is priced prohibitively to prevent all his workers' time being taken up in repairs rather than the more lucrative work of creating new pieces; it's meant mainly for restoring prized antiques or genuine works of art. Doumath has inherited the good reputation Bentbow House built up and has been careful to preserve it. The firm still uses the Bentbow Arms: a hunting bow pointing to the dexter, bent as if being pulled, but without an arrow, the spread wings of an owl in flight tracing the lines of where the bowstring should be. This emblem is burned unobtrusively onto all items turned out by his workshops (grand four-posted or canopied beds, highly polished tables or all sizes, and elegant armchairs are their most popular wares). As someone who worked his way up through the ranks, Ildryn begrudges time spent away from his carving tools; dawdling or verbose fellow Councilors who cause meetings to drag on and on are apt to find him sarcastic, his snapping voice interrupting like a whip to suggest a faster end to the meeting at hand.



Firestorm House: This large and increasingly famous concern is run by the youngest member of the Merchants Council, the always-busy, always-in-a-hurry Alampago Firestorm. He fidgets impatiently through every Council meeting but won't let someone else go in his stead—he doesn't want to miss seeing and hearing everything that goes on (always suspecting other Council members of conducting important business beforehand, behind

closed doors at secret locations elsewhere). Alampago wears only the finest clothes, but they always look rumpled, as if they'd been slept in (which is often the case). Likewise, his hair is always tousled as he runs from one engagement to another, not trusting his stolidly patient extended family to do their work properly unsupervised. Folk all around the Inner Sea are beginning to hear of Firestorm House, whose symbol is an upright, spread-fingered human hand outlined in flames—and Alampago is fretting over his latest department: four family members who devote all their working time to investing the huge and ever-growing Firestorm profits (largely in Cormyr and Sembia, but recently spreading to the Vilhon Reach and to the Dales). Alampago began the firm just selling locks and keys but has rapidly expanded into clockwork toys, music boxes, and wind-up toys with springs that launch tiny darts or miniature crossbow bolts when they wind down. He considers these novelty toys and has been genuinely puzzled by the number and variety of people who have been coming to his shops and buying one—or two—or a dozen. . .

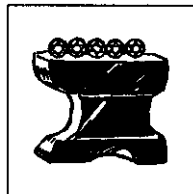


Horthlaer House: One of the smaller houses, Horthlaer's is run by the elderly, easygoing Urunst Horthlaer and takes as its symbol his everpresent accessory: a smoking black (curved wooden and brass-banded) pipe. Horthlaer represents small, established shopkeepers all over the Bluff, specializing in the fast buying and selling of sideline goods that aren't selling so well in one district but might move better in another. He spends a lot of time

visiting his clients, who look forward to having him drop by for a chat. Urunst also brings a little gifts for their spouse or child or parent, something entirely appropriate that he “just happened to find.” During the visit, he'll also show them this or that end-lot, leftover, slightly damaged, or mislaid goods that he's found in ship holds or warehouses up and down both sides of the Dragon Reach coast, that “just might sell here.” His business instincts are uncanny—he's almost always right about what Ravenians will

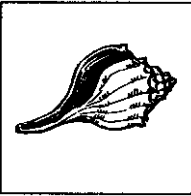
buy, and his clients enjoy small but surprisingly steady profits as a result of his attention—enough to make the difference between “getting by” and “doing alright.”

Urunst is one of the few Councilors whom other Ravenians would risk their own lives and fortunes without hesitation to aid or protect. His son Straevo is a ne'er-do-well who spends most of his time off on “business trips” (drinking, gambling, and womanizing in every port on the Sea of Fallen Stars, some whisper), but the two Horthlaer daughters have taken to accompanying their father on his rounds. Some believe that if Straevo will just stay away or meet with some timely accident before his father dies, Horthlaer House will carry on. Otherwise, it seems likely that the business will die when Urunst does. Shopkeepers who meet in the street often talk about the health of Urunst Horthlaer—and no doubt many prayers go up to the gods on this matter.



House of Kuldath: The five Brothers Kuldath are all bearded, secretive, pushy men from the east (lands east of Laothkund, now absorbed into Thay) who import slave-woven carpets, tapestries, and mats by the shipload, warehousing them patiently and selling them when the price is right. For example, when harsh winter weather strikes the city each year, small carts carrying the Brothers' wares appear in the streets and the Brothers stride up and down talking loudly about how warm their fabrics can keep folk bundled up in them. These are the same men who complain bitterly to the civic authorities about the danger posed to the entire city from allowing inhabitants of tenements to light fires in their rooms, direly predicting a major fire beyond the ability of the Red Ravens to control that will sweep the city some day soon. Aldeemo, Belurith, Narammus, Ospim, and Raethrif aren't well-liked and keep all their dealings with others on a coldly distant, strictly business level. However, they are said to be very affectionate to their wives and mistresses—whom they keep in luxuriously furnished lodgings all over the city and constantly shower with gifts; their many children are also treated with indulgent affection. The brothers take turns sitting in the house Council seat, and all use the same business symbol: A row of five identical faceted clear gems sitting on a massive iron anvil.

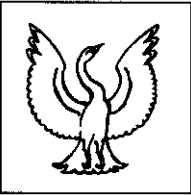




House of Whelk: This house is named for its symbol, a white whelk shell. It is run by Hlastryr Vhelturl, formerly of Calaut, who is rumored to be less than scrupulous but has shown no signs during Council meetings of being anything more than rather close-mouthed and politely conservative. The House of Whelk outfits fisherfolk (most importantly selling them ropes and netting), buys their catches, and resells the latter as both fresh

fish and spiced fish pastes in wax-sealed clay jars, popular with many folk seeking a quick meal (spread on toasted slices of bread and washed down with wine or beer). The house is also seeking to get into dockloading and warehousing work but is encountering stiff opposition from the guilds and may turn instead to shipbuilding or operating a merchant fleet.

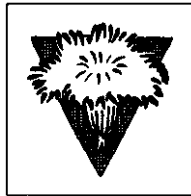
There are whispers that Vhelturl is backed by investors in Hillsfar and Mulmaster who have their own dark reasons for seeking to control the docks and own a fast, battle-capable fleet of ships operating in the Moonsea and Dragon Reach. One rumor even suggests that Scardale and Harrowdale will end up one day as fortified dockyards and trading-centers, housing artisans run out of other cities for shady practices. Others maintain that the House of Whelk fronts for pirate-loving, Zhentarim concerns. Most Ravenian merchants scoff at such far-fetched notions—and then stop suddenly and look thoughtful.



Nightbird House: Specializing in women's clothing and footwear, this well-regarded house is almost entirely owned and staffed by women (including the small security detail, who own a fiftieth concern in the business, which they tend to take out in merchandise). Nightbird House initially concentrated on imported accessories such as thigh-high boots, party masks, long gloves, stylish hats, and decorative walking-sticks (from

Cormyr, Sembia, along the Vilhon Reach, Chessenta, and, increasingly, Turmish). Recently they have moved more to designing and selling tailor-made garments from gowns to lingerie (the latter have particularly taken the Bluff by storm—as has their slogan, “making you look better”). The dozen talented tailors and seamstresses on staff are adroit at creating customized clothing of all types to suit any size or individual whim, and demand has long since outstripped supply; nowadays an appointment is needed for anything except ready-made items, and the wise schedule their fittings well before the next revel or “occasion.” Profits are consistently high, and the board of seven merchants who pooled their resources to create Nightbird House have all become rich as well as extremely well dressed. Each has hired a designer to work exclusively for the house, all of whom violently disagree over who should become *the* Nightbird designer. The symbol of this house is the gray silhouette of a swanlike bird in flight, seen side-on with its wing raised and its long, slender neck ever-so-slightly curved as it points its beak to the dexter.

The High Seat on the house board and its Council seat are both filled by the same woman: Iorla Trablatur. Born a commoner somewhere on the Vilhon Reach, she radiates elegance. Tall and shapely, she has ash-blond hair that hangs to the backs of her knees and wears makeup so skillfully applied as to be almost invisible. Some have complained that her beauty is *too* perfect, but these quibblers are few. Believing in advertising her ware, Iorla models an endless array of Nightbird originals, changing her apparel as many as twenty times in a day. Far more calculating than she appears, she can drink a prodigious amount without losing control of her manner and tongue. She loves to attend revels to show off her designers' latest creations but only “lets slip” what she means others to know. Uninhibited and lightly friendly in manner, Iorla knows how to make an entrance without seeming to care about it or work at it: heads turn whenever she enters a room.



Smokeflower House: The “smokeflower” (which looks like a dandelion gone to seed but with smoky-gray leaves) is found in wild places all around the Sea of Fallen Stars, basking in the heat of sunlight reflected off rocks. It is especially abundant around Altumbel, where this trading house originated. Using the smokeflower (superimposed on a painted red pennant triangle with a short horizontal top and a long-tapering central down-

wards point) as its symbol, it trades almost exclusively between Ravens Bluff, Tsurlogol, Procampur, and Altumbel; exporting Altumban goods such as pine oils, dried moonsteak mushrooms, mint jellies, and squirrel-fur mittens as well as selling seasonal produce and smoked mutton shipped from farms around Westgate. Recently furs and such things as liqueurs, nuts, and cheeses are becoming regular goods on house shipping lists—and so are mysterious stopovers somewhere in the Pirate Isles, where (presumably) the small but growing fleet of ships owned by the house trades with pirates. Rumors of such activities have begun to circulate in the Bluff, but no one has openly confronted or accused any of the Smokeflower shipcaptains and merchant investors about such doings.

Smokeflower House represents eight or nine captains, thirty-odd merchants, and another dozen or so passive investors (mainly elderly, retired Ravenians who've invested their savings). The house is run by the Theeir family. The matron of the family, the stooped and sixtyish Elgalatha, holds the Council seat while her three daughters (Albra, Sappheera, and Talatha) run the daily affairs of the house, employing a staff of two dozen agents (most of them burly male ex-adventurers used to danger and dealing with both thieves and pirates). Smokeflower House is prosperous but not spectacularly successful; some civic officials believe money may from time to time be diverted out of the coffers and flows to somewhere outside Ravens Bluff.



The Storm Dragon House: This new and relatively secretive trading house deals in all manner of goods, from hand mirrors to footstools, most of them exquisitely made and low-priced. Embroidered silk is offered at ridiculously reasonable prices, and increasing numbers of Ravenians have made the obvious connection between the materials and the prices: these are slave-made products, probably from Thay. Some stranger things (from Kara-Tur and Zakhara) are occasionally imported by the storm Dragons, and there's no evidence thus far of their either taking slaves in the Vast or importing the drugs that certain Thayvian slavemasters have made infamous. Still, under the guise of checking for such things, Chief Constable Sunriver's men have taken to making random inspections of Storm Dragon shipments and warehouses (they're really checking to ensure that incoming products aren't bearing enchantments that will enable Red Wizards to easily *teleport* hence, magically influence Ravenian owners of the purchased items, or unleash damaging spell effects from afar).

The Storm Dragons always act amazed and “outraged, simply outraged” when authorities question them or inspect their premises, but it's so obviously an act that it's simply ignored—and soon smoothly ceases, leaving the formerly protesting house merchants almost smirking. The Storm Dragon personnel are all Thayvian-born and of twenty to thirty years of age. They go straight to the embassy of Thay for an interview of some sort upon first arriving in Ravens Bluff, and to a man (there are no women among them) they seem quiet and utterly self-controlled. The house was founded and is led by a gray-haired veteran warrior named Riyvan Thalond, who uses the title Housemaster. Thalond holds the Council seat, though from time to time once of his two assistants, Houselaters Elgrith Orinthalas and Toseyin Dulkrauth will attend in his stead if he is “indisposed” (i.e., away on secret business). Orinthalas is known to be an expert jeweler and something of an authority on magic; Dulkrauth is a silk buyer and reputedly an expert killer-by-stealth, always discretely shadowed by the Watch whenever he goes out into the city streets.



The Storm Dragons use as their symbol an open-fanged dragon's head facing dexter and biting on a pearl; its long, snakelike, wingless body curves around to encircle the scene, the tail rising up to support the pearl on its tip.



Strangestars House: This house specializes in far travel and the exotic goods that can be brought back from far places (such as Nimbral, Var the Golden, and the Utter East). In particular, the various putty-like spiced and flavored edible garnishes made in such places (notably *halomonde*, an almond paste; and *soabrath*, a leekgrass-and-garlic paste) are solid sellers for Strangestars. One can also find a wild variety of brass lamps and braziers, rugs and tents, carved tusk-daggers from slain "desert dogs" (jackals), and chain-work in their line of imported goods. The house uses a device of a merchant's balance-scales (two pans hanging by chains from a T-bar) flanked on both sides by arcs of stars (three five-pointed stars in each arc).

House affairs are run by democratic vote (in closed, secret sessions) among the forty-odd young partners (most of them young men with small fortunes but hitherto no idea of what to do with them). These sessions are run by the secretary of the house, a tiny but forceful elven woman by the name of Aluendalee Strangestars. She usually sits on Council, but sometimes sends one of her handsome young men in her stead. Aluendalee's tongue can be razor-sharp, but she's seldom out of temper; her biting words usually seem to be delivered almost playfully. Strangestars is growing slowly and steadily in wealth, its success slowed by Aluendalee's insistence on turning twenty percent of profits directly back to the many partners, "to throw away as they see fit" — a decision that pleases her investors very much indeed,



Telsark's House: Augluster Telsark is a bald-headed, agile, handsome man who enjoys cultivating a mysterious manner, dancing, and swordplay. An expert with the blade, he seems irresistible to women; since his recent arrival from Reth, scores of Ravenian women have gone to revels with him — and left revels with him. Once he was accused of *charming* women, and even being a vampire, but a thorough investigation showed that he was magic-free, amusing, human, and spectacular of build. Telsark enjoys being the center of attention and making people talk and is given to bold (even foolish) acts in order to achieve such prominence. When he asked more than eighty lady friends if they'd invest in a venture headed by him, they agreed — so enthusiastically that Telsark was able to buy over twenty properties in the city and pay back his investors within a year just from the proceeds of resales of a few strategic buildings and the rents from the rest.

Telsark makes a practice of hiring the unmarried daughters of his lady backers to be his staff; thus far over twenty have agreed. Most of them find Telsark "hilarious" in person and exciting to work for, as the striking adventurer jaunts around Hillsfar, Sembia, Westgate, and Telflamm making deals and breaking hearts as he's always done. Telsark has told his staff to buy jewelry and clothing that catches their eye but isn't of the most expensive make; they are to keep samples to wear themselves and buy up the rest for sale by the house in Ravens Bluff and Sembia.

Telsark never enters the Dales (he has some past history there involving angry husbands) but often sends some of his staff to sell selected wares to Dalefolk. Thus far, their taste has proven unerring; on the first few runs, all the goods were sold at the first stop, and even with a veritable caravan of sixteen wagons on their last trip the Telsark vendors (selling under the name "Hillharp Traders") were cleaned out in Ashabenford after visiting only Essembrá first. As they packed the wagons to turn homewards, buyers from Tilverton were buzzing around them, clamoring for shipments of what they saw local women bearing away.

Telsark's had just one setback — the sinking of a ship he'd just bought — and the prow of a submerged ship, surrounded by curling waves, is now the symbol of the house. Augluster Telsark sits in his own Council seat and has already been confronted at three Council meetings by an angry nobleman (a different one each time) demanding Telsark leave his wife alone. He takes such confrontations with calm and quiet humor, and once even took a sobbing nobleman out to a nearby tavern for a quiet talk about domestic bliss — after disarming the man twice in a duel that lasted about a minute.



The Tempest Rose Merchant House: The largest, wealthiest, and best-connected of all the merchant houses is the Tempest Rose (whose symbol is a horizontal black rose, stem to the sinister and open flower to the dexter, with three drops of water hanging from its petals and a lightning bolt bisecting the stem from high dexter to low sinister). Officially run by its Chamberlain, the strikingly tall and urbane olive merchant Bendro

Mundigrar, it's an open secret in the Bluff that the Rose is owned by Lady Lauren DeVillars and managed by her as exactly as if its employees were her domestic staff (as indeed some of them are).

Lady DeVillars has hired landscapers from Cormyr to "set to rights" DeVillars lands ravaged by war, freeing her to devote all the time she can spare from her duties as the newly restored high priestess of Waukeen to develop commercial interests, aided in both endeavors by her daughters Chantel and Bethany (both priestesses of Waukeen in their own right). She is particularly concerned to block other merchant houses from snapping up the outlying estates of nobles who don't really want to sell but need short-term money to rebuild or pay off debts. The Tempest Rose has swiftly become the principal creditor of Ravenian nobles, owed huge sums secured by vast amounts of property offered as collateral. Lady DeVillars could continue in comfort (if not in quite so high a style as she's accustomed to) if not a copper of these loans were ever paid back — but if they are, she stands to recoup literally millions of gold pieces once all the principal and interest are repaid. The Rose thus functions primarily as a bank and has come to be so trusted that it now even mints its own money: gold pieces bearing a simple but elegant rose design on one side and Waukeen's profile in bas-relief on the other. Some Ravenians have come to prefer these gold pieces to the official coinage of the city: the "raven" (see page 66). In addition to its banking concerns, the Tempest Rose also invests in building construction (as Lady Lauren wants the city to replace wartime damage as quickly as possible). It owns several small concerns that make sailcloth, rope, chests, and barrels as well as investing in inventions of all sorts (the smaller and more practical the better). Finally, Lady Lauren uses the Merchant House to indulge one of her hobbies — that of breeding fine riding horses, able to race and jump with equal facility. She knows each of her horses by name and visits their farm whenever her duties allow.



Chamberlain Mundigrar sits in the Council seat for this house, but he's been known to hasten to Lady DeVillars for a conference before voting when unexpected matters arise (much to the amusement of his fellow Counselors). He's more kindly in manner than Lady DeVillars tends to be but still expects the best performances from the Rose workers under him that they can give. "How can we do that better next time?"—his inevitable question—has become a house catchphrase. The diligent attention to detail and smiling enthusiasm of Tempest Rose staffers make it the leading Merchant House in the Bluff, increasingly the business choice of independent merchants and lone citizens alike.



Vespers: This large and prosperous house deals in elegant, expensive, and expensive-looking items of all kinds, having established itself as "the purveyor to the finest folk" (i.e., the nobles and the most pompous and wealthy of civic officials and merchants). Crystal and glassware, silver dishes and accouterments, and fine wines are the most popular Vespan products. The deftly polite staff of this house (who often moonlight as serving staff

for lords and merchants desiring to impress visitors on special occasions) are adept at sensing changes in fashion and offering impressionable nobles things that seem irresistible at the time. Lord Norwood, not the most tactful of men, once looked around at a revel hosted by one of his fellow nobles and snorted "Huh! More Vespers junk! They'll be sending out a catalogue next!"

Perhaps two dozen silent partners stand behind the founder and head of Vespers, the white-haired old toymaker Queldino Tasamber (once of Athkatla). Queldino carefully trains his staff with the aid of his wife, said to be a witch of Rashemen—and they all seem to adore her but are careful to obey her utterly, acquiring the same perfect manners and impeccable grooming. Vespers is always tasteful show and exclusivity, never allowing any dirt, disarray, or hurry to disturb the smooth veneer. It simply pours profits back into the pockets of its investors, being perhaps the most steadily profitable of the Ravenian Merchant Houses. During the recent war, when many other houses suffered huge setbacks in business, the Vespans smoothly shifted to sell beautiful engraved silver armor—as well as elegant gauntlets for ladies who wanted to signal their readiness for battle without indulging in any actual discomfort.

Queldino holds the house Council seat (his wife, Vaerma, has never been seen out in public in the city, save perhaps heavily cowed and after dark). He designed the house symbol himself: a tall, slender wineglass of the sort sometimes called a "flute," with a twinkling, many-pointed star rising up out of it trailing smoke or stardust. This is usually rendered in silver; if painted, the background is deep purple at the bottom, darkening to near-black at the top.



Wyrnhoard House: Founded, as its name suggests, using wealth seized from a dragon's hoard by adventurers, this house uses as its symbol a pile of gleaming golden coins held in two cupped hands. It sponsors adventurers and exploratory mining expeditions of all kinds and has had a rocky up-and-down financial history as a result (due to client deaths rather than to defaults or deceit).

Wyrnhoard House is run by an elderly group of retired adventurers, the Band of the Flaming Sword, who once rode out of Arrabar, slaying at least two dragons and one fell archmage in over forty-odd years of adventuring. They sell adventuring gear, such as climbing ropes, packs, tents, grapples, dome-huts made of metal shields that can be firmly attached together, and so on. Their profits go towards the purchase of building after building in the city as they seek a more stable income (through rents) in their old age. The Flaming Swords move into each new acquisition, refurbish it, and then rent it out and move on. Certain members of the band are rumored to possess magical weapons, but the spokesman for the house, Council seat holder and retired warrior Baerendon Tulsnaar, denies any ownership of magic on the part of any of the surviving members of the band—according to Baerendon, the Flaming Sword from which the group took its name fell into a chasm thirty years ago with its owner, paladin of Tyr Taendel Warryth. Thieves who recently slipped into the bedchamber of the Band's other retired warrior, Casheira Archulgelt, swear she turned into a wyvern in front of their eyes and

"bounded across the room after them." Whatever truly occurred to make three of the thieves fall to their deaths on the street below also left a gaping hole in the wall, running almost the entire length of the structure. Casheira, questioned about the accuracy of their account, displayed wrinkled thews and said mildly, "Splendid imaginations the young folk have today, hey?"

Recent House Developments

Two interesting businesses have recently established themselves in the city—neither has been admitted to the Merchants Council (the original sixteen houses are wary of diluting their influence), but each has attracted interest. The House of the Black Flame officially purchased a large warehouse standing near the north gates and announced their grand plan to establish "the most prominent trading house in the city." Headed by Fredrick Truelane, the Black Flame specializes in clothing, foods, and exotic weapons from around the Realms.

In contrast, the other new house opened its doors almost secretly. The House of Desires is an establishment directly governed by clergy of Sharesa, specializing in the sale of oils, scents, "love potions" (herbal, not magic), and alluring garb of silk, leather, and fine textiles not often seen so far north. Although barred from a number of coastal cities around the Inner Sea, this House has been quietly welcomed by the Merchants Council (despite some friction on the part of Nightbird House) in the hopes that it will assist Ravens Bluff in the establishment of permanent trade with some of the far southern realms in which Sharesa's worship is well established. The Clerical Circle expressed considerable misgivings but found they could not actually ban the House or close its doors since the priestesses defined their edifice as a business, not a place of worship. This did not prevent accusations of payoffs "both sensual and monetary," but for now the Merchants Council continue to shield this fledgling venture.

Another point of controversy among the Ravenian Merchant Houses has been Whale's Tail House, a small concern operating out of various ramshackle buildings on the docks that has been accused of fencing stolen goods for Inner Sea pirates and wreck-booty from coastal wreckers (who lure ships onto rocks by showing lights by night in storms). The house has declined to respond or indeed make any scheduled report to the Council. The Merchants Council is now considering whether to claim authority over nonmember businesses, forcing them to uphold its standards, or to forward such reports to the civic government.

The Guilds

The guild is the standard organization for many professions and businesses operating in Ravens Bluff—measures of protection (through the strength-of-numbers and codified rules of conduct) for the small shopkeeper against ruthless and unscrupulous competition. Most guilds are legal entities chartered by the Council of Lords and the Merchants Council (both must ratify the charter for it to take effect). A guild charter specifies the internal organization of the guild, the authority of the guildmaster and other officers when dealing with outsiders, taxes and obligations owed the city, and guild privileges granted by the government, such as exclusive licenses or monopolies. These charters normally run for ten to twenty years, and (except in extreme and extraordinary circumstances) can be revoked only upon expiration. The Lord Magistrate can suspend a guild's charter for up to ten days if the guild has flagrantly violated some civil ordinance, but early revocation of a charter requires a majority vote of both Councils. All guilds in Ravens Bluff are officially less than thirty years old, but their members have been loosely organized in their various professions for as long as anyone can remember.

The Regent of the Guilds (see page 66) is the government watchdog over, and liaison to, all city guilds. By law, he has review and veto power over the official policies of all guilds and the responsibility to ensure that each guild honors its charter obligations. Should a guild not live up to its charter terms and obligations, the Regent can recommend revocation of its charter (more often, he or she levies fines and suspends certain guild mercantile privileges until the guild mends its ways). The Regent is grossly overworked and sometimes unable to fully attend to his or her duties, especially since many guilds strive to evade the Regent's authority as much as possible.



Guilds train apprentices in their trades, establish quality standards for products, set standard prices, market their members' product, discourage non-guild competition, and try to protect their members and privileges from government harassment (which certain guilds define as any interference or even scrutiny). Guilds are supposedly self-policing; any member who acts against a guild's best interests risks severe punishment. Some guilds maintain a small force of mercenaries for protection and intimidation, but most rely on their burlier members when physical persuasion is required.

Internal organization differs from guild to guild, but each is headed by a guildmaster elected from among senior guild members. The guildmaster acts as official spokesman in court and before the two Councils and Lady Mayor; he or she often sets guild policy as well. A guildmaster needs to be a shrewd politician to control his or her guild and maintain good relations with the civic government, since the interests of the members and the government often differ. Guilds have great political influence in the Bluff because of their wealth and power. The people elected as guildmasters tend to be among the most ingenious and astute individuals in Ravens Bluff.

Several types of guilds operate in the Bluff. The most plentiful of these are the Craft Guilds, which concern themselves with a single industry. There is a guild for all the major crafts practiced in Ravens Bluff: the Armorers Guild; the Brotherhood of Wool Carders and Weavers; the Builders Guild; the Cartmans Guild; the Chandlers Guild; the Coopers Council; the Fellowship of Herders and Butchers; the Fellowship of Jewelers, Goldsmiths, and Whitesmiths; the Fishmongers Association; the Guild of Blacksmiths and Wheelwrights; the Guild of Fine Carvers and Furniture Makers; the Leatherworkers and Tanners Guild; and the Stonemasons Guild.

Thieves' Guilds aren't guilds in a conventional sense, but they do tend to organize themselves along the same lines. Naturally, they don't bother with legal requirements. The last successful Ravens Bluff Thieves Guild, the Four Ravens, was suppressed some forty years ago; while persistent rumor maintains that it survives to the present day (see page 17), if so it has gone underground and works behind the scene in subtle ways, being careful not to attract too much notice. A new would-be Thieves Guild tends to spring up in the Bluff about every other year or so (organized by some ambitious adventurer who sees the Bluff as an ideal place to set up shop), only to be broken up by Chief Constable Sunriver's City Watch within a few months. The closest thing Ravens Bluff has to an official Thieves Guild is the Silent Network, sometimes ironically called "a guild for thieves and spies," which concentrates on rogues' known information-gathering skills rather than their larcenous ones.

Another sort of guild, the Collective, is represented in the city by the Merchants Guild. Unlike the craft guilds, which actually make things, this organization is concerned with the importation, transportation, exportation, and sale of goods and raw materials. Most of its members sell from small shops scattered throughout the city or work behind the scenes moving large quantities of products to and from the Bluff. Much of the city's current wealth comes from these peoples' incessant efforts.

The last type of guild represented in the Bluff is the Professional Guild, whose members provide services rather than goods. The Cartman's Guild, the Guild of Clerks and Scribes, the Launderers Guild, the Sages Guild, mercenary companies, and adventuring fellowships such as the Fellowship of the Sacred Feather are examples of this type of guild. Most of the service-providers in the Bluff are not organized into guilds (for example, there is no "Butlers and Barmaidens Guild"); only those whose loyalty to their profession comes before that to their employer.

All recognized guilds in Ravens Bluff have their own coat of arms and badge (the latter usually being a simplified echo or "detail" of the former). The coat of arms is rarely seen beyond guild banners at their headquarters, though the richest guilds have coaches emblazoned with it for carrying guild officials to court and to meetings. It's recently become fashionable for guild—particularly when they're disputing something but haven't yet come to cold exchanges in court or swords in the streets—to arrange for a private meeting at one of the country inns or mansions-for-hire in the countryside upriver from the city, where bodyguards and mages with shielding spells can better ensure privacy while the two guilds work out their differences. The system works very well; so frequent have these meetings become that some ordinary guildmembers now grumble that their officers deliberately foment dissension just for the pleasure of their leisurely retreats.

Be advised that the overview that follows, while accurate so far as it goes, describes a situation that could change overnight as new guilds struggle to organize and old guilds stagger through their death-throes.

Armorers Guild

Guildmaster: Lord Rethryn Hawkynefleure (LN hm F15)

Liaison Officers: Guildmarshal Bordryn "Blackbuckler" Saern (NG hm F5) and Seneschess [Treasurer] Cortyara Phindelstal (CG hf F2)

Headquarters: Manyshields Keep, Manycoins Way, Temple District.

For years the Bluff's armorers have plodded along, content to sell their wares to a seemingly endless stream of adventurers. Increasingly, though, folk are turning to magical bracers (items whose profits lie in enchantments administered by the Wizards Guild) and other means of body protection, eschewing the expensive, heavy, custom-fitted full armors that this guild takes pride in making. Business has been slowly falling off for almost a decade now, offset only by a fad for fake armor on the part of wealthy merchants with pretensions to nobility and pretty ladies who want to look daring at parties. The war created a sudden scramble for their services, of course, but this proved to be a short-term demand that has subsided as quickly as it began now that the war is over. The Armorers are worried that their trade may dwindle to almost nothing, leaving them with only the occasional "replace this vambrace" order. They've tried to counter the popularity of mobile, personal magical wards by spreading rumors about such magics exploding, or causing users to spontaneously combust, or even subtly eating away at the wearer's flesh until his or her skin simply sloughs off in a moments of exertion or intimacy, leaving a bloody remnant that looks like a living skeleton!

Meanwhile, some guildmembers craft slender and stylish gauntlets and stomachers for ladies, while others rail against catering to the whims of fashion, however beautiful the creations, arguing that this short-term gain could lead to the long-term doom of their trade. These traditionalists labor to replace the stockpile of armor of all types expended during the war (the guild donated them to equip the army and is currently negotiating a payment schedule with the Lady Mayor's office). The aged guildmaster, a retired warrior of great accomplishment, seems more interested on being seen squiring increasingly younger and more beautiful ladies to revels, not in settling the growing rifts among the membership. Not surprisingly, the junior officers (the Guildmarshal and the Seneschess) are swiftly gaining influence as they deal with the daily concerns of members, despite their fierce disagreements about almost everything. Gruff Sir Blackbuckler takes the position that "what's good enough for our great-grandparents is good enough for you"; Cortyara has a fiery temper and a nimble tongue and uses both to argue that unless the guild learns how to make lighter, more flexible armors they will become an anachronism.

All in all, "unsettled" is the best word to describe this still-wealthy guild, entrenched (in more than one sense) within the small but defensible keep that serves as their headquarters.

Brotherhood of Wool Carders and Weavers

Guildmaster: Boldo "Manyplumes" Farchild (CN hm F3)

Liaison Officers: Master Buyer Geldiir Lostriver (LN hm F5) and Weftspeaker Essarla Hollydar (CG hf T4)

Headquarters: Brathkelpt House (named after the founding guildmaster, but more commonly called "The Loomspider" thanks to its sculpted facade), corner of DeVillars Ride and Dragonscale Street, Temple District.

The grossly fat master of this guild has been a figure of fun in Ravens Bluff for three decades, but his childlike face and lisp naive remarks conceal a keen and calculating mind that has been steadily repositioning his guild to keep costs low and wares selling by maintaining a low profile of everyday necessity for most goods and high-fashion tapestries and cloaks to offset the influx of silks and other exotic fabrics from the southern shores of the Sea of Fallen Stars. The guild acts ruthlessly (but very stealthily) under his direction to control any supplies of needles, thread, and reliable dyes reaching the Bluff, stationing buyers on the docks to deal with unexpected ship cargoes that might allow common folk (or un-guilded merchants) to get their hands on substantial amounts of what guildmembers call "the necessities." As a result, such goods may be available across the city, but not in bulk—and never of the finest quality. The guild offers added features for its wares for those able and willing to pay, such as opaque damp-resistant inner



linings or cloaks lined with metal pellets that could become deadly concealed weapons. The Brotherhood once had a quiet arrangement with several minor mages of the city to cast bogus fire-resistance enchantments on their wares ("for an extra fee") until the Wizards Guild stepped in and put a stop to the practice.

Certain guildmembers offer secret pockets and the like, but others dismiss such touches as "flashy nonsense." The guild contains a hard core of so-called "Old Masters" (perhaps two members in ten, not all of them old nor particularly masterful) who disdain finished goods of any sort, dealing only in bolts of woven cloth or bales of dyed and spun wool, mainly for sale in the Dales, Sembia, Procampur, Melvaunt, Thentia, and Turlagol. "Good honest weave" is the touchstone of an Old Master, and these guildsmen (for they are almost exclusively male) deal in durable, everyday textiles produced swiftly, at low cost, and in great volume. Many a merchant selling nondescript cloth in upland Amn or along the Vilhon Reach has a wagon loaded with bolts of cloth that came—through several owners along the way—from Ravens Bluff.

Guildmaster Boldo has skillfully steered the guild into embracing changing fashions and advances in trade and the handling of wares without overly annoying the Old Masters or causing a split between younger, eagerly innovative members and their more traditional brethren. This task hasn't been made easier by the guild's old and crotchety Master Buyer, who can spot inferior dye, minor variances in quality, or substitutions of material from a city mile away but "doesn't hold overmuch" with change or the "passing notions of emptyheads" (fashion), preferring "good, honest cloth." Geldiir Lostriver prowls around the city, talking nonstop in his thick voice; he seems to know everyone, see everything, and forget nothing—little changes in how a house is decorated, who burns their lamps late, and so on. Uptown is his prowl, because buyers live there and sellers of the dyes, raw wool, and the like pass through there. He's the up-front eyes of the guild, poking his warty nose openly into all the passing business he can.

The other important officer of the guild is rather better at finding out things folk would fain keep hidden. The Weftspeaker is a young imp of a lass who loves to climb things—in particular, houses belonging to others. She spends many nights clinging to cornels and cornices aloft in the dark, peering in windows to see (she says) who's using what cloth in their furnishings. Some suspect she sells information on other topics to the Silent Network and other clients on the side, but her able tongue and deft arguments serve the guild well in court, and she's popular with members and clients alike. Some Old Masters have taken to calling her "the Weftsider" for her skulking habits, but they take care not to criticize her in public—so far. The rifts in this guild aren't healing, though all involved seem to be taking care not to let them erupt into open struggles for control or breakaways into new guilds that of necessity will command far less power than one united guild. The tensions are causing guildmembers to visit back and forth with each other often—so much so that Intelligence & Negotiations team members of the Watch are beginning to take an interest in the Brotherhood, reasoning that an agent of the Red Wizards, say, or the Zhentarium, Cult of the Dragon, an organized slaving group among the pirates, or even interests in Calaunt or Mulmaster could find such frequent to-and-fro trips great cover for passing messages and spying.

Builders Guild

Guildmaster: Baylar Chalimauphrae (CN hm F3)

Liaison Officers: Tender Witness Joslin Huntamar (NG hm T4) and Hiremaster Laudaloss Mree (LN hm F2)

Headquarters: The Hall of Five Arches ("Tall Hall"), Moorland Ride, Uptown District.

The booming business this guild currently enjoys (see page 10) leaves it with only the concerns sudden prosperity brings: where to find more skilled workers, how to find time enough to sleep (full, extensive meals are now brought to worksites), where to hide or invest all the money guildmembers are bringing in. From menial laborers, the Builders have risen to the status of lords-to-be or at the least investors who can end up sharing in the profits of a dozen or more small businesses they've sponsored. Some are even building shops and taking a percentage (10% to 20%) of the profits of businesses who locate in the buildings, though they haven't invested a copper in the firms who become their tenants. Most Builders have been too busy and successful to change their ways; they live in the same dirty clothes as always, work with their hands, and keep the same friends and

habits as before prosperity came their way. A few, however, have "discovered" their wealth. These Builders throw money at any problems that confront them, embracing fashion like envious peacocks, angling for invitations to the most prestigious revels, and taking up expensive hobbies and sports (such as spearhunting sharks from griffonback, or playing the Game of Masks—see page 91).

In fact, the builders are so busy that they can't adequately police the honesty of their tenants and the safety of their various properties, so cheating is rampant and the wealthiest builders have taken to hiring bands of adventurers to guard their families, buildings, and investments, to spy on rivals, or even to scout new possible building sites. This hired muscle gives them a weapon to threaten business rivals, confers status ("more swords answer my bidding than you can muster"), and allows commoners to unofficially assemble private armies to rival those openly and legally maintained by the lords. However, since the courts have found the builders financially responsible for the misdeeds of their hiring adventurers, even extracurricular raids and rowdiness that befell without the builder's knowledge or permission, adventurers who go on a real rampage can expect to find that their sponsor has gone swiftly to the city authorities in the midst of any fray he or she can't reach to stop and unemployed them by legally witnessed and attested declaration.

All three officers of this guild are in full agreement, each belonging to the "old school" of hard work and simple living. Guildmaster Baylar firmly believes that his guild will still be here thriving long after the current boom is over; what really matters is not what airs his fellows give themselves or how they spend their money but how well they do their work. In his eyes, so long as the buildings are sound the guild's reputation is safe.

Cartmans Guild

Childmaster: Rhaldolo "Fists" Clauthgylt (LN hm F8)

Liaison Officers: Purser Kleller "Cold and Thin" Belsklul (LN hm F1) and Cartcaptain Borth "Merry" Mrimmer (CG hm F4)

Headquarters: Carters Hall, Skulls Street and DeVillars Ride, Temple District.

Also profiting from the ongoing building boom, the carters of Ravens Bluff have always made handsome money; in a city built on trade, their services are vital. Never allowed to restrict the city to only guild conveyances, they've managed to make their services swift, easy, and prevalent enough to keep most shopkeepers from bothering to purchase carts of their own (those who keep rental stalls, or who must often go outside the city to get their wares, often rent guild vehicles for years at a time). The familiar gold-on-green lion's paw badge of the Guild is seen on carts stopped outside most businesses in the Bluff twice or thrice a day; the carters perform the essential loading-and-unloading-with-a-minimum-of-loss-or-breakage work deftly, always employing at least one youth to keep watch over their carts to guard against theft.

Guildmembers work long hours and make much use of herbal baths to soothe aching muscles; most have tubs fitted with harnesses to keep exhausted users from falling asleep and drowning in the soothing warmth. The work is backbreaking, and most guildmembers aim to retire early, keeping lesser incomes rolling in through ownership of guild carts (and a resulting split on all fees earned through use of that cart). The guild maintains all of its carts in top condition, rebuilding and replacing long before such work becomes necessary rather than after expensive and possibly dangerous collapses. A stable of extra carts is kept ready, safe from the weather in indoor storage, to handle emergencies (such as moving wares away from fires). The guild prides itself on the honesty and skill of its members; unlike the (non-guilded) dockloaders, carters must serve apprenticeships, being trained in gentle handling and safe storage of goods (and having their honesty covertly tested along the way) before full admittance to the guild. Adventurers and other newcomers to the city can't just hire on to help load and unload carts; guildmembers do *not* consider their work an unskilled vocation. Very few carters are female or small of build, though their lookouts are often both. Widows of carters often join the guild, either owning or operating their own carts. On the surface, this guild is more democratic than most, with long and heated arguments in the Carters' Council to determine guild policy; actually, the deft guild officers almost always ignore these debates, viewing them as a harmless exercise that enable Carters to get angry at each other rather than their leaders.



Chandlers Guild

Guildmaster: Guildmistress Raethra “Old Mother Coins” Glindara (LN hf F2)

Liaison Officers: Guild Scribe Jaulonta Bluree (NG hf F1), Guild Factor Berhurlt Memblin (LN hm F6), Deputy Guild Factor Sarsip Delmer (CN half-m T2), and sixteen Officers of the Knot (inspectors)

Headquarters: Lamplit Hall, Nightlamp Street, Crow’s End

This guild represents both makers and vendors of cordage, canvas for sails, plank oils, soap, and paints. Many members keep shops that sell a variety of other goods as well as guild-governed wares; others include suppliers who dwell well inland from the Bluff but keep agents in the city and want the protection of collective trade representation. This guild was literally forced into being, early in the existence of the city, by local merchants tired of caulking that gave way at sea, shoddy ropes and sails that failed when facing their first storm, paints laced with spoiled beer, pig swill, and less savory liquids, and similar chronic unreliabilities amongst the goods now administered by this guild. A sailor’s life can depend on a rope not breaking or a sail not ripping like rotted cloth, and the Bluff depends on its merchant shipping, making this guild crucial to the city’s financial health.

Quality inspection remains the backbone of Chandlers Guild operations, and the affixing of the guild mark (a seal depicting a circle of rope surrounding a ship under sail, always accompanied by knotted cords whose secret knots are sealed in pitch so they can be broken open, inspected, and retied only by guild officers) is serious guild business, not to be undertaken by non-officers. Guildmembers undertake to sell only guild-certified goods that have passed inspection but are of course free to sell carry other lines as well; candles, lanterns, lamp oil, and wicks are an unofficial guild sideline sold by almost every chandler’s shop in the Bluff. Guildmembers are entitled to purchase guilded wares at a 40% discount from fellow guildmembers.

Guild officers can lay their hands on astonishing amounts of guilded wares in a hurry, saving a desperate (or just lazy and overly wealthy) client hours of shopping. The guild sponsors the development of new and stronger sails, cables of traditional hemp interwoven with strands of wire, and similar innovations. “Ever safer, ever stronger” is the guild motto, and its officers mean this literally. There are plans afoot to reinforce ship hulls with bands of cable so they can better resist winter ice and thus extend the sailing season a few tendays earlier and later; to make ropes and sails both lighter and stronger; to make fireproof versions of basic guild wares—but all of these schemes are old now and progressing slowly.

Coopers Guild

Guildmaster: Mallowbar “Twocasks” Peldrin (NE hm T7)

Liaison Officers: Barrelmaster Halbaeros Cornfell (LN hm F3) and Deputy Barrelmaster Oszbil Smarven (LN hm F1)

Headquarters: The Cask of Casks, Cove Street, Crow’s End.

The Coopers Guild once had a fairly shady reputation for aiding and abetting smuggling of all kinds. Double-thick barrels could conceal all manner of small goods, including liquids, between the inner and outer walls. False bottoms (and hollows within apparent knotholes) were handy places to stow away small but valuable items among an otherwise innocent cargo. A decade ago several guildmembers were even implicated in the Black Fists slaving scandal, wherein folk who had been captured throughout the Vast, the High Country, and the Moonsea lands were drugged, gagged, and tightly bound, then transported in large casks with cunningly hidden airholes; such unfortunates were then delivered into pirates’ hands for sale at distant slave markets. As a result of such incidents, today regular inspections by the Harbor Patrol and Canine Corps check all casks and barrels, both large and small, to prevent kidnapping, slaving, and smuggling; all guildmembers are required to cooperate fully with the authorities.

The legendarily fat and rowdy Guildmaster of the Coopers, “Twocasks” Peldrin, has done wonders in the last few years to rehabilitate his guild’s reputation. Besides requiring all guildmembers to cooperate fully with the authorities in any investigation, he abolished the unsavory custom (brought from old Unther and Mulhorand to barrelmakers around the Sea of Fallen Stars) of anointing the insides of casks with a daub of blood from a murdered slave in order to “prevent leakages” (today they use animal

blood instead). His followers have accepted these restrictions and reforms because Peldrin has greatly increased their business. He led the guild into the “handcask” business (“holds more than a tankard” proved a slogan few carousing adventurers could resist). He introduced Ravenians to the concept of storing even small amounts of bulk dry goods in casks rather than coffers. He’s encouraged the development of tight-sealed removable lids, rather than just the traditional bung-and-spigot openings. By encouraging his coopers to make their casks more versatile, he has popularized the product beyond their dreams.

This isn’t to say the Coopers Guild is spotlessly honest. In fact, one of its most valuable and expensive services (outstripping even the fees charged for providing large numbers of matched, new barrels on short notice) is the shufflecask service. For the right price, the guild will undertake (without guarantees) to do its utmost to keep a single barrel from being inspected by the authorities. They never resort to magical means to do so, preferring the old-fashioned approach of a combination of substitutions, stealthy shipping, distractions (the famous “flaming barrel” spontaneous fire now alerts authorities to seize and examine every barrel within reach), and haystack-hiding (putting the barrel among hundreds of similar ones). Naturally, they will only undertake such a commission if the proffered bribe is a hefty one and they think there’s a good chance of getting away with it.

Diviners Guild

Guildmasters (an elected triad): Saldo Presto (LN hm W16 [Diviner]), Aberdleen Krestner (CG gm W12 [Diviner]), and Rial Potjian (LN hm W10 [Diviner])

Liaison Officers: None (the Guildmasters fill this function)

Headquarters: Seekers’ Guildhall, Fire Lane, Uptown District.

The Diviners Guild is the last of the independent magical guilds; the others have all long since been absorbed into the Wizards Guild. Membership in “the Dreamheads” (as they are sometimes derisively called) is dwindling, under pressure from the large and mighty Wizards Guild, the Ministry of Art, and business competition from the Silent Network and other information-gathering professionals.

Formerly in the business of selling scrolls (each containing a single divination spell), the Diviners Guild discontinued this practice under intense pressure from the Wizards Guild (this pressure usually took the form of several uncomfortable months as a rat, frog, or toadstool). Eventually the Diviners agreed to restrict their operations to casting divination spells upon request. They are allowed to use magical devices, such as *crystal balls*, but not to sell such items. From time to time when pressed by mounting debts the Diviners quietly sell off scrying devices from their dwindling hoard to buyers in distant cities such as Arrabar, Telflamm, Westgate, Suzail, and Selgaunt. Only a handful of such foreign sales have ever occurred, and similar items have tended to appear in Wizards Guild hands shortly thereafter, leading several Diviners to darkly suspect that the Wizards Guild know far too much about their business. This makes a few Diviners angry; it makes far more of them very, very nervous.

The Diviners still secretly sell potions concerned with divination to certain highly-placed officials in the civic government—for use in spying on the Wizards Guild. In return for this silent service to the city, the guild has been guaranteed Ministry of Art protection against any Wizards Guild attempts to absorb or destroy the Diviners. This promise hasn’t discouraged the Wizards Guild in their ongoing attempts, especially given the current disarray within the Ministry. Recently, however, the Dean of Divination’s friendly overtures have been accepted warily but with relief; at the very least, his attempts to entice Diviners into merging with the Wizards Guild willingly marks some breathing room. It’s said that one of the triad of Guildmasters, Rial Potjian, now favors merging with the Wizards Guild. The second Guildmaster, Aberdleen Krestner, opposes any change in the Diviners’ independent status and is rumored to be behind a recent string of killings of a number of Wizards Guild mages. The third Guildmaster, Saldo Presto, is cultivating a friendship with the well-beloved head of the Ministry of Art, the old mage Ambassador Carrague, to smooth the way for the Diviners to be incorporated within the Ministry of Art. If the Diviners Guild does not disintegrate under this three-way pressure, as seems likely, it will have to find a new champion.



Fellowship of Bards, Performers, and Artists

Guildmaster: Colin O'Lyre (N hm B12)

Liaison Officers: None in particular

Headquarters: The Guildhouse, corner of Raven Way and Moorland Ride, Temple District.

This guild is described in more detail in its own chapter (see pages 32-35). Its chief concerns are with aiding and supporting its members (who have less certain incomes than guilded workers of most other professions) and with promoting music and theatrical performances (and to a lesser extent dancing, juggling, mimicry, and oratory) as something all folk should enjoy, whatever their wealth or status. Such views may falter in the face of hunger or great hardship, but guildmembers concentrate on giving their audiences what will please, not "art for art's sake" or "strikingly bold personal statements." For many hard-working folk in the Bluff, performances are a welcome delight, and the guild is succeeding in putting the arts in the minds of folk as something they need, not a foolish luxury.

The guild is hard at work on instilling in the wealthiest merchants and the nobility the idea of great status gained by sponsoring musicians, poets, writers, and thespians. Such sponsorship typically takes the form of commissions—e.g., "write me some love verses I can use tonight" or "I need grand promenade music when I step out to my gates to meet this important guest, then unobtrusive relaxing music later during the business negotiations." The Guildmaster dreads the possibility that some outlander or non-guild citizen of the Bluff may become inspired to write or perform satirical verses that make fun of Ravenaar nobles or the civic government, creating a backlash of ill-feeling against bards. Therefore, guildmembers are forbidden to directly and obviously lampoon or ridicule local figures—and the guild will move swiftly against any visitors who indulge in such dangerous practices (to the extremes of kidnapping, beating senseless, and exiling them from the city).

Fellowship of Herders and Butchers

Guildmaster: Caliglath "Boarbelly" Haerowmere (CN hm F3)

Liaison Officers: Head Goad "Roarer" Belgort Blaerick (CN hm F5) and two assistants, Goads Lexandur Cammath (LN hm T1) and "Hooker" Mazkrath Bearbold (NE hm F2)

Headquarters: Hogs Head Hall, Vesper Way and Manycoins Way, Uptown District.

The guildmaster is a huge mountain of a man, grotesquely muscled and standing well over seven feet in height (though few have ever seen him standing up; he tends to spend his days reclining on an inclined couch lined with a bulky cascade of cushions and pillows). Legend insists he's devoured an entire boar at one sitting more than once; a guild joke now taken seriously in some quarters whispers that the officers of the guild who answer to him are just waiting for the Boarbelly to reach the right size before they butcher him and serve out the results at a special guild feast!

In truth, Guildmaster Haerowmere's bark is much worse than his bite; frustrated and lonely, he essentially spends his life in one room. Few ladies are interested in such a gross monster of a man, and he's having increasing difficulty in simply walking (his gasps and wheezes when so doing are quite alarming). Unable to adequately defend himself, he trusts two magical rings he wears to protect him from thieves. One is an *ironguard ring* (see page 97), the other a ring of spell storing. While his body is immobile, though, Haerowmere's ambition ranges far and wide. Through his guild, Haerowmere is trying to become the absent, unknown ruler of the Vast, manipulating stock supplies to keep prices of edible beasts high and his

own guild as powerful as possible. Thanks to his network of informants, bribe-handling agents, and daring contacts in the mountains, raids (mounted by brigands, orcs, and hobgoblins) seem to always strike at cattle drives run by farmers or non-guild drovers, largely leaving guild livestock movements unmolested. There are always a few independent bands raiding on their own, of course, but their attacks on guild holdings merely serve to quell accusations about the guild "fixing" raids.

Haerowmere may surprise those who never expect to see him outside his room again—Goad Cammath recently brought word to Haerowmere of a magical belt worn by a legless merchant from Saerloon that allows the man to float weightless and fly about at will. Though he dreams of acquiring such an item, and will spend or do almost anything to get one, the Boarbelly suspects Cammath may just be cruelly teasing him or trying to win his support for some as-yet-unrevealed scheme. What, he wonders, if Cammath is after the mastership, and the belt can be made to explode from afar? If only he had some guileless adventurer, first to fetch the device for him and then to test it . . .

Fellowship of Jewelers, Goldsmiths, and Whitesmiths

Guildmaster: Albeirmyr Twilintar (NG hm F1)

Liaison Officers: Master Buyer Hamlyn Halbaerikh (LN hm F7) and Mistress of the Vaults Mrassala Borveir (CG hf W5)

Headquarters: The Hall of Wonders, DeVillars Ride, Temple District.

This guild tends to be paranoid, secretive, and prissy, with members meeting at feasts where genteel courtesies rule. Every member has bodyguards, both overt and hidden, and by long-standing arrangement with the civic authorities all members are allowed to keep one monster to guard their vaults (most keep several of the same species, trusting that any Watch officer can be deceived into thinking, for example, that this owlbear is the same one that he or she was shown earlier). Fellowship members are known to use elaborate chains of keys, secret phrases, poisoned catches, and hidden hiding-places to keep their gems and precious metals safe. Their guildhall is designed not just as a meeting-place and a showcase for beautiful jewelry (though it is both of these things) but a shielded-from-screaming reinforced fortress where guildmembers can work in safety should their shops, persons, or homes become imperiled by thieves, creditors, or rivals. The Hall of Wonders is in truth guarded not just by the caryatid columns one can see flanking its doors but by the iron golem that can step forth from either side of the massive iron front door, several gargoyles that perch on stair-posts on the two grand staircases that rise up out of the entry hall, and unspecified guardians within the interior rooms.

A skyship once brought pirates to the roof of the Hall, where they attempted to break in, but some sort of magic was unleashed by the jewelers that turned the huge vessel to rock crystal, which promptly shattered. This incident is vividly told and retold in the taverns of the Bluff, for not a few folk have realized that such a magic could allow the jewelers of the Fellowship to gain themselves huge fortunes in gemstone material at a single stroke. If an enchantment can turn an entire ship to rock crystal, why not twist it a trifle and turn a stone castle into a huge block of ruby? It's doubtful that any successful spell modification of this sort has been or can be made, but Rave-nians have got the great, miserly wealth of the Fellowship fixed in their heads, and no amount of denying it is likely to change their views. It doesn't help things that certain Fellowship members have been quietly buying up buildings (swiftly, and with no haggling about the asked price) on specific streets, whenever properties become available. Actually, this is because the Fellowship recently discovered an old underground tunnel beneath their building which they wish blocked permanently and are seeking to buy up the other buildings it may access in order to bury their cellars in tons of rubble. After all, it's impossible to be too careful when guarding a vaultful of goldsmiths' gold, whitesmiths' silver and platinum, and jewelers' gems.

Fellowship of The Sable Feather

Guildmaster: Sir Therus Baldwin (LG hm Pal 14) [Life Lord]

Liaison Officers: Randellen Baldwin (CN hm W11), Lady Chanell Melandor Baldwin (LG hf Pal 7)

Headquarters: Sable Gates (the Baldwin family estate), Sable Lane, Crow's End.

Founded to honor the memory of Sir Therus's dragon-slain wife, Chantell, the Fellowship undertakes adventuring commissions that further the aims of the church of Tyr. It enjoyed the support of the Prelate of Ravens Bluff, the late Sirrus Melandor (Chantell's brother), who died in the war. "Sir Baldwin" (as Therus likes to be called) almost perished in the battle; he survived but lost his right leg, chopped off at the knee. Since his recovery he has thrown himself into Fellowship work more than ever, devoting his keen mind and lifetime of experience to using it as a tool for furthering Tyr's will. He's now turned command in the field over to his son Randellen (an accomplished mage) and his new daughter-in-law, Lady Chanell (a fellow paladin of Tyr, Sirrus's adopted daughter and Therus's former squire). During the recent strife the Fellowship did their utmost to protect civic officials and buildings and to preserve the rule of law as much as possible. In gratitude, the city formally recognized the Fellowship as a guild when the war ended, despite resistance



from certain nobles and merchants who had been stung in the past by the Baldwins' habit of shattering the best-hidden slaving deals, illicit investments, and disloyal dealings. The Fellowship is a successful force for good in the Bluff and beyond, and the newly married Chanell and Randellen clearly enjoy their status as beloved local heroes among Ravenaar commoners, who delight in their exploits just as citizens of other cities take pride in the deeds of local sports teams.

Members of the Fellowship don't have or use guild titles, but the three Baldwins are its unquestioned leaders. Sir Baldwin plans their missions, Randellen decides all matters relating to magic, and Lady Chanell acts as envoy. The Fellowship hires adventurers on a mission-by-mission basis, and Sir Baldwin's sponsorship of just but impoverished causes has prevented any more mercenary adventurers' guild from taking hold in the Bluff (although he tries to keep it quiet, it's well known that Sir Baldwin himself pays the fees of those who cannot afford justice). All three Baldwins are *very* good judges of character and are careful to admit only law-abiding persons of proven morals and loyalty into the Fellowship as permanent members, so this organization remains among the smallest of the guilds.

Fishmongers Association

Guildmaster: Master Leif Alltbeir (CN hm F8)

Liaison Officer: Mistress Kira Alltbeir (CN hf F5)

Headquarters: Shining Scales Hall ("The Fish-house"), Black Visor Street, Crow's End.

Known for their fierce independence—one magistrate termed it "habitual coarse and willful lawlessness," and the phrase has stuck, because the Fishmongers are proud of it, and everyone else agrees it catches the truth all too well—the Fishmongers formed a union a decade back to collectively vandalize the nets of boats from elsewhere who dared to fish off the mouth of the Fire River or who put into Ravens Bluff and tried to sell fish directly to the public rather than to local fishmongers. The "fishstink folk" soon earned a reputation for rioting and brawling. When they set out to intimidate they decide at the outset to "Never Give In, Never Give Up" (now the guild motto). Watch officers who tried to arrest or restrain one guildmember would be jumped by all, and anyone who crossed the Fishmongers could expect to be doused with fishguts and harbor refuse either on the street or in bed (through a bedchamber window, in the middle of the night—the daily fish-tossing at the market giving the average fishmonger frighteningly accurate aim). Dead fish might find their way into the stateliest manor or judge's chamber, hidden where





they would not be found until the stench filled the building. One fastidious noble lady who tried to have “those stinking lowlifes” outlawed from “the better parts of town” awoke screaming one night when she discovered that her luxurious bed had been quietly and deftly filled with live, glistening eels that were now writhing and slithering all around her! Never ones to let an opportunity pass, recently the Association has decided to accept the many requests they get to work such pranks for hire—in other words, humiliating nobility and the wealthiest and most pretentious merchant and adventurer upstarts at the behest of paying clients. The recent appearance of a snoring—and buck-naked—Lord Palraednor, neatly laid out on his own bed in the middle of Manycoins Way one morning without any disturbances among his bodyguards or household servants, serves as evidence of how effective the Association can be.

In the early days of the Association, Lord Mayor O’Kane attended an open meeting of the Fishmongers and hammered out some firm promises of law-abiding behavior on the part of guildmembers in return for guarantees of fair treatment and guild rights. Now, anyone can fish for personal consumption but no person can sell or publicly barter fish or any other seafood, from clams to seaweed, unless they are a member of the Association or are selling it to a guildmember (at prices set by mutual agreement between the Association and the Regent of Guilds; such prices are very low but steady, never changing without public proclamation). The Fishmongers have generally kept their end of the deal but have become noticeably more raucous since the new mayor took office, insisting that their agreement was a private one with “our friend, Charles Oliver O’Kane” and that Lady Thoden must negotiate a new one. They’ve invited her to attend any of their monthly meetings, but so far she has not found time for it on her busy schedule (or nerved herself to face an audience prepared to toss fish if they don’t like what they hear, depending on whom you ask).

The Fishmongers are capably guided by the husband-wife team Leif and Kira Alltbeir. Retired pirates who turned to life on land when they noticed how many of their mates wound up on the gallows (a part of their life they prefer to keep quiet about), Kira’s beauty drew customers into their fish shop and distracted them from Leif’s everpresent thumb on the scale. Their casual charm, enjoyment of life, and sheer gusto made them popular with their fellow fishmongers. They were at the forefront of efforts to organize the guild and a popular choice to head up the new Association. They’ve kept the loyalty of their fellow fishmongers by frankly reveling in the newfound wealth of

their position while at the same time being perfectly willing to roll up the sleeves of their expensive clothes and toss fish with the best of them. At 50, Leif is slowing down a bit (he limps a bit due to an old “fishing injury”) but has lost none of his zest; Kira is 47 but still trim and fit, easily looking a decade younger. Their daughter Sheila, now 27, married an adventurer and their son Eric, 24, is now first mate to a pirate. Their youngest child, Kathra (“Kat”), 10, finds her parents’ boisterousness rather embarrassing, to their vast amusement; having inherited her mother’s darkish good looks, she solemnly plans to marry into royalty (or at least nobility) when she grows up.

During the Alltbeirs’ free-wheeling reign the Fishmongers have capably worked out a means of running fresh fish to kitchens throughout the city in brine-basin handcarts but have otherwise introduced few innovations. With their rights guaranteed, they spend much of their time enjoying internal feuds and brawls. It’s hard to find a fishmonger in the Bluff who can’t throw a squid or flounder hard, far, and accurately: “a fish in the face” is universal Ravenaar slang for news or situations that astonish, startle, or dumbfound.

Guild of Blacksmiths and Wheelwrights

Guildmaster: Beldros “Stonehand” Winterthorn (LN hm F7)

Liaison Officers: Forgemaster Sunter Riventree (CG hm F5) and Master Wright Nurnos Gaulkond (NG hm F4)

Headquarters: Anvil Hall, corner of Fire Lane and Manycoins Way, Temple District.

Although its prosperity (as the chief source of wagon- and cartwheels in the city) is almost guaranteed, this guild has always worried about getting the supplies it needs—in particular, good iron and quality ash wood (for steaming into the curved wheel-rims). It has secured a steady supply of ash by planting and tending coppices upriver from the Bluff (coppices that suffered sadly in the recent war), but its iron comes from mines in the Earthfast mountains that are often imperiled by goblin raiders. Coppiced ash also yields admirable spearhafts and building poles, so theft is always a problem despite walls and guards.

Since constantly guarding the resources upon which it depends would leave guildmembers with no time to go about their proper work, the guild hires adventurers to stand guard on their tree-groves and to accompany supply wagons out of the mountains. It constantly sponsors forays into the mountains to find new mineral wealth (the prospectors always being escorted by adventurers, who are instructed to defend them at all times while on the surface and to hunt down monsters and brigands of all sorts in the lands around once the prospectors go underground). In almost all cases, prospecting is done by entering old, abandoned dwarven delves and digging or prying at the walls to uncover secondary veins of ore that the dwarves didn’t consider worth their while. When such veins are discovered, the prospectors return to gather manpower and mount a proper expedition to reopen the mine.

The guild keeps itself very busy seeing to the maintenance of its coppices and mines. It has several smelting-yards in the countryside, where raw ore is melt in furnaces and the molten iron poured into molds hollowed out of the ground; the resultant “pigs” (huge ingots) of raw iron are brought to Anvil Hall in the Bluff for storage and fair distribution among guildmembers. These pigs represent a valuable resource and thus not for sale to nonmembers, except by approval of the Guildmaster—who has only given it thrice, each time to the Wizards Guild for component use in magical experiments; the unspecified price is believed to have included certain magical protections for the ash-grove.

Guild secrets include ways of making certain alloys, of mounting wheel-rims, and of hardening anvils to reduce brittleness. The work produced by this guild is of outstanding quality and vital to the city’s mercantile success; members take care to make and maintain a plentiful on-hand supply of horseshoes, hinges, hasps, lockplates, axle-pins, door-corners, and other useful items in steady demand, while taking in large profits for such special-ordered items as metal-sheathed doors and iron strongboxes. Of course there’s always a market for replacement wheels (demand is particularly high in spring and fall when bad roads take their toll on laden wagons). Rush orders for wheels of particular sizes and construction can cost as much as 50 gp or more, ten times the usual price.

Guildmembers are currently trying to perfect “flowmetal” (wherein very thin sheets of metal are hammered onto an item and then heated so as to



not overly damage the sheathed item yet fuse the sheets together into a continuous covering). They're also working on new ways of plating one metal with another, so that armor can be made lighter and yet stronger and more durable at the same time. There have been some spectacular failures; one member who called on the services of a wizard to make a special suit of enchanted armor ended up with shrapnel armor that exploded when struck in certain ways, killing the wearer as well as several others who were standing nearby. Unfortunately, he was wearing it himself for the final test while the wizard completed the enchantments, so the process by which they arrived at exploding armor is now lost.

Guild of Clerks and Scribes

Guildmaster: Rhendalar "The Little Vulture" Unstruvel (LN hm F1)
Liaison Officers: Learned Master Baerlkrom Eselravatar (CG hm F6) and Master of Scrolls Dundarvar Olostin (NG hm F3)
Headquarters: Crossed Quills House, corner of Raven Way and DeVillars Ride, Temple District.

The master of this guild, like the Regent of the Exchequer, gained his nickname from the bird they both resemble (given their dispositions, long noses, and bald heads). The head of the scribes is a fussy, prissy man who holds grudges, sees slights where none were intended, and frets over details. No one who is late in guild fee payments can expect to remain a member in good standing; no client reported as being troublesome or late in payment for guild work can expect to have future assignments accepted without payment in advance. Rhendalar refers to himself as being "merely careful – *very* careful, as any good clerk or scribe must be." Others, even fellow members of the guild, tend to refer to him in terms closer to acute pains in nether regions. Particularly long-suffering is the guild's own keeper of accounts and records, the Master of Scrolls, who must maintain an atmosphere of respectful enthusiasm while retrieving obscure decades-old references in a matter of minutes. The guildmaster is the sort of man who sends for a particular ledger, promptly sends it back, and then demands it a few hours later – and then again, and then again, as many as a dozen times in a workday, waiting just long enough for one of the clerks who work under the Master of Scrolls to shelve it back in its rightful place before demanding it again. Rhendalar's chief opponent in the guild is the guild's external envoy and representative, the mellow-voiced, charismatic Learned Master, who would cheerfully feed the Little Vulture to the harbor gulls, piece by piece, over a period of about a month or so. The Learned Master is driven to distraction by Rhendalar's open lack of trust and friendship towards guildmembers, loyal clients, and indeed everyone else in the world, and by the guildmaster's endless looking for insults ("Insults, he wants, does he? I'll show him six cold, sharp feet of an insult, somewhere he won't like it, I will!"). The guild keeps much of its business by Learned Master Baerlkrom's charming manner and soft-voiced apologies for the Little Vulture's coldly insolent ragings, and by Baerlkrom's covert encouragement of what he calls "shadow work" on the part of guildmembers irked by Rhendalar's habit of dispensing large commissions among the membership on the basis of whom he likes most at the moment.

Shadow work is increasingly becoming the backbone of the real profits taken home by guildmembers. The charter of this guild specifically prohibits its members or hirelings undertaking forgery or any creative work that could reasonably be mistaken for the work of someone else (that is, falsely "discovering" a lost ledger, will, deed, or other document they had in fact just created to resemble work from a known source or author—they are, however, allowed to produce copies of existing originals). Of course, certain guildmembers will undertake forbidden work, at ten times the usual fee for the amount and type of work (and with a minimum price of 100 gp, which applies even to a scrap of scrawled note or an incomplete fragment supposedly torn off something larger). In fact, any work in which the client dictates the appearance (the style of script used, the inks or pen or paper used, and so on) is at least three times as expensive as a simple freehand effort, wherein the desired message text is dictated to or scribbled down for a guildmember who can then decide on the appropriate presentation and layout. Any work done by a guildmember who knows the written missive to be false

or intended to deceive (rather than merely controversial or disputed) is always two to three times as expensive as a straightforward risk-free job. Dishonest scribes asked to create a document that is clearly illegal (such as a blackmail or ransom note, or a treasonous declaration) will ask as much as they think they can get for running such a risk (not only criminal Conspiracy charges—see page 74—but expulsion from the guild).

Members of this guild are, of course, the Bluff's resident experts in dishonest accounting, paper shuffling, and tax evasion of both legal and illegal sorts. In the days "before the Little Vulture took the roost," under his predecessor Buljack "Happy Jack" Krothtor (who is still wanted by the Ravenaar authorities and may well be living in the city behind a more-or-less permanent disguise), it wasn't uncommon for large and wealthy clients to be overcharged so that the poor and the desperate could be given lower rates—but under Rhendalar, a copper piece is a copper piece to noble and pauper alike.

Guild of Fine Carvers and Furniture Makers

Guildmaster: Orvin "Old Oak" Aridgemen (CG hm F4)
Liaison Officers: Mistress of Woods Calathra Candlemorn (CG hf F2) and Mistress of Blades Jalarra Saraeda (CN hf T5)
Headquarters: Bolynstars Hall, Evensong Ride, Uptown District.

This guild occupies the former mansion of its founding guildmaster, the late and much-lamented Arkithil Bolynstars, whose chief delight in life was the construction of elaborate secret drawers and compartments in the elegant fine furniture for which he was famous. His hobby killed him, in the end: a thieving wizard, baffled by the secrets of how to get at Arkithil's collection of magical rings (which she knew to be somewhere inside one of three ornate desks), tried a triggering spell to awaken the rings and so reveal their location. Unfortunately, the spell activated all the rings simultaneously, causing a wild magic effect that destroyed the wizard, the desks, and the sleeping Arkithil, who was wearing two of the rings at the time. All that was left of the unfortunate guildmaster was a fine mist of blood staining his bedchamber floor and walls. The stains have been left untouched and are solemnly displayed to aspiring apprentices as a warning not to delve too deeply into the making of clever compartments and secret spaces. Enthusiasts seeking such features are politely advised that a buyer offering enough coins can find many fine pieces of Bolynstars work in private hands in Ravens Bluff, Sembia, and even Cormyr. His mark was a three-petaled flower with a four-pointed spindle-star (that is, a star device with long vertical axis and shorter horizontal axis) set into the two gaps between the leaves.

As the Bolynstars line died with Arkithil, the guild has now taken this device for its own, displaying it in honey-brown upon a chestnut-brown field. The guild is currently enjoying new popularity and prosperity, thanks to its vivacious and energetic "Two Mistresses." The current guildmaster is a conservative, tradition-loving man. He realized that his set ways could slowly drag his beloved guild down into poverty, so when two young and energetic women inherited carving and cabinetry firms from fathers who'd been guildmembers and came to Orvin with some sharp complaints, he made them guild officers and let them do as they pleased. For two years they fought each other like spitting cats, disagreeing on just about everything except the need for change—until a night when they met to settle everything once and for all, drew daggers on each other, and ended up falling off their rented boat into the harbor. Neither could swim, but somehow they helped each other back into the boat, shrieking in utter terror, and found friendship along the gasping way. Orvin nursed them back to health like a doting father, and they agreed to split the guild work: Calathra takes charge of procuring raw materials and watching for trends and shortages, Jalarra supervises the details of tools and working techniques (her title, "Mistress of Blades," refers to woodcarving knives, not daggers), and Orvin sees to civic liaison work, advertising and negotiations, and matters of recruitment and guild discipline.

The latest guild ideas, enthusiastically promoted by the Two Mistresses, include padded hat boxes for ladies and ornately-carved thighstrap document cases for merchants, fitted with quill slides, secure inkbottle compartments, and scroll caddies (with an unobtrusive knife slot or coin drawer for those requesting these extras).





Launderers Guild

Guildmaster: Mistress Pentethra Narnath (CG hf W8)
Liaison Officers: Lady Envoy (negotiations and payments) Shalragha Ember (NG hf F2) and Lady of the Baskets (deliveries) Amandee Bollard (CG hf F1)
Headquarters: Mornbright House, Nightlamp Street or Rhabie Promenade (two entrances), Crow's End.

The fat, cheerful, always-merrily-bustling-about mistress of this guild can't abide dirt—especially on bodies, clothing, and linens; she takes a positive delight in banishing stains and grime. For some years this widowed mage lived in Saerloon and made ends meet by using her spells to clean up after huge revels thrown by the wealthiest of that city's merchants. Growing tired of being sneered at by haughty folk who somehow couldn't find the coins to pay her on time or in full, Pentethra finally lost her temper. In a spectacular rampage, she put back all the filth she'd removed from a twenty-towered mansion. Her deadbeat client promptly sent mercenaries to slay her, so she used the most powerful magic she had, changed to wyvern-shape, and fled to Ravens Bluff. Changing her name to that of a long-dead magical tutor, she looked around her new home, found real filth on all sides, and set to work. The increasingly prosperous but overworked Ravenians loved her for it, and her business grew by leaps and bounds. One day two sour-faced launderers came to her apartment to complain she was doing them out of a living, and she insisted on accompanying them back to explain herself to their fellows. She found a room full of exhausted, surly, scalded women and men. On the spot she conceived and laid before them a plan that would see everyone work less, share equally in all fees taken in (thus eliminating the need for rivalries), and still get fed if they fell sick. Some snorted she was addled or soap-drunk, but enough felt the fire of hope that they made her guildmaster on the spot. She's never looked back, and those willing to work hard and plunge their arms into near-boiling water have never wanted for employ since—fetching, washing, hanging, folding, pressing, or delivering laundry. Only guild officers handle funds, and Pentethra herself handles all training. Anyone who wants a bath can get one at the guildhouse at any time (2 coppers to non-members but free to members; the member invariably choose cool baths over the hot ones), and the guild is becoming popular with everyone except perfume-sellers, though it will always lack the importance of some other professions. Few in Ravens Bluff know or care about Pentethra's past; she rarely refers to it herself but did use her real surname for the guild headquarters.

Leatherworkers and Tanners Guild

Guildmaster: Ilbert Orndather (NE hm T3)
Liaison Officers: Master Buyer Handelmer Forthgil (LN hm F7) and Guild Clerk Audatha Lhandaerlos (NG hf F1)
Headquarters: Sternbound Hall, Unicorn Lane, Crow's End

This guild has always been an intrigue-riddled, discontented collection of warring factions. Years ago it absorbed the Cobblers Guild in what was for all practical purposes a sword-point takeover, and the bad blood from that battle has never run out of the crumbling old converted warehouse that the guild now calls home. The last guildmaster, Orskos Sternbound, was assassinated in his chair at the Hall late one night—by a disaffected guildmember, according to the official story (most guildmembers have their doubts), setting off a vicious power struggle. The winner was a ruthless bullyboy who knew how to toady to certain now-dead nobles. He enriched both himself and the guild by using the least scrupulous guildmembers as a gang of hired muscle willing to kidnap or destroy property for his noble patrons. Many a guildmember was killed in such work, and the few who went on "special assignments" and still survive would never now dare to breathe a word of their former careers to anyone, those who did having met with "accidents" shortly afterwards.

Guildmaster Orndather is less bold in his crimes these days, affecting the air of a wise and smiling old man as he sits among his everpresent bodyguards, working out tax fiddles and new and ever-slicker ways of embezzling guild funds. His Master Buyer is a retired warrior he rescued from poverty and ill-healed wounds long ago, unshakably loyal. Guild Clerk Audatha—young, pretty, and naive—is being positioned to be the scapegoat if the

monetary shortfalls he's engineered are ever discovered. In the meantime, she serves as a welcome, decorative, friendly addition to the guildhall, popular with members and visitors but clearly not a power within the guild.

Guildmembers know that something's going on; their guild fees are high for seemingly little in return, and guild business is done in whispered confidences passed on from one member to another. For all that, the recent war has created a high demand for replacement swordbelts, gloves, reins, leather armor, and boots, in addition to the steady demand for shoe and boot repair and new footwear. There's also more call for leather upholstery and tack (many horses have been slain by three years of harsh winters, orc raids, and the recent war, and new mounts are often of different sizes than the old). The plague of rats recently engineered by the guildmaster (employing three young Thayvian wizards proud of the rat-summoning spells they'd devised) has also inflated demand: rats gnaw on leather when they can't easily get anything else. Orndather knows he dare not do that again, however: the three magelings vanished, and shortly thereafter someone left three dead rats at the guildmaster's own front door—each of them clad in red wizards, robes. Someone knows.

For the first time in years, Orndather is feeling the cold creep of real fear down his back. He's doubled his bodyguards and sent out spies to every tavern and backalley meeting in the Bluff, to listen and ask about any news of the Leatherworkers or about wizards having anything to do with rats. Those who have reported back have found nothing. . . but then again, two of the spies have gone missing.

Merchants Guild

Guildmaster: None at present; Council Secretary Andeamus Druthfyre (NG hm F1) unofficially fills this post as guild representative but lacks Guildmaster authority

Liaison Officers: Councilors (nine in number, listed in roughly descending order of influence): the importer Haeribare Oumrath (a Calishite CN hm F4), the warehouse landlord Dlaerstil Fendree (a LN hm F7 much-scarred retired Cormyrean soldier), the importer and bulk-goods barterer (and suspected slaver) Algalor Hanabar (NE hm T6), the stall- and crate-maker Olorpus Khaldyn (a grossly fat Chessentan CN hm F6), the caravan-sponsor Nolbeth Durncrown (a handsome and sweet-voiced NG hm B3 who seldom escapes the notice of ladies, wherever he goes), the short-cargo shipper Donadel Flurwaender (a gruff, hairy, surly, and racist CE hm F4 dealer in goods too small to fill a ship but too bulky to profitably be carried overland), curios broker Balamaerthos Valaguth (a smooth-tongued NE hm T9 who imports and passes on job-lots of all sorts of exotic goods from distant ports), bulk exporter and caravan assembler Alaundalo Phaermyl (CG hm F2, an effeminate but astonishingly successful investor), and trinkets and lamp oil seller Belbedeera Shouth (a hard-as-nails, brassy-voiced, and broadly-built NG hf F3 known in the streets of the city as "the Queen of the Stalls")

Headquarters: The Cup of Coins, corner of Broken Bit Lane and Dalton Drive, Uptown District.

Based in a former tavern that wouldn't admit merchants (subsequently triumphantly seized by guildmembers in lieu of unpaid debts, rebuilt, and renamed), the Merchants Guild has risen with the speed and splendor of a spring flower from nothingness to great power—only to be passed by in the last year or so. Under its able (and only) guildmaster, Arvin Kothonos, the fledgling Merchants Guild championed those traditionally ignored by guilds: importers, caravan merchants, exporters, bulk sellers of raw goods, and small-stall street- and market-vendors. These are the buyers and sellers, both on the street corners and behind the scenes, who keep supplies flowing to, from, and through the city. They're never viewed as a close-knit or even allied group of merchants, nor do they personally produce goods, but they do make a lot of coins in their work and are essential to the flow of trade in the region, the prosperity of the civic coffers, and the folk in the streets.

The guild consists of hard-working, busy folk who lack the time or energy to attend many guild gatherings. Instead, they elect a governing Council of Ten and use one of the two dozen pageboys employed by the guild to send complaints, news, and suggestions to individual Councilors, trusting these exalted figures to oversee guild policy and tactics in their many closed-door meetings (any guildmember may freely attend, but his or her staff may not, nor any other non-member—not even civic officials or leaders). The Council of Ten sets minimum prices, decides export and import quotas, assigns



guild-controlled stall spaces in the bazaar, and disciplines guildmembers who violate guild rules; they also oversee guild-sponsored projects and devise the necessary tactics to crush unwanted opposition.

In theory, the guildmaster chairs and is the final member of the Council of Ten, but since the appointment of Kothonos to the civic post of Lord Chancellor the Council has been without a leader. Not surprisingly, the individual interests of its Councilors threaten to tear the guild apart. The Council Secretary has inherited all the grunge work but none of the decision-making responsibility; he acts as the guild's liaison but cannot commit the guild to courses of action without Council approval—which has never yet been forthcoming. A strong new leader who's *not* one of the present Councilors is needed (if any one of the sitting Councilors were to take the chair, at least three of the others would quit guild, Council, and all on the spot in protest, taking their factions with them). The guild is being overtaken by the new civic body, the Merchants Council; several Guild Councilors who hunger for power are clawing to claim seats. Those who sit in the Cup of Coins may soon see their guild collapse or dwindle down into a thief-watch collective serving only street and stall vendors, with the wealthy behind-the-scenes bulk shippers deserting its ranks for the Merchants Council (or places in the unofficial, low-profile ring of backers and lobbyists that will inevitably form behind the Merchants Council).

In the meantime, the shy, quiet Council Secretary is trying to keep the guild running at least as an information-sharing network among its members, whilst important decisions on member discipline, guild-sponsored festivals, and the like are continually deferred. Secretary Druthfyre made one tentative overture to the former Lord Mayor, Charles Oliver O'Kane, hoping to entice him into the guildmaster's chair, but O'Kane remained politely evasive. Increasing street-snatch crimes have driven Secretary Druthfyre to hire adventurers to serve as guild "stall safety enforcers" in recent months, but the Watch has taken a dim view of this, and (as the Councilors argue and no guildmaster steps forward to snarl at the Lady Mayor to "get her dogs—er, Watch—in line") the legal status of these guild enforcers remains in doubt.

Sages Guild

Guildmaster: Lady Havaratha Delmaer (in life, a LN hf W9; now a LE flameskull, AC 3, MV Fly 21 (A), 22 hp, THAC0 15, casts 1 spell per round: *dispel invisibility*, *dispel magic*, *Evard's black tentacles*, *invisibility*, *magic missile*, *spell reflection* (returns all spells cast at the skull during the following round back at their casters) or *tongues*; regenerates 1 hp per round and will reassemble after being destroyed unless doused in holy water or affected by *dispel magic*, *exorcise*, or *remove curse*; has all undead spell immunities plus immunity to mind-control spells, cold, fire, electrical, and heat-related attacks of all sorts; has 88% magic resistance; can't be turned in the House—otherwise turns as a lich; SZ S; ML 20 in House, 14 outside; XP 2,000; MC *Annual* #1)
Liaison Officers: House Steward Orthryn Calavadaver (LG hm W2)

Headquarters: Oldover House, corner of Hawk Passage and Manycoins Way, Temple District.

More of a private club than a true guild, the headquarters of this small congregation of sages provides a place for the aged men and women who make up its membership to smoke, sleep, dine, drink, relax, and even live (when on hard times). It occupies a tall, four-story stone city mansion (sporting balconies but lacking grounds) that once belonged to the now-extinct wealthy merchant family of Thaalier; the house was renamed to honor the first great sage to dwell in Ravens Bluff, the long-dead Nunclær Oldover, who mastered human history like no other has before or since.

Oldover House sees many strange goings-on. There are the occasional extremely odd visitor come to trade information, like goods bartered in a market, late into the night: past guests have included a lillend, an illithid, a tefling, a former sage who had become a lich, a doppelganger, a gold dragon (in human form, of course), an alu-fiend, an erinyes who was in town recruiting for the Blood War, any number of lycanthropes, a wolfwere, a rakshasa, yuan-ti, and once even a medusa—all quietly arriving under a promise of safe conduct, of course. On other nights, a good feast is served up (with a comfortable bed to follow it) to a visiting minstrel or peddler, in exchange for all the news he or she can furnish. Some nights see trivia-contests, wherein the prizes hazarded are secrets or copied-out pages of rare and dusty lore. Others see urgent conclaves, wherein members debate on what information to divulge or withhold on a particular sensitive matter that has come up—concocting a "house line" prevents customers from playing one sage off against

another. This is the real business of the guild, though outsiders assume its primary function is to provide a "house sage" on the premises. Each member takes turns being available to answer the queries of passersby in exchange for stiff fees (which are divided between the sage and the guild, freeing the guild from having to charge any sort of membership fee to maintain the level of luxury it offers its members). The price is typically 25 to 50 gp per simple answer (for example, a name, location, or amount) that the sage knows without looking it up and 100 gp for an extensive but straightforward answer (for example, a list of names, genealogical relationships, brief account and dating of a single historical event, identification of a time period or race or nationality from a name alone, and so forth) or for any question that requires research. Complex questions are referred to the ranking guild expert on the particular topic, who will make a private appointment with the customer (answers to such questions will cost anywhere from 100 to 1000 gp per day, depending on the intrinsic value of the information).

Few folk know that the guildmaster is dead; most believe a rumor (started and spread by the guild sages) that she's suffering from a wasting disease which leaves her weak and in seclusion. Havaratha doesn't bother to hide her condition from fellow guildmembers, but she deems it prudent to stay out of sight of envoys from other guilds or civic officials, communicating entirely by dictated messages. Havaratha runs the guild even more efficiently now than she did in life, free of the need to sleep, the extremes of emotion that govern living folk, and personal ambitions; if her manner has grown brusque, the sages affect not to notice. She chairs all important meetings and covertly checks on the doings of guildmembers about whose honesty she harbors suspicions; such forays (always employing *invisibility* when the darkness of night can't cloak her, arriving and departing via two sewer routes that allow her to enter or leave the immediate vicinity of the House underground) are the only times she leaves Oldover House.

Besides Guildmaster Havaratha, Oldover House has at least two other guardians. The most important is Orthryn Calavadaver, the tall, dignified, white-haired House Steward. Usually seen gliding tirelessly along the halls like a butler with his *rod of stewardship* in hand (this black rod functions just like a *rod of rulership*, save that its enchantments are embedded in the walls of Oldover House; it is powerless when removed from the building), Calavadaver has politely escorted any number of would-be sneak thieves empty-handed from the premises. A watchghost also lurks in the guild library, jealously guarding the books, scrolls, and maps of the guild from fire, gnawing worms and insects, and intruders.

The guild performs additional, important, and secret services for members only. Any member can request guild assistance in providing disguises or a hideaway (concealed living quarters, useful for evading angry clients or importune creditors). The guild also does discreet banking for its members (either vault storage of funds and valuables or the active investing of same) and will arrange third-party acquisitions of old books or other information. Finally, for sages who are down on their luck, the guild will pay in ready coin for the loan of any interesting tome not already in their library; an exact copy of the book is made and the original returned to its owner.

The Silent Network

Guildmaster: Unknown

Liaison Officers: Deputy Guildmaster Lady Cassandra Minstrelwish (NG half-f T10), Recruitment Officer Martin (NG hm B6), Information Officer Snaggly (NG dm F5/T6), and Purchasing Officer (identity unknown)

Headquarters: None known; the Deputy Guildmaster can usually be found at her husband's place of business, the Crescent Moon Inn, Rhobie Promenade, Temple District.

This "guild for thieves and spies" is more fully described in its own chapter (see pages 35-37). A spying organization run for an unknown master, the Silent Network seems to often freely share the information it gathers with senior civic officials, as if in support of ongoing good government. In turn, the Watch never tries to identify Network members nor hamper surveillance activities it can identify as Network-run. There were grumblings in some civic chambers about the paltry and useless information gathered by the Network about the recent war, but such arguments are countered vigorously by the Deputy Guildmaster with the view that the Network gathers what it is commissioned to learn and nothing more—and that, war or no war, civic officials would have a far greater problem with an organization of spies that looked where it wanted, acting without restriction or responsible guidance. "Think of the scandals," she said, and that phrase has quickly be-



come a standard warning in the government, applying to many other things than the Silent Network.

There is growing concern among both civic officials and the nobility, however, over the continuing mystery about who runs the Network. "How can we hold accountable someone we can't find?" one of the Regents publicly complained. Surprisingly enough, the Merchants Council came to the Network's defense, citing a long precedent of anonymity in some business negotiations and arguing that this "guild" be left alone unless the Network begins to use violence in its operations or otherwise act in an irresponsible manner. "A hunger for control may be what drives governments," one Councilor said in a rebuttal speech to the Regent, "but that hunger should never strangle the daily work of a legitimate, guilded business organization." Members of the Network continue to say nothing of such politics and to go about their business as usual—though some merchants have noted a rise in rumors about the less savory doings of certain nobles . . . rumors that are all turning out to be true.

Stonemasons Guild

Guildmaster: Olberth Hammargar (LN hm F10)

Liaison Officers: Senior Master Ilmer Melpert (NG hm F6), Cutter-At-Large [ombudsman and envoy] Morblan Sharaksan (CN hm F4), and Chief Delver Waxshn Hebron (LN dm F7)

Headquarters: Stonelion House, corner of Hawk Passage and Moorland Ride, Temple District.

The Masters (as full members of this guild all prefer to be called, regardless of their guild rank or actual accomplishments) tend to favor massive and practical work over stylish, although recently they have begun to work sweeping curves into many a corner where wall and roof meet. The guild has been very successful in promoting all-stone building methods for the exteriors of all houses, using the fire-safety argument tellingly by demonstrations that plainly showed the following: stone block buildings burn within, where all the timbers are, and collapse in on themselves, whereas wooden structures spit fire in all directions and send flames racing horizontally to any touching or adjacent buildings well before they are themselves destroyed. It's just fair fortune and happenstance that the Stonemasons benefit personally from all the stones and slates that take the place of timbered upper floors and shake roofs . . .

In the current vigorous push for rebuilding, the guild has been aided by the steadily increasing cost of property within the city walls. After surviving the fierce winter cold and any number of orc, wolf, and brigand raids, the tent city outside the north walls was forcibly dismantled earlier this year when bands of thieves began using it as a base for raids into the city. The final battles of the war, which most citizens watched from the walls, vividly showed how much safer it was inside the city than outside those same walls, making it unlikely that the tent city will be rebuilt anytime soon. The resultant crowding has led to small one-story cottages being torn down in favor of taller structures everywhere in the Bluff. Among the nobility and particularly the wealthiest merchants, games of competing architecture have even begun. Everyone has to have more floors and larger turrets than their rivals, so the Stonemasons are constantly adding foundation-stones, buttresses, and outlying pillars to support extended floors and garden decks, gables, and so on. Delays in new construction due to rebuilding necessitated by war-damage (starting with damaged temples and civic buildings) has caused impatient and wealthy clients to start offering double or triple payments to queue-jump. The stonemasons responded by hiring on workers at a great rate, taking in coins at an even faster rate.

In order to meet this demand, the Stonemasons naturally needs a reliable supply of stone. This they get from a quarry in the mountains just south of the city under the control of their Delvers Guild associates. Formerly a separate guild of quarrymen composed almost entirely of dwarves, the Delvers united with the Stonemasons some years ago into what has proved to be a mutually beneficial association: the Delvers (who kept their old name for their branch of the operation) harvest the stone from the mountain and roughly shape it. Sledges then carry the stone blocks down the mountain and to the Stonemason's warehouse in the Southside District, where the stone is cut into proper lengths and shapes, dressed, and transported to the worksite. Like the Builders and the Stonemasons in the city, the Delvers have expanded their operations to keep up with demand.

The Stonemasons are much amused with the way wealth earned in the current boom has gone to the heads of many members of the Builders Guild

(who have shared in the prosperity). For the most part, the Stonemasons have not been so affected; they work at their best pace to build permanent buildings they expect will be standing two centuries hence—the current flood of orders is certainly welcome, but more for the chance it gives them to remake Ravens Bluff in stone than in the incidental wealth it brings into their coffers. They have, however, been much annoyed that the Cartmans Guild has refused to increase their allocation of carts and wagons to carry stone from the Stonemason warehouse to the various building sites and the carters' firm refusal to allow the Stonemasons to arrange other means of transport. The carters recently staged a slowdown to emphasize their point, driving the frustrated Masters to their wits' end. Any day now they're going to explode, which will take the carters entirely by surprise (they view the whole dispute as "business as usual" and have no idea of the depths of the Stonemasons' feelings).

To make matters worse, the Stonemasons recently obtained evidence that the Cartmans Guild was acting in collusion with the Builders Guilds to slow all stonework so that more of the new construction would be of wood than of stone. Unknown to the Masters, this information is wholly false, fabricated by the rather shady adventurers they hired to investigate the matter. Not having any evidence that would stand up in court, the Masters are muttering among themselves about what best to do next. Creating a real cart shortage by a theft-and-bum campaign is a popular suggestion, as is the spreading rumors of a fantastic magical treasure hidden in the timbers of a cart or wagon somewhere in Ravens Bluff. It's also been agreed that adventurers will be hired to do any dirty work involved, so the Masters can spread their massive hands in injured innocence if any angry accusations are made. The Masters are slow to anger, but they're roused now, and something will be done before the next winter comes.

Wizards Guild

Guildmaster: Archmage Alcides Von Tighe (LN hm W18 [Invoker])

Liaison Officers: Deans (ten in number) Dean of Abjuration Sebastian Silverlocke (LG hm W15 [Abjurer]), Dean of Alteration Martin MacGreggor (NG hm W16 [Transmuter]), Dean of Conjunction/Summoning Jerrod Korbandor (LN hm W12 [Conjurer]), Dean of Divination Micah Starfire (CG em W15 [Diviner]), Dean of the Elements Angelica Nereid (CN hf W15 [Water Elementalist Wizard]), Dean of Enchantment and Charm Lady Belinda Moonglow (CG ef W15 [Enchantress]), Dean of Illusion Uldiznae Rockfall (NG gm W16 [Illusionist]), Dean of Invocation and Evocation Lady Penelope Norwood (CN hf W16 [Invoker]), Dean of Necromancy Terrance Trent (LN hm W18 [Necromancer]), Dean of Wizardry Lady Delshandra Sinaran (NG ef W15 [Mage])

Headquarters: The High House of Magic, MacIntyre Path, Uptown District.

This guild, and the personalities that guide it, are described in more detail in its own chapter (see page 19ff). It has traditionally worked as a means of communication between the mages of the Bluff and as a collective to prevent persecution of mages by the authorities, individual nobles or priests, and thugs. It seeks to better the lives of all its members by sharing news of opportunities and by keeping public opinion as favorable as possible towards magecraft. To these ends, mages have worked together to foil, slay, or have arrested thieves and nobles who tried to prey upon them and have also tried to destroy independent mages' organizations—so successfully that only one such organization (the Diviners Guild) survives today in the Bluff, though some members mutter darkly that the Thayvian embassy might as well be considered a rival wizards guild. A more direct challenge is the Ministry of Art, which the guild dismisses as "a nest of tame magelings chirping at the Mayor's beck and call" but nevertheless view as a direct threat to their authority, to be undermined by every means in their power. So far the guild seems to be winning its quiet little war with the Ministry, which suffered a number of defections to the guild in recent months, but the struggle is far from over. More than anything else, though, the guild fears that some of the non-guild wizard adventurers will enlist in the service of this noble or that merchant lord; preventing the formation of private cadres of spellcasters is something the Wizards Guild takes very seriously.

Other current guild concerns include smooth accommodation with the new Lady Mayor and Merchants Council, the suppression of any shop that tries to openly sell magical items, the recent prevalence of drifting wild magic and dead magic zones in the city, and the mounting evidence that somewhere in or under Ravens Bluff is a source of great magical energy—a



source unknown to all guildmembers (if their testimony can be believed) yet so potent that it attracts the strange beasts known as disenchanters from all over Faerûn. Perhaps ancient, buried Sarbreen still has the tattered remnants of the magical standing stones known as a “mythal” somewhere in its underground corridors? Or perhaps, some whisper, the living city is beginning to wake up after all these years

The Game of Masks



Originally established as a way to keep restless adventurers from doing real damage in the city (or leaving town for good, when winter orc raids or some other threat might soon make them a necessity), the Game of Masks has always been played by bored thrill-seekers among the nobles and the wealthier merchants (most recently by members of the Builders and Stonemasons Guilds).

Simply put, the Game of Masks is an ongoing puzzle, or “treasure hunt,” or series of conspiracy plots, with treasure rewards for successful solvers—“a kind of parlor game that got out of hand,” as one critic put it. Originally devised and hosted by the late sensualite Lady Tassandra Raphael, the Game is now administered jointly by young priests and priestesses from the city temples of Tempus and of Tymora. Cryptic verses, found at revels put on by various nobles who enjoy the Game as unfolding entertainment, lead participants through challenges (including battling monsters legally brought in for the purpose) to solve mysteries and puzzles of the “who murdered the knight” and “who stole the jewels” type. Mock murders and disguised malefactor feature heavily in these games; to avoid problems with the Watch, its officers are informed of the plot beforehand, lest their constables mistake these fake crimes for the real thing. Participants collect “Masks” (large, ornate, gilded playing cards) hidden at the “crime scenes” to prove that the finder has solved a clue or part of a mystery.

Anyone can participate in the Game of Masks, upon payment of a 25 gp joining fee plus a monthly 6 gp membership fee. Those who miss a single month’s payment can simply make it up by a double payment the next month, but those who lapse more than one month in payments must pay the joining fee again. Most of the players consider it worth it, though; winning just one treasure can cover the costs of fees for a decade or more. Past treasures have always included minor magical items (usually healing potions, but sometimes glow-at-a-touch “endless candles” that can be used as room lighting in a dwelling or other small useful items) in addition to a bag of coins and some attractive piece of jewelry.

There have always been rumors that various sinister individuals and groups use the Game as cover for illicit activities, and certainly real crimes have been committed at Game events and revels or alongside Game play, ranging from picked pockets to rumors (never proven) of kidnappings and even murders. These suspicions have kept members of the Advanced Specialist Patrol of the City Watch and other organizations (such as the Silent Network) playing the Game since its inception—leading in turn to many small merchants and other citizens muttering darkly about “irresponsible vandals” and “tax money sponsoring folk playing at children’s games.”

The recent war disrupted a particularly complicated Game plot thread centered on a deaf-mute aasimon and a wily alu-fiend (and their various unwitting agents and shapechanging minions) who had come to the city, each seeking for a hidden artifact stashed in some cellar or closet that could allow its wielder to rule a kingdom of monsters (just what type—illithids, fiends, beholders, grell—participants could not agree). Each, naturally, sought to prevent the other from gaining the artifact and planted spies among the other’s agents. Many proclaimed it the best Game ever, and more than one Game player became convinced that the plot was real or that at least there was—and presumably still is—a potent artifact of some sort hidden somewhere in or under the city, and that a lot of mysterious and covert groups are after it.

Since peace returned to the Bluff, new Game threads have been started. The most popular centers on the belief that Gondegal, the so-called “Lost King” of Cormyr, secretly married a hitherto unknown descendant of the kings of Westgate and had offspring: the “Night Princess.” This mysterious human sorceress claims rightful rule over all Cormyr, Westgate, and the shorelands it dominates; she poses as a normal citizen of Ravens Bluff by day and plots to retake what is “rightfully hers” by night. Supported by a secretive cult that commits murders and deals in lucrative contraband, the sinister Night Princess is moving steadily closer to seizing open rule over both her rightful territories. According to the Game, the “Cult of the Night Princess” numbers several prominent Ravenaar citizens among its members but both it and she are being manipulated from behind the scenes by some darker power—perhaps a lich. Since this Game thread started, disquieting rumors have begun to spread through the taverns of the Bluff; some citizens fear all of this may be just too close to reality for anyone’s comfort. Oddly enough, some of the monsters—floating zombie torsos that swing blades and hover as guardians where key clues lie hidden—have been seen in places which the Watch had not been told were part of the official Game events. Perhaps some prankster is simply confusing the issue, or perhaps the “Night Princess” story ran too close to some actual secret someone doesn’t want to come out.

Less worrisome to Game organizers and Ravenaar citizens is the second current Game plot: the Saga of Lord Manymirrors, one of the light, farcical bedroom-scandals-among-the-nobles frolics that are a favorite staple of Game-watchers and less adventuresome players. The fictitious Lord Manymirrors is a fat, pompous fop who discovers that his wife has not only been unfaithful to him but that her lovers include (gasp!) commoners in need of money. Naturally, she’s been supplying them with coin out of the Manymirrors vault, nearly emptying it in the process. Unfortunately, the Lord is a banker for a perpetually drunken group of Tantran wine merchants who now need some of their funds and have come staggering into the city to claim it. Players in this Game (loyal retainers of Lord Manymirrors) have to quickly find the missing money while Lord Manymirrors makes delaying excuses to gain them time, taking the Tantrons on a tavern crawl that descends from the city’s finest wineries to its lowest dives. The money is stashed in a variety of bedchambers across the city where Lady Manymirrors keeps rendezvous with her lovers, each rented in her husband’s name—to gain entrance, the Gamers must pretend to be Lord Manymirrors and win their way past skeptical doorwardens. Just to complicate matters, some lady pirates are also after the loot; masquerading as lingerie models displaying their wares as they visit Ravens Bluff, these ladies try to steal the coins before the Game players can get them back into the Manymirrors vaults. What’s more, Lady Manymirrors has boasted of her lovers’ ardor to her noble lady friends, a succession of whom arrive, dressed in a wild exaggeration of fashionable costumes (hats crowned with small cartloads of fruit, trains that have to trundle along behind the wearer on carts, and so on) and try to throw themselves into the arms of the false Lord Manymirrors. As a final complication, Gamers who collect all the Mask tokens representing the various treasure stashes must return them to the Manymirrors vault, talking their ways past a riddling, poetry-reciting, tipsy “beholder” (actually an illusion, though a real *wand of paralyzation* stops players who try to rush through it) who guards the vault doors.

The organizers of these games keep their identity a great secret to avoid cheating (a band of thieves once bribed several of the actors and actresses playing parts in the game in order to find out where the final treasure was and then made off with it). It is known, however, that the Fellowship of Bards is heavily involved, and that the Players of the Ravens Bluff Playhouse fill many of the roles. Once or twice the plot has strayed perilously close to some current event in the city or parodied a public figure too obviously; perhaps this accounts for Lady Amber Lynn Thoden’s known distaste for the event. But many of those who have participated come back year after year, sometimes assuming the same persona each time. A great deal of harmless fun goes on at these Games, and they seem likely to continue for years to come.



Monsters of Ravens Bluff

Some may turn to this chapter expecting to find details of some of the more dastardly human villains active in the city at the mouth of the Fire River, or the pirates, slavers, and smugglers who visit it, but no; herein we look at the outwardly monstrous (to human eyes).

Orcs, other goblinkin, and occasionally worse things have always come raiding down out of the Earthfast Mountains to the south of the city; in harsh winters, wolf packs can often be heard howling out in the snows. All Ravenaar know of such dangers, and in peacetime, the armies of Ravens Bluff are trained, equipped, and deployed to intercept such incursions and to safeguard travelers along the roads in the vicinity. Aquatic monsters of various sorts—when the Veil comes ashore to cloak the city, in particular—have also proven to be persistent problems. Few citizens haven't heard of lizard man or even wereshark raids along the docks, and such menaces as real sharks, intelligent octopi, and even mud-men are all too frequent in the coastal waters and along the shores and riverbanks near Ravens Bluff, too.

Paranoid citizens insist that drow lurk, listening, in every shadowed corner of every cellar and alleyway in the city—held in check only because of various slimy wet-clawed monsters wriggling up every sewerpipe and cistern overflow to clutch at law-abiding (and other) citizens and drag them down. In truth, there *have* been very rare drow forays, but these are far rarer than visitations from the sea, and most Ravenians can live out their lives in the certain knowledge that they'll never see anything more fearsome than hand-sized rats, mice, spiders, and the occasional harmless snake in their cellars. Squirrels and similar furred scampering creatures soon learn that to venture too close to Ravens Bluff is usually to end up spitted over a fire in a hungry someone or other's hearth-comer. Larger woodland beasts spend too much time scampering away from hunters' arrows and spears to menace folk in the streets of the city. It's true that in earlier times it was a common lark among bored soldiers to let a goaded boar loose in the evening streets and watch the fun as citizens fled frantically in all directions, but such practices are so frowned on nowadays that they've practically faded into legend.

Until recently, Ravens Bluff has rarely had much trouble with doppelgangers and other creatures able to shift their shapes, or with mind flayers, beholders, and the like. It's thought that these cunning predators avoid such a concentration of adventurers, and of magic that can divine their true natures—or merely blast them into component parts—when so many other cities offer safer pickings. The events of the last few months suggest this is no longer the case; sightings of exotic monsters of all sorts is on the rise, drawn perhaps by the chaos of the recent war or a belief that amid such a shifting population it's easier to pass unnoticed. It's now clear that a number of doppelgangers and yuan-ti have been infiltrating the city for some time, and that illithid in particular have been quietly phasing out and in as it suited their purposes.

Some sages suggest that this increased activity is the result of such creatures being drawn to the city by its ambient magical field, which there is good evidence is increasing in intensity of late. Others believe that the rumors that Warlord Myrkyssa Jelan sought some relic or artifact hidden within or beneath the city has, not unnaturally, brought others (even, it is whispered, rakshasa and ogre magi) who would like to investigate the truth or otherwise of the story and claim any such item for themselves. Still others maintain that the lost gates under the city have become active while most citizens' attention was elsewhere and that many a strange and dark creature has slipped through to spy out the lay of the land before deciding whether to reclaim territory that were theirs long ago (see "Lost Sarbreen," page 8). Finally, some stoutly assert that all the rumors are just that: rumors and no more.

EORMENNOTH

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CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	The treasury vault beneath Ravens Bluff
FREQUENCY:	Unique individual
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary at present but still looking
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Almost anything (prefers seafood and pearls)
INTELLIGENCE:	Exceptional (16)
TREASURE:	H, S, T22
ALIGNMENT	LG
<hr/>	
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	-6
MOVEMENT:	9, fly 30 (C), swim 12
HIT DICE:	18
THACO:	0
NO. OF ATTACKS:	3
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1d8+8/1d8+8/4d6+8 (claw/claw/bite)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Tail slap (2d8+16 plus stun), kick (1d8+8 plus knockdown), wing buffet (1d8+8/1d8+8 plus knockdown), breath weapon (lightning stroke 100 feet long), fear aura (30-yard radius), weather summoning, spells
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	ESP, polymorph self (thrice per day), breath weapon (repulsion cloud 20 feet long, 30 feet wide, & 30 feet high), immune to electricity, wall of fog (once per day), sense intruder in lair (80-foot range), spells
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	35%
SIZE:	G (78-foot body plus 70-foot tail)
MORALE:	Fanatic (17)
XP VALUE:	20,000

Few citizens know Ravens Bluff has a resident dragon, but the chief guard of the city treasury (and occupant of the vaults) is the bronze dragon Eormennoth (Old Male Bronze; standard dragon abilities for his type and age include *create food and water*, *speak with animals*, *water breathing*, and *airy water* as well as the powers listed above; carries ready the wizard spells *charm person*, *ventriloquism*, *invisibility*, *magic mouth*, *sepia snake sigil* and the priest spell *command*, all of which he can cast at 16th level of ability). This vigilant guardian raises the alarm over any unauthorized withdrawals—that is, any which are not accompanied by a certified writ specifying the amount down to the last coin. Eormennoth has been on duty for over fifty years, preventing “shrinkage” of treasury funds through both outright thefts and illicit borrowings by city officials (it’s the Regent of the Exchequer’s job to prevent misappropriations once monies leave this room).

Eormennoth (whose name means “immense treasure” in the tongue of his kind) began his local career as a ravager of pirates and was used in that capacity by the then-newly-installed Lord Mayor O’Kane. For decades he’s been the guardian of the vault, having been originally promised a rather generous rate of pay of ten gold pieces a day by the Lord Treasurer of that day, who reckoned that a payment deferred until after he left office was someone else’s problem. While that may not sound like much to anyone with thousands of coins at his or her command, Eormennoth is patient. Every day the dragon diligently counts out his share and moves it to his side of the vault. As the years have gone by, his stack has grown to impressive dimensions (over 180,000 gp) while the city’s pile has visibly diminished. Vernon Condor, the current Regent of the Exchequer, has estimated that the share Eormennoth has claimed will eventually bankrupt the city. He suggested some time back to Mayor O’Kane that they “re-negotiate” the dragon’s contract to include “room and board” as well as imposing a one-time “dragon tax” amounting to at least 50% of Eormennoth’s share should he decide to leave a city so suddenly inhospitable. O’Kane, for his part, prepared for the negotiations by procuring a *cube of force* and a *long sword*, +2 *dragonslayer* (LN-aligned and attuned to bronze dragons, dealing triple damage and having a +4 combat bonus against them) in case the dragon decided to exact payment in the form of property damage or otherwise kicked at the proffered settlement.

Fortunately, perhaps, the matter never came to a crisis; although Eormennoth was (falsely) announced dead some years ago, the war and other disasters distracted O’Kane until the mayoral mantle passed to Lady



Amber Lynn Thoden, who has not yet had leisure to deal with such pending but low-priority concerns. Eormennoth, for his part, remains blissfully unaware that anyone finds anything wrong with his scrupulous guardianship of the vault. He’s always been curious about the lives and deeds of the entertaining humans of the city and loves to listen to gossip. Since his opportunities for interesting talk are limited in the vault, he sometimes slips away for a bit. He loves the smells, sights, and sounds of the sea, both in dragon form and *polymorphed* into the shape of a ship’s cat hanging around the docks. He also enjoys watching people, and any idle person or animal in Ravens Bluff (particularly within sight of the water) might just be a dragon in disguise. Over the years, as his trust in the city administration has grown, he’s felt increasingly comfortable about leaving the main vault where he customarily lies at his ease and “taking the air” or going for a quick swim.

Some of these flights have been his first extended jaunts away from Ravens Bluff in half a century. Eormennoth has decided it’s time to raise a family, and although female bronze dragons have proven rarer in the lands around than he’d thought they would be, he is a wyrm of looks, sophistication, and treasure. As word of his availability spreads, the city may well soon be invaded by a dozen or more female bronze dragons of all ages, vying for the attention of the “Wyrm In The Vault.” When Eormennoth chooses a bride, the civic government will face a real monetary crisis. Like most dragons his age, the guardian of the treasury will soon become irritated by his mate’s constant hints that she deserves—nay, needs—more treasure. Once their eggs are laid, he may well persuade her to depart—with a suitable division of their joint property, of course, plus a generous gift—money that “the Vulture” regards as the rightful property of the government.

Moreover, when the eggs hatch, Eormennoth will have successors. The problem that so many generations of Ravenaar officials hoped would eventually just “go away” will magnify when the post of vault-guardian becomes a hereditary one. As a good father, the incumbent guardian will of course gift each of his offspring with some coins as “seed money” to begin their own hoards. Moreover, young dragons of any type will defend themselves if attacked, overreact if frightened, and generally be rambunctious in the extreme, placing the property and citizens of the city at risk for a long, long time. And any large-scale battle with dragons may attract the attention of other, less benevolent wyrms—or anyone else who sees an opportunity to take advantage of mayhem and destruction to plunder or launch attacks on Ravens Bluff. The often-humiliated pirates, for instance, who’d like nothing more than a chance for revenge on the city and its great winged warrior. . .

Dragger

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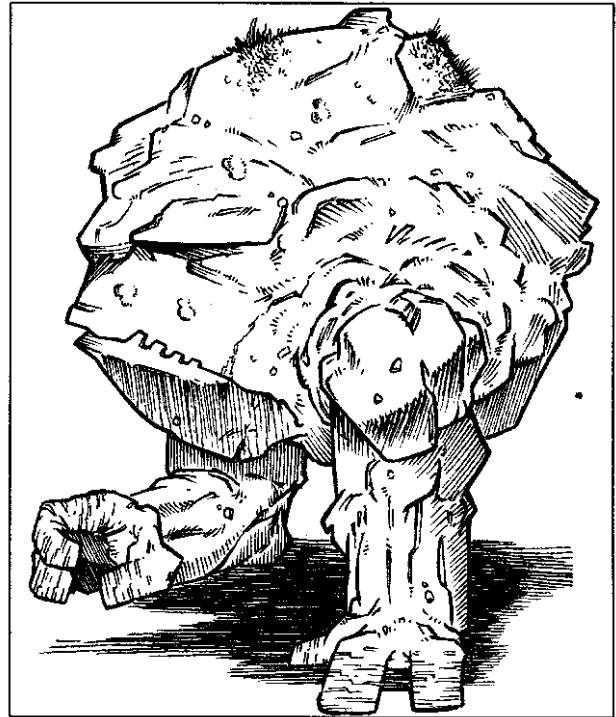
CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any (caverns or subterranean)
FREQUENCY:	Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Omnivorous
INTELLIGENCE:	Low (5)
TREASURE:	Q
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
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NO. APPEARING:	1d6
ARMOR CLASS:	0
MOVEMENT:	12, burrow 9
HIT DICE:	2-6
THACO:	19 (2 HD) 17 (3 & 4 HD) 15 (5 & 6 HD)
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	3d4 per round (digestive juices)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Swallow whole
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Immune to most spells, half-damage from edged and piercing weapons
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	L (8-12 feet in diameter)
MORALE:	Fearless (20)
XP VALUE:	2 Hit Dice: 975 3 Hit Dice: 1,400 4 Hit Dice: 2,000 5 Hit Dice: 3,000 6 Hit Dice: 4,000

Draggers are usually encountered in natural caverns, though many are to be found in the underways of Ravens Bluff, where they have been the doom of more than a few smugglers down the years. Like their cousins the galeb duhr, draggers resemble boulders, with a single pair of appendages acting as both hands and feet and with huge mouths that seem mere fissures in rock when closed. Draggers are natives of the Plane of Elemental Earth and are able to propel themselves through stone.

Combat: A dragger typically "floats" in a section of floor, camouflaging itself through its ability to create *hallucinatory terrain* at will in a ten-foot-square area centered on itself. Anything stepping upon the hidden dragger risks being swallowed by the creature's gaping maw (such a target is considered to be AC 10, exclusive of Dexterity bonuses). If the initial attack fails, the dragger will submerge beneath the ground to a place of safety, returning to the same spot 2d4 turns later. Should the attack succeed, the dragger's target will have one or more appendages (usually feet) trapped in the creature's jaws. On the following round, the dragger will momentarily loosen its grip as it attempts to swallow the victim. A successful saving throw vs. paralysis indicates that the prey manages to wriggle free at this time; each being helping the victim adds a +1 bonus to the roll. Should the save be unsuccessful, the prey is sucked into the dragger's gullet. On the next round, the dragger sinks into the ground to enjoy its meal safe from harm.

Should the creature be slain before it withdraws, captured prey can be freed in 14 rounds but suffers 3d4 hit points of damage per round from the dragger's corrosive digestive juices. Draggers can digest virtually anything except gems (their treasure, if any, consists of gems carried by previously swallowed victims).

Draggers can be struck by any sort of weapon, although edged and piercing weapons do only half damage. Spells don't affect draggers, except as follows: *magic missile* inflicts normal damage; *move earth* causes the dragger to immediately depart for 14 turns, first releasing any prey not already swallowed; *stone to flesh* lowers a dragger's Armor Class to 10 for the spell



duration, immobilizing the creature if it is submerged in stone at the time (if only partially submerged, it can force itself out of the stone in 1 round at the cost of 2d4+2 hit points abrasion damage); *stone shape* can be used to force a dragger's jaws through one involuntary movement and then hold it in the new position for the spell duration (in other words, to either hold the jaws shut or to force the dragger to open wide and disgorge a swallowed victim); and *transmute rock to mud* fully heals the creature (they otherwise heal 1 lost hit point per day, as many other creatures do).

Habitat/Society: Draggers are solitary, sexless hunters. When they reach an unstable size (i.e., above 6 HD) through diligent devouring, they split to form two to four smaller (2 HD) draggers, expelling all previously ingested gems in the process. The new individuals may stay together for a time but as they grow they move apart to find their own hunting grounds. They have no social interaction but never fight each other; if two draggers encounter each other in an area heavily trafficked by prey they may feed side by side for a time, but otherwise they'll always instinctively move apart. Draggers have been known to go dormant for long periods of time, hiding inside solid rock and ignoring food nearby; no good reasons for this behavior has yet been offered.

Ecology: Draggers are carnivores, eating all manner of birds, reptiles, and mammals. They ignore most plants, devouring only ambulatory sorts, but avidly swallow fungi. They otherwise place no value judgments on food: edible is edible, and a dragger won't choose a larger or more formidable meal over a lesser (or vice versa). Regardless of the size of prey it eats, a dragger will try to devour prey only once every three hours or so, ignoring other possible targets after one try (successful or not). They are capable of going months if not years between meals.

Greater Raven

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CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Uncommon
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary, mated pair, or flock
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Omnivore, Carrion-eater
INTELLIGENCE:	Very (11-12)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral, chaotic neutral, or neutral evil
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	7
MOVEMENT:	6, fly 12 (A)
HIT DICE:	1
THACO:	19
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1d2 (peck)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Curse
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Immune to charm
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	50%
SIZE:	S (4-foot wingspan)
MORALE:	Fearless (20)
XP VALUE:	120

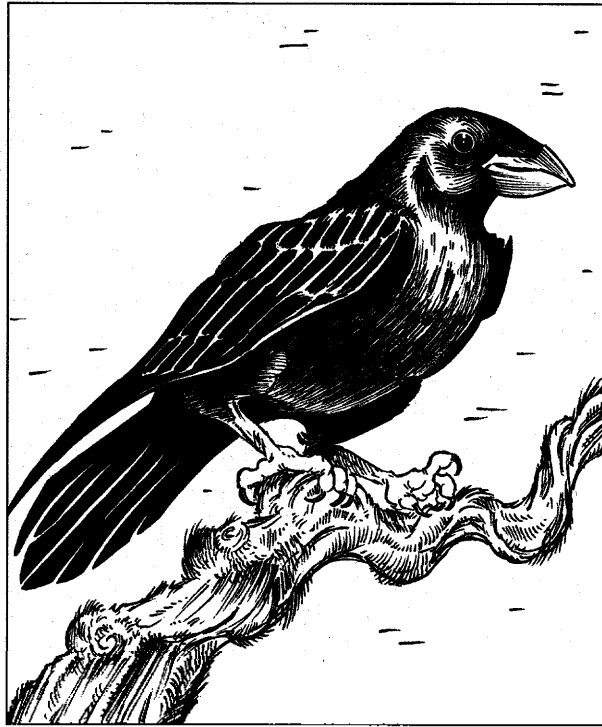
Many believe (correctly) that Ravens Bluff is named for these avians, who dwell almost exclusively in the area. These large, glossy black birds are locally renowned for their ability to speak and foretell the future. In Ravens Bluff, these birds can be found just about anywhere (as can normal crows and ravens).

Combat: Greater ravens love to single out and accompany an intelligent, active being, such as an adventurer. Some beings so favored find the raven's presence irritating and toss a stone in the bird's general direction. This may (70% chance) drive the creature off; otherwise it decides the being is going to be truly interesting to watch and determines to stay, remaining for d100 days (or even permanently if the "host" provides enough entertainment).

These Ravens are easy to kill but have the power to curse their slayers. Such curses will always be in the form of a rhyming prophecy foretelling some kind of punishment or misfortune to the offender or someone close to him or her. A greater raven slain by a crossbow bolt, for example, might with its final breath tell its slayer: "As my blood is drunk by the ground/Yours likewise soon will be found." Typical prophecies foretell the receiving of a grievous wound, being slain, or being bested in battle or a swindle. They often warn of the impending loss of some prized possession, such as a mage's favorite wand or a warrior's enchanted dagger. Even if the raven is torn apart, crisped to ashes, or otherwise rendered incapable of speech, the curse will be heard as clearly audible, hauntingly chanted words issuing from the empty air near the site of its death. Magical *silence* can prevent the prophecy's being heard but not the curse from taking effect.

Habitat/Society: Greater ravens are usually solitary when encountered, but mated pairs may also be seen, and flocks of up to forty birds have been reported. Such flocks are highly territorial and may swarm intruders, causing results similar to a double-strength summon insects spell (damage is either 4 or 8 points, depending on whether the targets defend themselves; the attack penalty is -4, and the Armor Class penalty is +4).

For reasons of their own, greater ravens are fond of attaching themselves to individuals or adventuring bands to observe their doings. They fly from tree to tree or rock to rock (or balcony to balcony) to perch with a good view and watch, keeping a curious eye on the object of their interest. Not surprisingly, these creatures tend to be shunned as bringers of bad luck, though they rarely harm anyone directly. Instead, greater ravens seem to derive some satisfaction from watching the troubles of others. Some delight in continually uttering sarcastic comments, though they rarely make actual jokes; others enjoy hinting at secrets their host wants kept secret.



Most greater ravens, however, speak little—and when such close-mouthed individuals do, it's usually to offer some sort of poetic prophecy of what the future holds. Raven prophecies almost always entail woe to those addressed, whether insignificant or catastrophic.

On rare occasions, a lone greater raven has been known to attach itself to a neutral or evil wizard, becoming a familiar of sorts (although none of the usual benefits derive from the relationship). The bird will perform a type of *commune* spell up to thirteen times a year, whenever its "master" desires. Queried formally on these occasions with respect to plans or events, the raven will offer cryptic advice (in its harsh, cackling voice) on the best course of action to take or about the intentions of an enemy. In like manner, the raven can be asked to foretell the future. Those seeking such advice should be certain they want to hear the answer, for, as has been noted, raven prophecies almost always foretell someone—quite possibly the "master"—meeting harm or ill luck.

Ecology: Greater ravens devour small rodents, the eggs of other birds, small birds, carrion of all sorts, insects, lizards, berries, flowers, and growing shoots. They also have a liking for wax (even strongly-scented candle wax), butter, and cheese (the more strongly flavored and moldy the better). Given the opportunity, they'll sample any food eaten by humans, preferring salty viands to all other materials. Greater ravens can hold bones in their claw for long periods, spitting them out polished clean whenever they desire (usually to make a point or impression on someone to whom they're speaking).

"Well," quote the raven, "you could wait—" He tossed his head and spat something thoughtfully onto a rock at Glauren's feet. Something small, white, and gleaming. A bone. "—forever."

Glauren stared down at the bone, and then, slowly, back up at the raven. He swallowed.

The raven cocked its head to one side. One dark eye met his squarely and knowingly for a moment—then feathers flapped, and it was gone.

Glauren looked down at the bone with a chill. The bird, he knew, would be back.

Greater Sea Hag

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CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any aquatic
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Very (11-12)
TREASURE:	B, C, Y
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic evil
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	5
MOVEMENT:	Swim 15
HIT DICE:	2-8
THACO:	19 (2 HD) 17 (3 & 4 HD) 15 (5 & 6 HD) 13 (7 & 8 HD)
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1d4+6 (dagger or claw) or 1d6+6 (short sword)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Ogre strength (+3 to attack rolls, +6 damage), <i>charm</i> gaze, ghastly visage, spells
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	<i>Change self</i> , immune to charms, spells
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	50%
SIZE:	M (3 foot tall plus 3-foot tail)
MORALE:	Champion (15)
XP VALUE:	2 Hit Dice: 975 3 Hit Dice: 1,400 4 Hit Dice: 2,000 5 Hit Dice: 3,000 6 Hit Dice: 4,000 7 Hit Dice: 5,000 8 Hit Dice: 6,000

One of the most dreaded denizens of the deep, greater sea hags are fortunately rare. They are thought by some to have descended from twisted servitor creations of Olhydra, princess of evil water creatures and ruler over the Plane of Elemental Water (which in turn argues that lesser sea hags, and perhaps all other hags, are merely degenerate descendants of greater sea hags). They appear as wrinkled, withered old crones with seaweed-green hair that covers their green-scaled bodies, iron-like claws, and fiery red eyes. Some can't be distinguished from lesser sea hags, but others are noticeably larger and more charismatic.

Combat: Though they lack the *death gaze* power of their lesser kin, greater sea hags can work a powerful *charm* three times a day by making eye contact with an intelligent creature. Those so *charmed* remain in this state until the hag is killed or the *charm* is magically dispelled; victims do not get additional saves as time passes. Greater sea hags are themselves immune to all *charm*, *suggestion*, and other mind-influencing magics or psionics.

A greater sea hag can cast *change self* so as to resemble any sea creature, usually choosing one as beautiful as she is ugly, such as a mermaid or nereid. This disguise is often used to deceive seafarers into following a dangerous course—onto rocks, reefs, or other hazards—and causing their vessels to be wrecked. The hag then seizes any sunken treasure and devours the drowned seamen at will. The true appearance of a greater sea hag is so ghastly that anyone viewing it must make a saving throw vs. spell or lose half his or her Strength for 1d6 turns.

Greater sea hags are most greatly feared, however, for their magic use. They possess the spellcasting abilities of mages equal in level to their own Hit Dice. The following spells are ones typically used by greater sea hags, although they may know any spells of appropriate level listed in the *Player's Handbook*. DMs interested in underwater spellcasting may wish to consult the appropriate chapter in DMGR9, *Of Ships and the Sea*.

1st level: *audible glamor*, *dancing lights*, *enlarge*, *expeditious retreat*, *magic missile*, *phantasmal force*, *protection from good*, *shield*, *shocking grasp*, *sleep*, *taunt*, *tears of the crocodile*, *ventriloquism*.

2nd level: *blindness*, *blur*, *darkness 15' radius*, *detect good*, *ESP*, *invisibility*, *know alignment*, *levitate*, *locate object*, *mirror image*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *shatter*, *stinking cloud*, *web*.



3rd level: *blink*, *clairaudience*, *clairvoyance*, *dispel magic*, *haste*, *hold person*, *lightning bolt*, *monster summoning I*, *protection from normal missiles*, *slow*, *spectral force*, *suggestion*, *tongues*.

4th level: *charm monster*, *confusion*, *curse*, *dimension door*, *emotion*, *enervation*, *Evard's black tentacles*, *improved invisibility*, *minor globe of invulnerability*, *monster summoning II*, *phantasmal killer*, *plant growth*, *polymorph other*, *polymorph self*, *shout*, *wizard eye*.

*spell from *PLAYER'S OPTION: Spells & Magic*.

**spell from *Of Ships and the Sea*.

A rare few greater sea hags are psionic wild talents. Such individuals always have unpredictable powers, not the abilities exhibited by a being who has developed personal psionic abilities in the usual manner.

If they must battle an opponent directly (something they tend to avoid), greater sea hags use daggers or short swords. When making any physical attack, their great strength (18/00) allows them a +3 bonus to the attack roll and a +6 damage bonus.

Habitat/Society: Greater sea hags usually lair in undersea caves filled with the spoils they have salvaged from sunken vessels; sometimes they claim captain's cabins of those ships if the chambers are lavish enough. Much of their time is spent grinding salt through the use of magical rock-crushing devices; greater sea hags derive essential sustenance from sea salt. When not grinding salt or hunting prey, greater sea hags seek to enrich their treasure hoards, often with the help of charmed helpers or evil aquatic creatures. They take pride in knowing their undersea surroundings well and can often spot concealed or magically disguised intruders or newly-arrived items by the change in familiar seafloor topography. On the other hand, greater sea hags won't hesitate to boldly strike forth into new territories, making long forays into strange seas. The waters of the Fire River, flowing out into the Sea of Fallen Stars, seem to attract greater sea hags. In general, they favor regions having "interesting" sea bottoms, such as reefs, underwater crags and rifts, and ship graveyards adorned with lots of wrecks.

Ecology: Greater sea hags are thankfully rare and seldom reproduce, being jealous and suspicious of all other life. They sometimes dwell with their lesser kin but never seem to take part in coveys. They can live for as long as a thousand years and speak the tongues of sea elves, their own language, and annis (the hag languages). Danger and strong foes seem to attract them, and they serve as the ultimate predator of human-sized or smaller opponents. Most sharks avoid sea hags, having learned the bite of their fell magic.



The Magic of Ravens Bluff

The City of Adventurers often seems a-crawl with magic of all sorts, flashing and lurking and bursting into life on all sides. Only in the last few years, in fact, have the infamous “magic shops” of the Bluff disappeared (most of them, such as the large and successful Chemcheaux, obliterated in a series of mysterious explosions that hint at some sort of behind-the-scenes struggle). No summary of the magic at work in Ravens Bluff can ever be complete or up to date; what appears here are unusual magic items common or important enough in recent times in the Bluff to be listed by type.

Ironguard Ring

XP Value 500 GP Value 5,000

“Doubled” ring:

XP Value 500 GP Value: 7,500

These plain brass rings have been seen elsewhere in the Realms but have become very popular in Ravens Bluff since the recent war, being sold in back alleys there by the mysterious Baerult Blackmask (who has so far eluded Wizards Guild retribution, although most believe it’s only a matter of time . . .). The wearer can activate the ring by silent effort of will, protecting himself or herself as if by the fifth-level *ironguard* wizard spell for 1 turn. During that period, all metal items pass harmlessly through the protected being as if his or her body were empty air; even metal worn or carried by the ring-wearer falls through him or her (except for the ring, of course). Enchanted metal items can inflict damage upon the ring-wearer equal to their magical bonuses, and enchanted metal barriers (including *blade barrier*) are impassable to him or her. At the end of ten minutes, the protection ends and the ring crumbles to useless dust.

There is an important difference between the spell (described in *Pages from the Mages and Wizard’s Spell Compendium, Vol II*) and the effects of this ring: when an *ironguard* spell expires, the being it protects is killed instantly if his or her body occupies the same space as a large or sharp piece of metal. By contrast, when the protection created by this ring ends, any metal is forcibly (and harmlessly) expelled from the ring-wearer’s body; if the metal is fixed and immobile, the ring-wearer is instead safely whisked to the nearest metal-free location.

Baerult also reportedly sold “doubled” rings of this sort, marked on the inside by a small diamond shape. These provide two identical protective effects, crumbling at the expiration of the second. Any amount of time can pass between the two usages of such a ring.

Ring of Dimensional Darting

XP Value 500 GP Value 5,000

“Doubled” ring:

XP Value 500 GP Value: 7,500

These plain brass rings have become very popular in Ravens Bluff since the recent war, being made or at least sold locally by the black-market mage Baerult Blackmask. The wearer can activate them instantly by silent effort of will, affecting himself or herself as if the fourth-level wizard spell *dimensional door* had been cast on him or her. The following exceptions apply: (a) no living material can be taken along on the trip, (b) no recovery time is necessary once the trip is made, and (c) if a solid body occupies the desired destination, the ring’s power is wasted and fails (no dimensional translocation occurs, and the ring-wearer suffers no damage or exile to the Astral Plane). The maximum range of the jump is 90 yards from the spot where the ring is activated, and the ring crumbles to dust after a single jump.

If a secret command word (not graven on the ring but told by Baerult personally to the initial purchaser) is uttered as the power of the ring is called upon, a *ring of dimensional darting* can be used to bounce the ring-wearer from the starting spot to a desired location and then two seconds later to whisk him or her back safely to the starting point. This power is typically used to snatch an item or hurl a weapon in the momentarily-visited

locale but can (if properly timed) be used to avoid an attack passing through the starting point.

Baerult also reportedly sold “doubled” rings of this type, marked on the inside by a small diamond mark. These provide two identical *dimensional door* effects, crumbling as the second is used; any amount of time can pass between the two usages of such a doubled ring.

Ring of Helmed Horrors

XP Value 3,000 GP Value 30,000

Many nobles and wealthy merchants of Ravens Bluff purchased these rings in the past; the source of supply has apparently ended with the destruction of Chemcheaux. Today the daringly acquisitive must dare noble mansions and even burial crypts to gain such a ring. A *ring of helmed horrors* takes the form of a plain brass fingerband; its powers are activated by silent act of will. It has 20 charges when new and can be recharged by those few wizards who know the correct spell to use (the ranks of the sufficiently learned include at least two members of the Ravens Bluff Wizards Guild). Any attempt to awaken a ring power that requires more charges than remain within the ring destroys the item and calls forth a (randomly chosen) lesser power instead.

Use of a single ring charge causes a *helmed horror* to appear within ten feet of the ring-wearer at the end of the same round, at a spot chosen by the ring-wearer. The *horror* obeys its summoner’s mental commands (typically to fight specific targets or to carry certain items) until it is destroyed, 2 turns pass, or its summoner wills it to disappear (whichever happens first). If a solid body or item occupies the space where the ring-wearer desires the *horror* to appear, it will materialize (piece by piece, if need be) above the chosen spot and *feather fall* down into it. The ring can be used in this way up to three times per day—whether in three consecutive rounds or eight hours apart makes no difference.

The most potent ability of such a ring costs 7 charges, makes the ring go dormant for an entire day, and affects all *horrors* (regardless of type or origin) within 70 feet; any *horror* within that radius is instantly paralyzed for six days. Any *horror* entering the area of effect after it is awakened is also paralyzed (but only until the six days is up; it doesn’t receive its own six-day sentence). This effect can be ended instantly by the casting of a *dispel magic* but will survive the destruction of the ring that created it.

The *helmed horrors* created by this sort of ring are empty, animated suits of armor that are AC 2; MV 12, fly 12 (E); HD 4+12; THAC0 12; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (long sword) or 1d4 (weaponless); SD immune to all enchantment/charm spells and to *fireball*, *heat metal*, and *lightning bolt*, automatic *feather fall*, *infravision* (120’ range), *detect invisible* (120’ range), can reach dismembered limbs upon contact, healed by *magic missiles*; SZ M (6 feet tall); ML fearless (20); Int high (14) but can’t communicate telepathically back to the ring-wearer or with anyone else; AL N; XP 2,000.

Ring of Nine Lives

XP Value 6,000 GP Value 60,000

This ring takes the form of a slim band of apparently unbreakable ivory, carved at one point into the snarling face of a cat. At least two such rings exist. One is in the keeping of Storm Silverhand, somewhere in Shadowdale (it formerly belonged to her sister, Syluné). The other was discovered a decade ago in catacombs somewhere north of Waterdeep. Its finder, a priestess of Chauntea by the name of Catherine Crowne, brought it to Ravens Bluff. Catherine’s ring was examined by at least one (anonymous) Ravenaar mage, and if rumor within the Wizards Guild can be believed, most of the secrets of the long and expensive process of making such a ring were divined by him. He certainly determined that Catherine’s ring dated to ancient times.

A *ring of nine lives* helps to preserve its wearer’s life. When its wearer would otherwise be brought to zero hit points or less, the ring automatically expends a charge and negates all damage to the wearer, removing forever all effects of diseases, poisons, and curses; restoring damaged organs; and healing wounds (though not restoring severed limbs—in such cases, smooth stumps are created and all loss of blood ceases). In cases of spells or other effects that would cause death because the ring wearer has failed a saving throw, the ring allows the wearer to treat the saving throw as successful, again at the cost of a charge. However, the ring can’t function more than once in any given round; if the wearer still takes enough damage from a successful save that he or she dies, the ring cannot save him or her.



When a *ring of nine lives* is discovered, it will have 2d4 charges remaining. Such rings can't be recharged.

Ring of Scrying Globes

XP Value 4,000 GP Value 40,000

These very rare rings appear as silver bands, each adorned with a tiny claw that holds a pearl (of minimal value; if shattered, the powers of the ring are unaffected). One such ring is known to have been owned by the sorceress Brenna Graycloak of Aglarond, who used it to spy on Harper enemies and to extend the reach of her spells. Many folk believe Brenna eventually traded her ring to a Ravenaar priest in return for healing that saved her life, but another local tale insists that the ring was stolen by a Harper who perished with it when its bubble revealed a medusa behind a closed door; the creature's gaze turned both Harper and ring to stone.

Once a day, the wearer of a *ring of scrying globes* can (by dint of a round of undisturbed concentration) cause the ring to release a shimmering, translucent silver-white bubble of magical energies up to ten feet in diameter. This bubble can be used in either of two ways, which must be chosen by the ring-wearer as the bubble forms. Either form is clearly visible to all creatures nearby, seeming to be a faint white sphere or blob of *faerie fire*, and either form is destroyed upon contact by a *dispel magic*. Magic items and spells that detect or foil scrying are effective against a *ring of scrying globes*.

The seeking mode of a *scrying globe* allows the ring-wearer to send the bubble (MV fly 16 [A]) to a maximum range of two hundred feet distant (the bubble simply can't move farther away; attempts to make it more distant fail but don't end the magic or hamper the operation of the globe). The *globe* lasts for 3d6 turns and can be moved about in as intricate a path as the ring-wearer wills. At all times the ring-wearer can see out of the wandering globe, in any direction, though viewing is limited by the same lighting conditions that affect the ring-wearer's own vision (note that the bubble's own radiance doesn't augment the ring-wearer's vision through it if he or she attempts to scry into dark places). This sort of *scrying globe* can shrink to fit into tiny spaces; such a change in size halts the bubble for 1 round and can't be reversed. Thus, a ten-foot-wide bubble might shrink to pass through a keyhole into a locked chest to look inside but couldn't expand from its new, stringlike shape. The ring-wearer can also attempt to move the bubble through solid barriers. Each barrier requires a saving throw vs. spell on the part of the ring-wielder; failure means the bubble collapses. If the ring-wearer moves from the spot where the globe formed at any time while using a seeking mode, the bubble collapses into harmless motes of light that wink out within a round, ending the magic of the ring for that day.

The distant mode of a *scrying globe* must be activated as soon as the bubble forms in front of the ring-wearer (at the end of the round in which the ring is called upon) and normally lasts for 4d4 rounds. It permits the ring wearer to teleport the *globe* to a location or individual the wearer has seen before, with the same chances for success as the normal chance for scrying (see the *crystal ball* description in the *DMG*). Failure means the *globe* collapses instantly, ending the ring's magic; success allows the ring-wearer to look all around within the bubble, and outwards in all directions from any spot within it. This sort of globe remains stationary; it will automatically collapse if sent into a magically warded area or into a spot so as to touch any part of the area of effect of any sort of warding spell. If the ring-wearer desires to spy upon a creature, the globe will center on that being and move with it. If the target creature is intelligent, he, she, or it receives a saving throw vs. spell. Success alerts the target (by a tingling feeling) and causes the instant collapse of the globe (giving the ring-wearer no glimpse of the intended target or its surroundings). If the target fails the saving throw the bubble forms without any betraying radiance and invisibly encases the target creature, allowing the ring-wearer to look around within and outwards from any part of the *globe* until it expires.

The ring-wearer can move about freely while using the distant mode and can cast a single spell at anything within or touching any part of the globe. Spells requiring a touch attack are considered to be automatically successful if directed against a target creature encased by the globe. The effects of any spell cast through the *globe* don't extend beyond the confines of the bubble but its unleashing destroys the *globe*. Thus, the area of effect of a *fireball* cast through a *scrying globe* would be limited to a maximum of ten feet in diameter and could be as small as a one inch sphere. All saving throws against spells cast through a *scrying globe* gain a +1 bonus. Only the ring-wearer can cast a spell through his or her own *globe* and only when the ring is in distant (not seeking) mode. Whenever a spell is cast through a *scrying globe* (offen-

sive or not), its caster loses 1 hit point from magical backlash; if the spell is a destructive attack then the caster must make a Constitution Check or be rendered unconscious for 2d4 turns.

Fang Dagger

XP Value 3,500 GP Value 10,000

Fang daggers are of two sorts, both able to glow like a *faerie fire* at the command of their wielder and both enspelled not to rust.

A *battle fang* is a *dagger +1* that can be thrown and then made to return (MV fly 8 [A]) to the hand of its wielder. Its touch automatically banishes magical invisibility for six rounds.

A *healing fang* receives no attack bonus but is considered a magical weapon for purposes of determining what it can hit. It can be made to return to its wielder's hand just as a *battle fang* can and has an additional power. When touching the skin of its wielder, it enables him or her to automatically succeed in all System Shock rolls, instantly bestowing up to 6d4 lost hit points to the wielder whenever he or she is reduced to 2 hit points or less. Such healing staunches blood flow, nullifies poison, and regenerates lost limbs or organs. This power can operate only twice; its second activation causes the *healing fang* to crumble to dust. Many *healing fangs* are worn as pendants or strapped to the wielder's arm or leg under armor or clothing, the protection they bring far outweighing their use as a weapon.

Thickwater

XP Value 10 per ounce GP Value 100 per ounce

Holy Thickwater:

XP Value 20 per ounce GP Value 200 per ounce

This magical substance appears as cool sapphire-blue gelatinous water. By consuming an ounce, the imbiber can go 24 hours without need of further refreshment. *Thickwater* is also known to neutralize a few taints and poisons upon contact (either inside or outside a body), turning a sickly brown in the process, but the effectiveness of a particular quantity of *thickwater* can only be determined by experimentation; there is no apparent consistency in *thickwater* performance as a poison antidote. *Thickwater* is found in certain small pools in the forests east and south of Ravens Bluff. How it comes to be there remains a mystery; in a typical pond of normal water, an ounce or two of *thickwater* may be isolated out by a diligent alchemist. The substance is prized by clerics, who turn it into a type of holy water. Enchanted in this manner, *holy thickwater* inflicts 6d6 points of damage on undead.

Helm of Asps

XP Value 800 GP Value 8,000

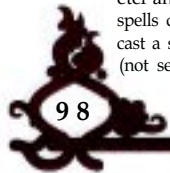
Some sages believe this helm is a unique creation, but others believe a dozen or so may exist. A *helm of asps* is an open-faced brass war-helm, relief-sculpted in a lifelike pattern of many writhing asps. The *helm* known in Ravens Bluff was once traced back through almost three centuries of owners to certain priests. Its most noteworthy owner was the gladiator Piso, who once operated a famous gladiatorial school in Ravens Bluff. The helm was kept on display there and was thought to have been destroyed when the school burned down. Piso's son, however, suspects the *helm* was taken by scavengers searching through the ashes.

Once a day, a character can activate a *helm of asps* for ten rounds. During this time, the asps upon it come to life, biting like those on a medusa's scalp. The asps have a THAC0 of 16, causing death to anyone failing a saving throw versus poison (the wearer of the *helm* is immune to all bite effects), but the wearer must get close enough to targets to allow the snakes to bite; if an intended target is mobile, this requires a successful attack (made at +3 to reflect the greater ease of moving close as opposed to striking through defenses).

Morgrim's Tapestry

XP Value 5,000 GP Value 33,000

This thick, lushly sewn tapestry is seven feet tall and four feet wide. It displays a menacing knight in plate armor, standing alert and ready for battle as he stares out of the tapestry directly at anyone viewing it. The tapestry was discovered by adventurers exploring Carthrose Hall, the old Ampner mansion outside Ravens Bluff. Research by the group's mage,





Morgrim Shoenfeldt, revealed that the tapestry functioned as a guardian. The tapestry hung in the band's rented house for several months while they adventured in Thay. Upon their return, they discovered that the house had been looted by thieves in their absence. The tapestry was among the items stolen, and its present whereabouts remain unknown. At least one sage who heard of it believes it may be one of several similar tapestries rather than a unique item.

The tapestry's magic takes effect when it is hung or lain in a room of any size, touched, and ordered aloud to guard an area, object, or creature within the room ("the entire room" may be specified). The command orders must be uttered in Common, must contain the secret name of the tapestry (the one examined by Morgrim is known as "Talaglavvas"), and can be a maximum of 33 words. If the order given is longer, it will be entirely ignored, leaving the tapestry inactive. In all cases, the tapestry follows the orders given literally, following what was said and not necessarily what was meant; care must be taken in framing orders. The tapestry will never activate to attack the being who gave it orders (unless ordered to do so) but seems unable to distinguish between its activator and other beings able to closely duplicate that entity's physical appearance (in one case, a clever disguise enabled a thief to bypass its power).

The tapestry obeys the orders of the last being to touch it and correctly order it (using its name). However, it can't receive new orders while activated (in other words, to be given new orders, it must be approached by someone who doesn't inadvertently activate it). A *legend lore* spell cast by a being able to touch the tapestry during casting can reveal the exact orders the tapestry is currently operating under (an identify spell used under the same circumstances will reveal only the general nature of the orders; i.e., what is defended and something about what or whom it is defending against). Moving the tapestry to other rooms, even by the use of spells from a distance, doesn't break the orders; the tapestry ignores such spells. Even the destruction of walls or floors to forcibly remove the tapestry doesn't suspend its activation.

When the guarded object is threatened, the knight in the tapestry steps out to fulfill his orders, usually by battling any (specified) intruders. The knight has 33 hp, a movement rate of 14, and an Armor Class of 3. He automatically hits a target once every round, delivering 1d8 +2 points of damage (regardless of whether he hits with his sword—which is part of him, not detachable-or some other part of his body). He is a mindless automaton, oblivious to obvious danger and immune to enchantment/charm spells and other mind-influencing forces of all sorts; any attempt to force him into a precipitous descent activates an automatic *feather fall*. The knight is a non-metallic force construct, not a body of flesh encased in metal, and thus unaffected by magnetism and rust. He halts his attacks only if his defined targets die or leave the guarded area, or if he is rendered immobile or reduced to 4 hit points or less by wounds (whereupon he falls into dust that rushes back into the tapestry).

If the knight is slain outright (reduced from 5 hit points or more to zero or less during a single round), he collapses forever into dust and the tapestry loses its magical powers. If the wounded knight returns to the tapestry, a mending spell will heal all damage to him. The tapestry itself cannot be burned and resists most attacks: slashes and piercings do it no harm, and it takes only 1 hit point of damage per spell level from damaging spells hurled against it. It has a total of 333 hit points and regains 1 lost hit point per day. The tapestry weighs about 50 pounds and is inert to most spells (thus, it can't be animated or made to fly by the use of magics cast on it).

The Tears of The Dragon

"...And all that night the dragon cried
As o'er the rooftops she soared and beat,
For one mage lost to her when he died
One heart stilled; one was torn yet beat."

The Dragon Cried
Anonymous Ballad of The Vast

Adventurers still search the Vast today—all the great sweep and stretch of it, from mountains to shore—because of the dragon who wept one day, long ago.

The Fall of Archveult

Some seventy winters ago, the archmage known as Archveult Tattercloak vanished in a spectacular midair explosion in the dawn sky over the harbor

of Ravens Bluff. The blast ended the wizard's short but savage battle with a gigantic dragon—some say of an unknown breed, never seen before or since—whose command of magic rivaled Archveult's own. The explosion apparently destroyed them both (though some sages argue that it may only have cloaked the violent shifting of one or both to another plane). Whatever befell, Archveult Tattercloak was seen no more in Faerûn.

The sun rose that day over an awed and fearful Ravens Bluff. Merchants and warriors alike muttered and cast anxious glances skyward, often and darkly. Archveult was known to live with a powerful gold dragon, Tlanchass Hailstorm. While in his company, Tlanchass often took the shape of a beautiful human woman, and many said they loved each other deeply. It's commonly agreed he died protecting her from this mysterious attacking dragon. Some even believe Tlanchass bore the missing archmage a child—and that such crossbreeds produce the fabled cinnamon dragons of children's tales. Whatever the truth of all this, it is certain that Tlanchass came out of the east to the scene of Archveult's fall in dragon shape, huge and terrible in her rushing flight. She swooped and quested over the Bluff frantically, while folk of the city cowered in their cellars and hurried to shelter, and then she gave a great, ringing cry of loss.

All the rest of that day, the distraught dragon flew about, weeping. Her tears blazed down out of the sky like fire, and where they came to ground, they sparkled and gleamed, diamond-bright. At dusk the dragon flew away westwards, never to be seen again by men. Behind, on the streets of Ravens Bluff, her tears glittered and shone. They had become hard and clear like gems, smooth-sided, retaining the shapes of falling tears. Men gathered them wonderingly, for they took in the starlight and shone with a pale mint-green fire. Hard they were, too hard for blade to scratch or hammer to shatter, and the news spread through the city like fire through dry straw. The tears of the dragon were a gemstone like no other, a beauty that a lady might wear and stand prouder and grander than any Calishite, Waterdhavian, or Thayvian princess.

All the next day, men admired them, fought over them, and hid them away. And all the next night that followed, gargoyles came out of the dark windows of the fell tower of Muaralygrym the Mage, darkest in reputation of all the known sorcerers of the city. They swooped through the city with eyes of burning flame and claws that rent wood and flesh alike, seeming to know where every Tear had been hidden. Probably the evil wizard had worked a spell that sought out the precious things, for his murderous creatures are said to have left not a Tear behind when they rose, claws dripping with blood, and flew back to the tower. Many an angry man with sword in hand went to the tower the next day, but they found it open, unguarded, and empty. The Tears were gone, along with every work and copper coin of Muaralygrym the Mage.

A mighty wizard of those times, Lauthdryn "Hurler-of-Stars," was then the Magister. Called upon through spells cast by certain mages of the Bluff, he appeared in the city and told folk gathered there that Archveult's seat of power had lain "in a low place, not in a high place" somewhere in the Vast. Muaralygrym, he said, had used great Art to hide himself—spells so twisted that their trace had not yet faded. They told the Magister that Muaralygrym the Dark was himself still lurking in the Vast. Then Lauthdryn went forth alone into the lands east of the city, naked power crackling and crawling upon the staff he bore, to break Muaralygrym the Dark's spells. The next day the ground shook, and pieces of that shattered staff fell from thin air to the streets of the city; the Magister was no more.

Many days later, a sad-eyed and bent old sorcerer came to the city, giving his name as Aralagath Tarsil of Elturel—now the Magister. He told the folk of Ravens Bluff that Lauthdryn had spent his life in the breaking of Muaralygrym's power and that both had perished; "somewhere near, between thy walls and the watching mountains." Aralagath then departed and was not seen again; men soon heard talk of Magister with other names.

From that day to this, adventurers have searched the Vast for the abandoned hoard of the dragon Tlanchass, and for the place where Muaralygrym stashed the stolen Tears.

The Lost Hoard

Tlanchass and Archveult dwelt together in a network of caverns—one at least large enough for the dragon to stretch out in, in her own great form, and bathe in the shallow waters that flooded that place. Access to the caves was through a covered well in the cellar of what looked from the outside like a simple stone cottage sitting in a wooded dell somewhere in the Vast. So much is certain, but just where that cottage is, or was, is not known. If any have found it, or the great wealth of gathered gold, gems, and



Archveult's store of magic said to lie hidden there, no word has come of it. Archveult devised many spells and was known to own powerful magic staves, rings, and more strange and mysterious things of Art. Nor is it known where Muaralygrym took refuge and met his end, with his stolen hoard of Tears.

The Tears

It is not known what magical powers the dragon Tlanchass commanded, or even what became of her, though Elminster has hinted rather strongly that she went to Evermeet, where she may yet dwell. No other dragon has created what she did, in her grief—and it is highly likely that no other dragon alive in the Realms today can, or word of it would have spread over all the lands. What is certain (because Azuth, Lord of Spells, once showed one to a later Magister) is that at least some of her Tears have survived and are as beautiful and as valuable as the tales say.

A *Tear of the Dragon* is a hand-sized, teardrop-shaped, silky-smooth clear stone—or some other substance so hard that no known force can mark it, let alone shatter it. It gathers available light and stores it within itself, so as to emit a soft, mint-green *faerie fire* at all times. If struck or dropped, it gives forth a ringing sound so sad that the strong and stem wizard who heard it (and knew nothing, then, of the tale of Tlanchass) was moved to tears. A *Tear* is literally priceless—and there are archmages and rulers of the Realms who will stop at nothing to possess one.

A *Tear of the Dragon* is known to possess certain magical qualities. Its touch heals insanity and damage to the mind, disease (including curses such as lycanthropy and mummy rot), banishes scarring and disfigurement, ends *charms*, *feeble-mindedness*, and other mental influences and compulsions (including *geas* and *quest* magics). It also heals 2d12 lost hit points, if a touched being is damaged. These powers work with each contact, for every being. A *Tear* can also, once every tenday, act as a *potion of vitality* on a being touched by it. Finally, it can act as a commune spell, allowing the one touching it to contact his or her deity and receive 1d4+1 answers; this power can only work once per year for any given being. Azuth is also said to have told the Magister that any creature who carries such a stone is protected against life energy draining and possession of any sort (such as attack by the user of a *magic jar* spell) and against shock (i.e., a System Shock survival rolls would automatically succeed), but so far as is known this has never been put to the test.

It is thought that there were once seventy-odd *Tears*; no one knows how many survive. Many companies of adventurers, down the years since the Grief of Tlanchass, have searched ail over the Vast for traces of the Lost Hoard and the Tears of the Dragon, with apparent lack of success. If any have found either, they have not made public the fact.





The Walking Tour

Those new to Ravens Bluff often find it easy to get around in but difficult to know well; adventurers who have lived here for years often don't know the names of major streets or what's on the opposite side of the block from their favorite shop or tavern. The lack of street signs is partly to blame here, as is the Ravenaar habit of renaming streets from time to time, with some people adopting the new name and others keeping the old. Even more confusing, sometimes an adventurer will nickname a street and the new name will catch on among his or her fellow adventurers, while longtime residents will continue to use the original name for the same street. The best way to find out where something is has always been simply to ask around: it's a small enough town that sooner or later you'll run into somebody—a friend of a friend—who knows the spot you mean. Until recently no accurate building-by-building survey of the Bluff had ever been undertaken (Lady Amber commissioned the first in order to evaluate war damage and plan for reconstruction). Civic officials have been notoriously reluctant to make available maps, street plans, sewer diagrams, or similar graphic depictions of Ravens Bluff, lest they be used in the planning of thefts, ambushes, and getaways. The new mayor, Lady Amber Lynn Thoden, has recently issued an official decree that divides the city into seven districts and twenty-two neighborhoods. She also approved the renaming of many streets (some actually reversion to older names no longer in common use). While this has greatly simplified the planning of Watch patrols, property tax schedules, building permits, and the like, not everybody has accepted the "newfangled" names as yet (for example, Crow's End is now smaller than it used to be, much to the annoyance of some long-time residents who find they no longer live there, their houses now being on the other side of the invisible border).

To orient new visitors properly, it's best to have a guide. Accordingly, Raraerdo Moonspring, nephew of Lady Lauren DeVillars and self-proclaimed man-about-town, has volunteered his services to give newcomers a walking tour of the city. Readers of this chapter are warned that all opinions and comments contained herein are his.

Foreign District

Also, less politely, referred to as "Outlander Town" or "the Outlander District," this walled-off little slice of the city is the cleanest, quietest, most eerily lifeless part of Ravens Bluff—unless one considers ever-present Watch patrols and private guards to be "life." Folk who keep to Fireleap Lane or Daren's Ring (which bisects the Lane at the center of the district) will be watched attentively by various armed authorities, but no more. Anyone who ventures into the nameless lanes that snake outwards from the Ring through the neat topiary plantings and carpetlike lawns, however, will instantly be challenged as to their rightful business here. Security is the reason for the existence of this walled enclave—and security certainly rules over all else here.

This is hardly surprising, given that such traditionally aggressive and unfriendly powers as Mulmaster and Thay have embassies in this district—let

the traveler be forewarned. Many Ravenians (myself included) know little of what stands in this district of the city; we're not encouraged to wander and explore, and embassy guards here are seldom forthcoming with building identifications when asked (the most common reply to my queries was the flat question, always delivered with a hard stare, "And why do you want to know?"). No inns here, and no place to purchase food or drink—except for the occasional party thrown by someone too mean to let refreshments flow for free.

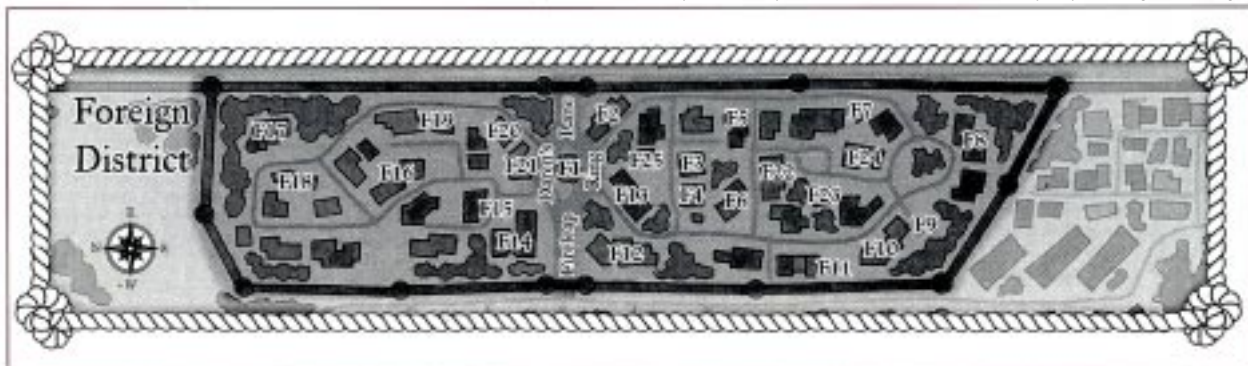
Entering the district from the city proper, we pass through these ornate bronze openwork gates depicting mermaids, hippocampi, and schools of fish sporting together. Directly ahead stands **Ring Park** (F1), the tiny circle of duskwood trees enclosed by Daren's Ring. Its shady benches are supposed to be for visitors to sit and chat upon—but are always occupied by Watch officers dining on hotbreads washed down with flasks of brandy. The tiny dolphin fountain at the heart of the park, a gift from the now-extinct Selmer elven family, is one of the few clean, free, and easily reached sources of drinking water in the city.

On the south side of Fireleap Lane, just inside the gates, stands the small, tastefully carved stone tower abode of **Hark the Herald** (F2). The seaflower plantings about it are the work of the Onder halfling family, in memory of Jaraera Onder, who lies buried in an unmarked grave hereabouts after she fell defending her children against orcs before any city stood here.

Passing around the ring southwesterly, but taking the first lane southeast back towards the wall of the city proper, we end up walking along the outer wall, in a pleasantly shaded lane of shadowtop trees pruned into an overarching canopy. On the first cross lane running due west stand, side by side, the large square towers that are home to the half-elven adventuring wizard **Loki Spellsinger** (F3) and to **Anna Geden** (F4), respectively. Both are surrounded by tall, close-bar, wrought-iron fences surmounted by alternating spearpoints and grinning imp-heads, but Geden's tower is the more interesting, sporting huge hanging baskets of trailing plants and moss beside most of its narrow shuttered windows. These hang from huge iron brackets, and not a winter passes without at least one of them falling and shattering—with unfortunate consequences for any Watch officers who happen to be dozing nearby!

The frowning, many-pillared stone pile that stands at the corner of the next crosslane, with its mock battlements and scowling gargoyle downspouts (rumors would have it that these gargoyles being real, monstrous guardians—perhaps there's some truth to the rumors in this case) is the **Embassy of Zhentil Keep** (F5). Its guards have been known to strike first and apologize later; tarry not overlong to admire the gloomily dreary architecture. Just to the west along the same lane stands the palatial, many-lamped manor that is **the Embassy of Amn** (F6). Much of its splendor comes from the huge plates of mirror-polished copper that stand behind every lamp-tree; the sea air eats at these daily, and teams of liveried servants are forever buffing and sanding these splendid-looking embellishments of impracticality. The greedy or desperate onlooker should know that their coin-be-decked surcoats aren't sewn with real coins at all but rather with gilded circles of coarse iron.

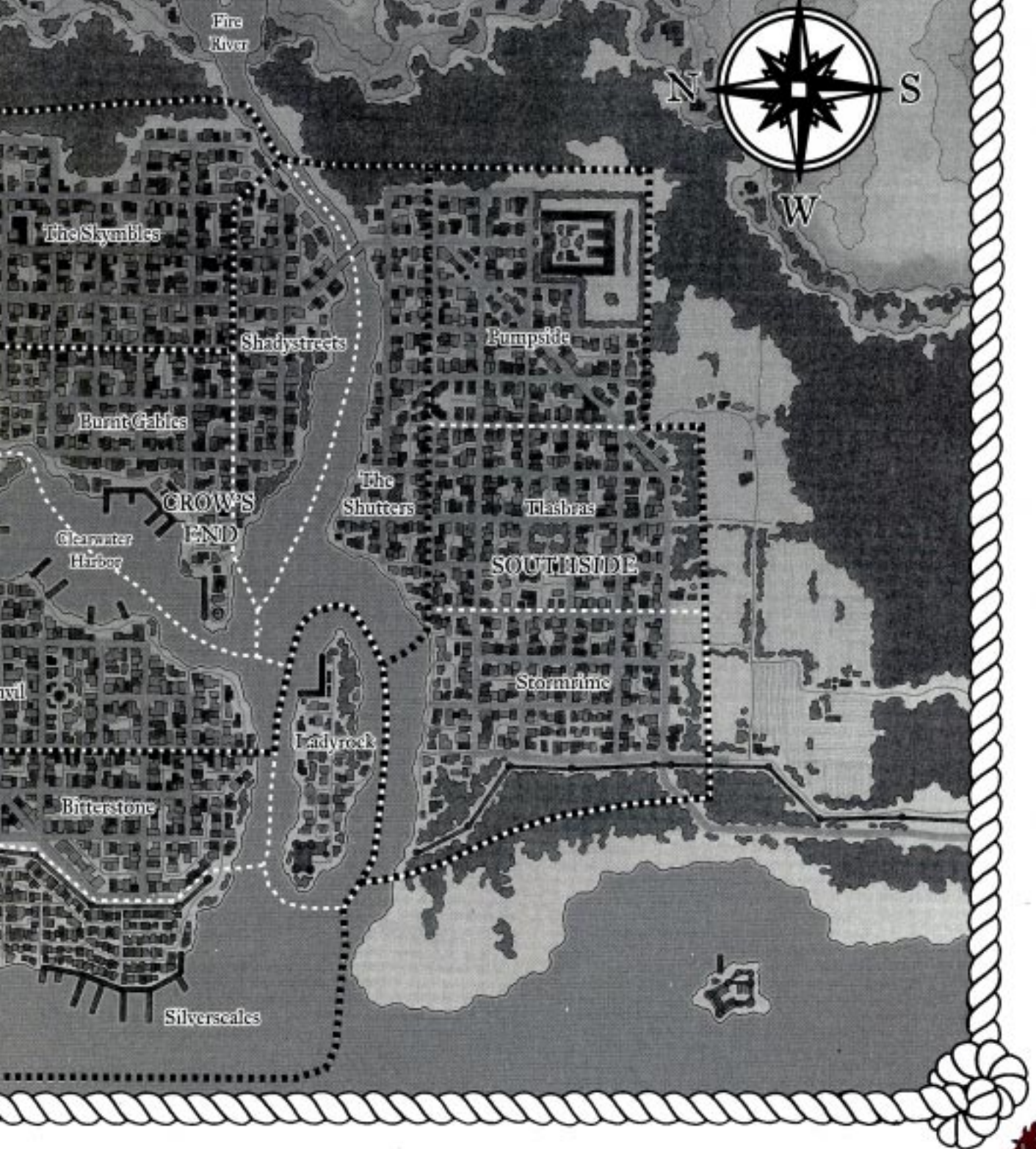
A bit further down, the lane running along the city wall passes the small but pleasantly balconied square stone tower home of **Talin Brewmaster** (F7) before abruptly turning west. A sidelane looping to the south offers an approach to the much-visited **Embassy of Procampur** (F8), host to an almost desperate flurry of revels throughout each year. Its wooded gardens are lit by small ruby- and emerald-hued lamps every dry evening, providing a



Ravens



Bluff





place for guests (almost always merchants or experienced adventurers thinking to relocate) a place to stroll, chat, and make deals of all sorts—some of which they even intend to honor in the morning.

Passing westwards, a short yew-flanked spur lane leads to the small, rather plain round tower abode of the elven-adventurer **Sir Kile the Ox** (F9), standing hard by the impressive, many-windowed stone **Cormyr House** (F10). The walls of this embassy of the Forest Kingdom are adorned with tall sculpted shields, and it sports a rear terrace where wines often flow into goblets like water.

The lane continues northwards, flanking the western wall of the district now, past the small but tasteful stone house of **Gideon Sagson** (F11), a gnome whose illusions have won him something of a reputation; its large stone yardposts are surmounted by stone balls that seem to be a favorite perch for the city's ravens. After a few blocks the way turns northeast again to link up once more with the Ring. In its final block the lane passes between the sinister, seemingly-unguarded **Embassy of Thay** (F12) on the west (with its domed central hall and three-story wings—even the ravens avoid this place, no doubt sensing the legendary warding magics said to slay intruders at a single over-reckless step) and the rather more welcoming **Embassy of Impiltur** (F13) on the east (with its ornate gate framed by rearing stone horses which the ravens seem to particularly like).

Leaving the Ring and going due north, on the westernmost of the two lanes, we immediately pass the **Embassy of Tantras** (F14), a mock castle that is in truth a defensible fortress, in case the traditional rivalry between the Bluff and its northern neighbor ever breaks into open hostility. Aerial steeds sometimes land here on the rooftop in the dead of night, in the clandestine arrivals that so anger the City Watch. I've heard it's no accident that the statue in the center of the ring-shaped lane leading to what the locals call "the Tantran Castle" is the **Watchful Defender** (F15). This finely carved, twelve-foot-tall granite statue of a Watch officer stands on his plinth—ostensibly gazing out to sea at pirates but in actuality glaring at the very doors of the Tantran building. He's been dubbed "Simon" by the local bards and is said to bear all sorts of interesting scrying and divination enchantments that the Ministry of Art refuses to discuss.

The main north lane runs arrow-straight from the Ring until it reaches the front of the many-turreted **Waterdeep House** (F16), which some misguided builder thought would impress onlookers by aping the look of many tall city buildings thrust together into a forest of sky-stabbing ostentation. Those who visit this embassy can find an ample supply of small, round rooms, but the novelty of climbing endless corkscrew flights of stone stairs inside each of the towers gets old very quickly. Still, the lure of the deal (and the beauty of the lovely ladies who represent Waterdeep as agents here) keeps a steady stream of visitors coming and going through its pearl-inlaid front doors; I can't recall a quiet night here.

Sidestepping along the front of the Waterdhavian embassy, the lane strikes out again due north, only to turn tight corners at the north end of the walled district and pass between the imposing **Embassy of Sembia** (F17) and the home of **Elvira of Startree** (F18). Elvira moved into this ornamental-spired crimson stone mansion, formerly owned by the notorious late Deputy Mayor Belanor Fenmarel, after her own house (which had adjoined the Sembian residence on the northernmost turn of the lane) was destroyed in a mysterious and spectacular magical fire. From here the lane turns southeast to run along the city wall. At its corner with a cross lane stands the compact but imposing stone house of **Daren of Selune** (F19), its grand carved portico of the moon wreathed in stars surmounting four floors of round-windowed splendor.

Here, as you see, the lane turns southwest to pass a thick clump of trees that conceals a Watchpost (and public privy facilities—a very civilized feature, I've always thought) and rejoins the Ring. In doing so it passes along the front of another mock castle, this one sporting conical scarlet tile-and-spire roofs and an air of overgilded hauteur, with copper and gold trim appearing everywhere. I know it looks like a hideous party cake or child's toy, but is in fact the **Calaglara**, or embassy of Calimshan (F20).

Between the two lanes on the north side of the Ring stands the rather modest **Embassy of Turmish** (F21), with its low-railed rooftop garden studded with impressive statues of heroic men and women wrestling with peryton and manticores. Like its Procampa counterpart, this converted manor house often hosts parties thrown by merchant alliances who pay handsomely for the privilege of using such an impressive venue.

Let's go back for a moment to the southern end of this district. It's easy, among the grand walls and gates and stands of trees, to miss this little lane—see it there?—winding its way through the interior of district, continuing the

loop of laneway from where the Procampa embassy stands. Along this inner way stands the grandest building in the district, the high-domed **Embassy of Chessenta** (F22), a slippery-floored palace of gleaming pink-veined marble. The interior of the dome is painted in a scene of winged men and women chasing each other around a deep blue sky amid swirling flocks of ravens and doves. The gardens behind the embassy consist of a series of arched wicker bowers that lead almost to the back hedge of the solid square tower that is home to **Rogan the Confused** (F23). Diagonally across from Rogan's tower—yes, over there—crouches the forbidding-looking **Embassy of Mulmaster** (F24), whose stone walls are surmounted by small cupolas that hold alert guards both day and night. Don't like the place myself; it's never been known to host a party in all the years since its building.

The only recent construction in the neighborhood that I can think of is the renovation of a small, quaint manor house not far from the Ring. A necromancer used to live here, but his dreary gloom-and-doom decor is all gone now, thank goodness, replaced by an impressive collection of delicate white pillars adorned with spiraling vines. It's now the home of the gnome illusionist **Delila Rosebud** (F25), who took up residence here after her nearby tower home burned to the ground—a lot of that going around now, isn't there? I suppose the Red Ravens can only do so much, but still it does make you wonder why we pay them. Mustn't grumble, I suppose . . .

I have to admit that there are quite a few large and impressive buildings in this district whose owners are a total mystery to me. Keep to themselves, don't you know. Still, while I have no idea who they are, I'll guarantee that the expense and difficulty of obtaining such a residence ensures that any one living here is wealthy and powerful. If you're planning to just drop by unannounced for a visit sometime, be warned that griffon-riders (of the Griffon Guard, no less!) fly over this district at frequent but deliberately random intervals. And they're always peering at the grounds below for any sign of folk lurking, hurrying, or carrying anything unusual. Trouble here reflects badly on the Bluff's reputation abroad, so they take any intruders *very* seriously. To my mind, this may be the safest district of the city but it certainly feels more unfriendly than the most dingy and dangerous dockside alleys. Watch your step here.

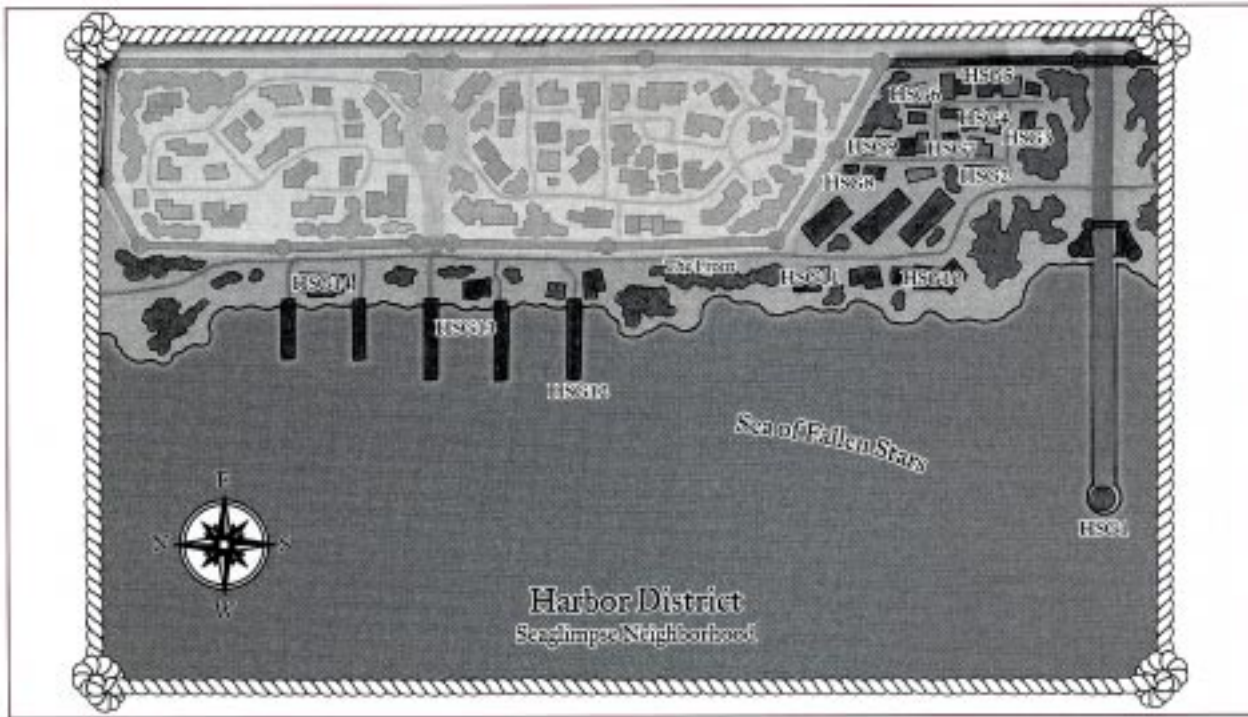
Harbor District Seaglimpse

Many folks who've lived here all their lives never see this neighborhood, lying as it does tucked away outside the city wall, along a mud-and-gravel wagonroad known as "the Front." Storms blow onshore here, waves pounding the land and carrying off anything that isn't securely fastened down. Ships docked hereabouts are often cross-chained to more than one wharf to prevent their being torn free, driven ashore, and wrecked. Sailors and longshoremen make up most of the folk we're likely to meet here in Seaglimpse, aside from the occasional Watch patrol. Be warned that in addition to the uniformed patrols the Watch also has undercover spies here, usually in the guise of "old salts," to keep smuggling and illicit dealings of all sorts to a minimum. I'm told the relative privacy of Seaglimpse used to lead to such abuses as open slave-auctioning (with the unfortunate "wares" chained on display) and the repacking and false relabeling of cargoes in plain public view on the docks. No more!

There's not much reason for a casual visitor to come down from the fortified Seatower breakwater into Seaglimpse, unless you happen to like bracing seabreezes. I do—I find the smell of dead fish and rotting seaweed less strong here than in other waterfront locations around the Bluff, because of the scouring action of the waves.

The breakwater, by the way, has been called many things (not all of them polite), but the name that seems to have stuck is **Sundaroon's Seatower** (HSG1), derived from its location on the site of the former pirate haunt of Sundaroon's Wharf. This long, narrow castle housed much of the on-duty Ravenian navy in the past—er, back when we *had* a navy, that is—and will again, I'm sure, when the navy is eventually rebuilt. In the meantime, it's still home to a griffon landing pad, a long canvas-shrouded row of heavy catapults, and interior arsenals of the oil-soaked fire-shot and chain-linked stone balls that these fearsome anti-pirate weapons can hurl. I've often heard folk who live or work on the docks refer to this place as "the Seawall," but drylanders never seem to use the name.

Setting out north along the Front from the Seatower, we immediately come to a tangle of nameless lanes leading off to the east and a cluster of large, rather ugly warehouses to the west. Decisions, decisions. The Front



plunges into and through the latter, but let's first investigate some of the interesting sights along the lanes in this pocket of buildings sometimes unofficially known as "Gimble's Elbow" (nobody recalls nowadays who Gimble was, exactly, beyond being a sailor and a bit of a rascal) or simply "the Elbow." First we pass **Narwhal Manor** (HSG2), a fortress-like stone building that houses the Bluff's main customs warehouse (for confiscated and "about to be examined" goods). Draco Ellass, the chief customs inspector, has his office here; I've found he can predict the weather better than most seacaptains. The Manor presents a stern face to the sea—after a good storm you can see the whole seaward wall just glittering with salt.

Due east along the lane stands the smaller but just as massively built premises of **Safe Harbor Marine Guarantees** (HSG3): a two-story stone building that looks like the stump of a castle keep, flanked on its seaward side by a 60-foot tower that looks like a solid stone obelisk. I've often seen the limping half-elven former sea captain who owns the place laboriously climbing the rickety wooden staircase that spirals up the outside of the tower, rotten plank-ends drooping and dangling from it. The tower is topped by an observation room with a signal bell, and a ship-shaped weather vane that squeals as it turns. Ship owners and captains are the main clientele of this place, but anyone can walk in and buy charts of any Moonsea and Inner Sea waters.

Across the lane from the guarantee office (said to house a considerable vault) stands **Maukshoun's Rope, Cable, and Chain** (HSG4), a cluttered barn of a place overrun by disdainful rat-catching cats the size of large dogs. Maukshoun is banned from selling fine wire, by city ordinance; too many sailors were equipping themselves with strangle-wires before visiting city taverns, alleys, and back bedrooms.

The lane turns a corner here (the second leg of a box-shaped route that'll bring us back to the main road) and passes the **Farspice Trading Company** (HSG5). You can readily identify this place not only by its fading and rather fanciful sign of amorous mermaids (nice, eh?), happy sailors, and party-hat-festooned dolphins a-frolic but by the sneeze-inducing scents of many casually casked spices at war with one another. Many of the neighboring buildings are caulking and boat repair concerns, where old boats and older men lie dreaming amid sagging, peeling wooden structures that look as if a good push would cause them to collapse into the chaos of old split barrels and broken masts that lies on all sides, growing weeds and breeding rats. Peaceful-looking, isn't it? I suspect a lot of these places are just fronts for smuggling and similar skulduggery, but you'd never know it just to look at them. A little too perfect, perhaps.

The lane turns another sharp corner at something that advertises itself as **Rare And Fine Seashell Remedies** (HSG6)—remedies that take the form of fiery liquor cordials. Now the lane runs west for a ways, past net-drying racks and lobster traps, to turn south again around the walls of the **Flagon o' Flames** tavern (HSG7), a truly dreadful pit of a place where sailors drink themselves stupid and consort with loose women. Folk bent on dark business may occasionally meet here with heavily-hooded folk who dare not show themselves more openly (including, it's whispered, both drow and illithids). Dark and smoky, this place offers only cheese melted over burnt hand-loaves of buttered bread; both the beer and the wine are watered down.

See those steps leading down beneath the tavern? There, beside the front steps of the Flagon? When they're not choked with snoring drunks or hurled refuse, they lead to the little-known **Mystic Star Charts** shop. Rumor has it that you can buy fenced magical items here, or at least the components used in the working magics (pickpocketed from careless mages, I suppose).

That spur laneway of this last leg of the Elbow leads to two notable spots. On the west side stands **Haldivar's Mermaid** (HSG8), a rental business where sailors can get good clothing and footwear when getting ready to step out "on the town." Also a good spot to get ready disguises, come to think of it. Costumes discarded from the circus and out-of-date fashions from nobles' wardrobes find their way here. Haldivar himself's a bit peculiar—he looks every inch the hairy, gap-toothed salt that he is, but he likes to model splendid ladies' gowns as he works. Takes all types, I suppose. By the way, the mermaid statue-cum-bathing-pool out front is for rent, too. On the east side of the lane is **The Silver Lady** (HSG9), a nice, quiet establishment that relocated here a few years back from Silverscales, where it was called "The Silver Lily." It's very popular among sea captains when they're in port, and they all seem devoted to the innkeeper, Desiree Nadeaux. I'm told it's beautiful inside—all polished mahogany and comfortable chairs, where the captains relax and sip Golden Amber brandy, the house specialty, while they exchange witty banter with Desiree. But I've never made it past the hall-porter, and you won't either; only captains are allowed in. A pity; I've heard Desiree is one of the most beautiful ladies in the city. Ah well.

Let's make our way back to the main road. As you can see, from here the Front curves around the Elbow to run north along the shore. As it does so, it passes the well-known **Davy Jones' Lock-Up** (HSG10) on its seaward side and a row of three huge old warehouses to landwards. Anyone can rent



fire, theft (including piracy), and water or rodent damage. The rental office (and garrison quarters) for **Stars In My Hand Safeholds** (HSG11) stands across the road from the warehouses, separated from Davy Jones' by a trash-pile where rats run and gulls roost.

Davy Jones' is the feature of Seaglimpse best known to folk who live within the walls. For the right fee, sailors, shippers, and average citizens alike can store small quantities (up to about a small cartload per person) of valuable items by the day, the tenday, or the month. "No magic, no flammables, no banned goods" are the only restrictions on what can be stored here, but these rules are only invoked if someone is caught breaking them. So long as someone's willing to swear that whatever's inside a bundle or crate doesn't break a rule, that's good enough for the staff. The Lock-Up has a reputation for being very secure; carnivorous apes roam the place inside (or so I've heard) to guard against intruders.

A good hike down the road takes us past the wharves where navy ships used to ride the dockside waves, ready to race forth and repel pirates or a naval invasion. You can still see the hulks sticking out of the water on a clear day. The southernmost dock, **Chasipher's Wharf** (HSG12), is the scene of much activity these days as the city struggles to get at least two boats ready for harbor defense before word spreads among the Pirate Isles that the Bluff is undefended and the temptation to take advantage of it becomes irresistible. The pair of wharves north of Chasipher's belong to the **Coker Wharf Company** (HSG13), whose guarded and palisaded warehouse stands between them. The stench that hangs heavy hereabouts is due to the muck exposed at low tide; the Coker wharves march through some very shallow water before the sea bottom drops away to allow ships to approach. The Cokers have acquired a business reputation to match the smell, I'm told.

The last, most northerly pair of docks belongs to one of the most profitable businesses in all Ravens Bluff: **High Seas Shipbuilding** (HSG14), the source of many of the largest and fast vessels to ply the Reach and seas beyond. The Sandor family have been respected shipwrights for generations. These days they concentrate on fast, graceful caravels and cogs of truly monstrous size, employing their own Red Ravens firefighting detachment to guard against the loss to flame of the many piles of lumber and the scaffolding that cradle the hulls of unfinished ships; as you can see, these crowd

around the High Seas offices on both sides of the Front and stretch away northwards for a goodly distance.

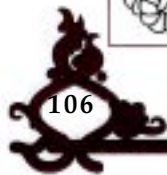
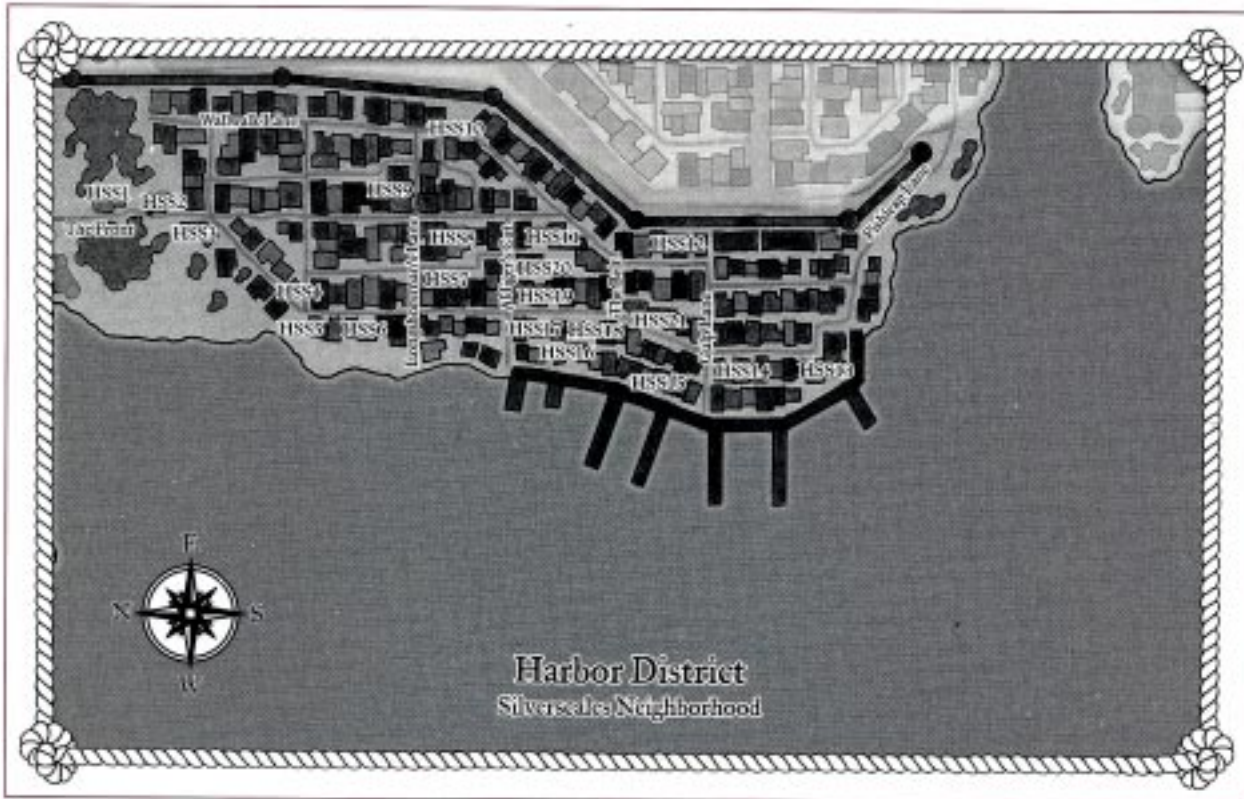
North of this is a field sometimes used for fairs but kept clear of all permanent encampments by the Watch. That grassy breakwater there is slowly and steadily being enlarged by the dumping of stone rubble from demolished buildings. It's a traditional spot for lovers to meet and watch the moonlight over the water—and a most effective one, in my experience. Recently it's become a bit notorious as a dancing-spot for local drow who revere Eilistraee. Some fearful citizens even set out with torches one night to "bum or drown the black-eared witches," but the Watch arrived in time to prevent the confrontation from becoming a true battle. There was much talk of banning all religious rituals and all nonhumans from the breakwater, and some folk are acting as if slay-on-sight laws were passed—but I know for a fact that civic officials never enacted any bans or restrictions beyond the "no encampment, no building" rule. A lot of fuss to make over a little moonlight dancing, I say.

Silverscales

There's a saying among those who work on or near the water in Ravens Bluff: "Docksiders know." The unspoken addendum to this is that non-docksiders *don't* know—about the docks, about what goes on there, or even the everyday customs and slang of the place. It's all too true, and since I'm not a docksider I'd like you to bear with me whenever we tour harbor areas. There are a lot of the businesses tucked away down alleys and up backstairs that I've never heard of—and docksiders don't encourage me to learn more.

Silverscales is an outside-the-walls part of the harbor, built on the mudflats as increasing trade made more wharves necessary. It's a rough, poor, seedy neighborhood of nameless lanes and shops without signs, where the not-so-fresh fish trade dominates (as your nose should be telling you). I despair of giving directions without named streets, so let's just wander south from the Seawall.

The Front continues arrow-straight southwards through "the Gullgulp," a litter of beached boats, drying nets, fish-curing sheds, and discarded sails and tackle. The first establishment along this road is **Embrol Sludge's Eatery and Shell Shoppe** (HSS1), a seafood restaurant and jewelry shop. I like this





place; the food's good and prices low, with an amazingly clean dining room—the smoked seaturtle in the shell especially fine. The jewelry is finely made and, since Sludge's puka-shell necklaces became popular with Ravenian high society, quite expensive. Glad to see a hard-working fellow "make good." Bracelets, necklaces, and pendants of pearl and shell are always on offer here; some are even set under glass in the centers of dining tables.

Next along the road is **Samara's Scrimshaw** (HSS2), which has recently expanded into a busy workshop employing dozens of gnome carvers who polish and sculpt tooth, tusk, shell, and bone into decorative coffers, hand-mirrors and hairbrushes, and scores of small decorative pieces. This formerly small human-run concern is now a bulk shipper of decorative goods to Sembia, Turmish, and the Vilhon Reach. Across the road from Samara's is a muddy, well-trampled bit of ground where the smell of fish is always strong. See those rows of stone sockets in the ground? Once every four days, year-round except in winter, poles are set in these holes around dawn to support awnings. Wagons of fish creak in from warehouses all over the city or straight off the boat (under the watchful eye of the Fishmongers Guild, of course), and a busy **Fish Market** (HSS3) erupts, continuing until dusk. My, how those people can throw fish. Amazing sight; you should come down to watch it sometime, taking care not to insult one of the dealers. Samara's does a good trade in wrappings and carry-trays while the market is on; the eyes and watering mouths of Ravenians are typically larger than whatever carriesacks they've brought with them. Don't miss Lonster, in his little stall close to the water: he adds a secret sauce to his roasting clams that makes them simply wonderful. Some folk buy a score or more, one after another, gorging themselves on the spot. Fried eel on a stick is a rather less popular market delicacy—I like it, but it's not to everyone's taste.

Beyond Samara's, the lane branches into a muddy labyrinth of ramshackle buildings and alleyways. Turning southwest, towards the waterfront, we pass **Ornagar's Smoked Eels & More** (HSS4), where fragrant fires of cherry and other woods are used to slowly smoke eels (ah! more eels!), oysters, mussels, squid, and smallfish, so they'll keep longer when sealed in jars and sent throughout the Vast and up north into the Moonsea lands. Down the road stands **Ashakar's Accessories** (HSS5), worth a stop for even the most discerning traveler: all of the steeply-priced items for sale in this neat, dimly lit showroom are of top quality. This is *the* place to come to find all sorts of smallish unusual items—including items that have come from the depths of the Sea of Fallen Stars, of merfolk-make and suited for use underwater. The tall, strikingly handsome proprietor is a mage, which may explain why thieves never pillage such quality wares.

Southwest of Ashakar's establishment, across a three-way comer known locally and for forgotten reasons as "Fashpost," the adventurous diner may find **Flirin's Sea Morsels** (HSS6), a recently enlarged and very popular restaurant where patrons may enjoy a variety of bite-sized raw seafood delicacies prepared before their eyes by the stunningly beautiful Flirin. This is the only place in Silverscales where the wealthy and noble can be seen lining up to dine; a scuttling staff of helpful halflings (who run along the tabletops when things get really busy) serve and seat in the spotless and plain rooms while most patrons take their drinks (rice and plum wine; an acquired taste, but a good one) in hand and line up to watch Flirin at work with her flashing knives. There's no menu; Flirin varies what sauced-drenched marine morsels go onto the small plates of rice according to what catches are available; tanks in the cellars keep some ingredients swimmingly fresh to the last. Flirin makes her own seaweed sauces from secret recipes of her own devising; she's open from highsun to about three hour-bells after dusk. Half Ravens Bluff (the male half) love to come here as much to watch her work as to eat. Highly recommended.

Two doors down from Flirin's is the **Fresh Fish** shop (HSS7), where recently-installed tanks make the name a literal promise. Crabs are the specialty here, but anything the nets bring in can feature as a "daily special." Reasonably priced, though the success of Flirin's has made prices rise here as well in recent years.

The rest of the block is tumbledown warehouses and fisherfolk residences. If we take the next crosslane east, locally known as "Longshoreman's Lane," the first corner we comes to holds, on the southwest, **Misti Morgan's Moonlight Pawnshop** (HSS8). If you're ever wandering down in these parts and get lost (not something I'd recommend), you can always identify this shop among the other decrepit rathold buildings all around by its faded sign: a serenely-seated black cat silhouetted against a full moon. Here the alluring Misti (and her elven female companion and messenger Vanet, who has a pet monkey) lends money in exchange for items. Misti knows every resident of Silverscales (and many "outsiders"—that is, folk

from inside the city walls) by sight, keeps up on all the gossip, and is widely rumored to fence stolen goods and hide illicit money. You can find everything from old tools to enchanted items of great power in her shop from time to time, but the daringly acquisitive are warned that Misti's traps are many. She's known to have a shadowy band of street urchins at her disposal to mount spying, trailing, and stealing operations for her—or even perform swarming attacks. Misti never deals in amounts larger than 5,000 gold pieces and refuses to invest in building ventures. She deals only in coin, gems, or tradebars, never paper of any sort—odd, that, since I've heard this is because she's an expert at forgery and the detection of forgeries. Don't be fooled by her pretty face and friendly smile; she's an expert manipulator and can shift from coquettish to vicious in the wink of an eye. But she's not a bad sort, all told; many folk in the Bluff enjoy her company, and she and Vanet get invitations to many a posh revel, usually arriving arm-in-arm and dressed to kill.

Continuing east on Longshoreman's Lane, we come to Paerl Finn's Shark Fin Restaurant & Tavern, universally known simply as **The Shark Fin Tavern** (HSS9). This converted warehouse offers good food and decent drinks for a reasonable price. Here you'll find hospitality and warmth amid sea decor, arm wrestling, jokes, and relaxed dancing. Tall tales, spontaneous singing ("What do you do with a drunken halfling?" is a traditional favorite), and laughter abound. Friendliness is the rule here, making it a refuge for many.

On the north side in the middle of the next block, flanked by warehouses that were once multi-story residences and are now all boarded-up windows and collapsing porches, you'll see the **Seaside Salvage Company** (HSS10). Don't look directly at it! I didn't dare linger long for us to inspect this establishment; dangerous-looking men lounge about in profusion here, many of them sliding back into the shadows whenever the Watch shows itself, and they take a dim view of strangers expressing interest in their business.

Let's pick up the pace a bit and continue east. Good, good. I think we can slow down now. Here, where Longshoreman's Lane ends by joining a lane running parallel with the city wall (imaginative locals call it "Wallwalk Lane"), we turn south and immediately come upon the infamous **Skully's Bar and Bait** (HSS11), a ramshackle tavern and live bait shop that seldom closes. It has underground water connections to the harbor, and stocks everything from fish entrails (1 copper piece a bucketful) to large frogs and giant centipedes. If someone brings it in and parts with it reasonably, and it can serve as bait, Skully will buy it; starving beggars have been known to trim off their own toes and ears in winter and bring them in to trade for a little fishbroth. That broth—the only "food" served here—is how Skully gets rid of bait too rotten for anyone to buy it, mixed in with bits of salted fish and a lot of old sauces and perfumes purchased cheaply from the "spoiled and dusty" stock of local shops. The stench wafting out the open front of Skully's is incredible; only those of strong stomach or poorly functioning noses frequent this place. Despite its wild reputation and rumored pirate connections, Skully's is always roarily busy—and no wonder: drinkables are of adequate quality and go for half the usual prices.

A long block down Wallwalk Lane from Skully's is a rather more presentable alternative, **The Ship's Wheel Tavern** (HSS12). Dark paneling, nautical decor, and average to high prices prevail here, reflecting its position as the safest watering-hole in Silverscales. Good selection of wines and better of beer, so it's usually crowded. Slabs of bread spread with dripping or roast boar is the only food here—simple but hearty.

As you can see, Wallwalk Lane straightens out to run due south in the next block, which holds the almost-hidden **Buftooroo's Dry Goods** shop (HSS13), a source of useful necessities. Thereafter the stink of fish and the slow crumble of sodden, sagging warehouses predominates down to the docks (known to the Watch as "the Seaward Docks").

If we turned east here onto Fishleap Lane, the muddy street that serves the wharves, we'd go around the end tower of the wall and into Bitterstone. But for now, let's turn west past the businesses and tall, narrow houses that stand close-crowded along the dockfront. Some of these residences are old, laundry-draped rooming-houses that the poorest Ravenians share with rats. Others—often sharing common walls with the near-ruins—are rebuilt luxury homes. One home I can identify is that of **Quincy Blackmantle** (HSS14), standing there on the corner where the coastline turns inward. Walking back north along Fishleap, we pass the **Dock Ice House** (HSS15) on our left, an establishment of critical importance to fish vendors all across Ravens Bluff. The next cross lane is Gulp Lane—a nice name, I think; don't know where it comes from. A turn west here and we come to the dockfront and the boardwalk. That's the **Fishing Co-op** (HSS16) over





there—look at those fish fly! **The Fishing Tackle** (HSS17) stands not much farther on; under new management, it sells the usual nets, draglines, hooks, and gaffs for fishing but also hot fish pies for famished fisherfolk and warm spiced grog (fortified “butter-brandy,” I’m told, whatever that is—it seems to contain all sorts of things but certainly cuts through chills).

The next cross lane is Aldiger’s Cut—the name’s some sort of local joke about impromptu surgery with a cutlass. We’ll take it back to Fishleap and turn south to catch a few interesting businesses we missed along the way.

On the west side of Fishleap, that old wooden house is home to the decrepit **Endelo’s Tankard** tavern, frequented by sailors too poor to drink elsewhere and too tired to want to fight or carouse. It’s got watery beer, all the hospitality of an abandoned ruin, and a bucket for a toilet—not recommended, unless you happen to go in for that sort of thing. Those brave souls who ascend that decaying flight of outside steps to the floor above the tavern will find themselves in **Talon’s Tattoo Parlor** (HSS18). Not only is the half-ogre Talon Darkoak a tattoo artist famous among sailors all over the Inner Sea, even rumored to be able to apply magical tattoos, it’s recently been revealed that he’s the last living member of the formerly prominent Ravenaar noble family of Whiteoak (the rest were wiped out in a pirate raid years ago). Highborn and richly pretentious ladies are beginning to flock to the attic-like parlor; it’s considered daring to have one’s skin skillfully carved by a muscular half-ogre. Talon’s acquiring quite a name for the small and stylish designs he applies to ladies who might later change their minds about wearing such a “brand.” I just love a happy ending—don’t you?

A few doors down from the tattoo parlor is **Talton’s Ivory & Scrimshaw** (HSS19), a small, square stone shop that resembles a miniature keep with bars on its windows and a heavy portcullis that’s drawn down when Talton’s is closed. Talton, his assistant, and several journeyman carvers turn out fine ivory and bone carvings—coffers, scabbards, combs, frets, cloak and hair pins, and inlays on daggers (Talton’s specialty). This shop produces a prodigious amount of carvings, and Talton buys bone and ivory in bulk from adventurers whenever possible.

I’m sure you couldn’t help but notice the stylish balcony on the east side of Fishleap Lane that we passed a few doors back, adorning the “docks” office of the **Coker Wharf Company** (HSS20), whose main place of business we saw up the shore in Seaglimpse. Next door stands the charmingly named **Swill & Spill Tavern** (HSS21). Its sagging roof signals a literal collapse into the street someday soon; this rat-infested, thoroughly ugly place serves truly awful stew (said by some to be made largely from rats) and ale that’s almost as bad. Many would-be patrons are reduced to physical illness after a few swallows. Surly waitresses and a fireplace that fills the place with smoke whenever lit complete a dining experience that can only be described as “the cheapest in town—but no bargain at the price.” There’s rumored to be a secret cellar used as a meeting-place by thieves . . . but they’d have to be strong-stomached thieves, I think. There’s a good reason this tavern is known as “The Sewer” among Ravenian thieves.

Let’s wrap up our tour of Silverscales here at the southeast corner of Fishleap Lane and the short linking lane known as The Belt with a quick stop at the **Lucky Coin Inn** (HSS22). Recently reopened after a change in ownership and a thorough renovation, this establishment features spartan accommodations—but at least the beds are sturdy and new. Its dining room shines, of course, when compared to the nearby **Swill & Spill**; anywhere else it’d be deemed no more than adequate. Watery wine and a raucous bar, but generous portions. Ample platters of tough, stringy meat (from a knacker’s down the way where old horses and worn-out oxen are slaughtered), and a heavy reliance on rich seasonings and oil-soaked garlic. It’s considered good luck for newcomers to the Bluff to have a first meal here—why, I can’t imagine—and toss a coin or two with the regulars “for luck.”

Bitterstone

Many folk regard this neighborhood—named for a miller (a former knight from Cormyr, some say) who lived hereabouts when only a few buildings stood where there’s now stone all around—as the heart of the harbor, where the most active, above-board, and largest sea-related Ravenian businesses can be found. Bounded by the city wall on the west, the waterfront on the south, Blacktree Boulevard on the east, and Morlgar’s Ride on the north, this is an area of long-established, solid stone and half-timbered buildings with paved alleys and even trees. There’s always activity on the streets of Bitterstone, no matter what the hour, and torches are lit at the major intersections here at night (in contrast to Silverscales, where folk bring their own lanterns or stumble around in darkness). Please bear in

mind that my knowledge of this part of the city is patchy at best. I snuck a look at the tax rolls to see if I could learn more to tell, but my few glances won me no more than a few random names.

If we begin our tour where Fishleap Lane rounds the endtower of the city wall, we come first to the infamous **Ill Eagle Inn** (HB1). This first-rate hostelry is known for fine food (Damaran cuisine, surprisingly; owner Sor-duel Meytauc was once chef to the lord of Damara, I hear) and unusual conversation (some of it provided by a talking eagle who goes by the name of Toddles and hates all demihumans with a passion). Humans only are welcome past its doors, and as its lodgings are steeply priced, more dine here than sleep over. If you hate anything that’s not human, then this is the place for you; otherwise I’d advise you to stay clear. Folk who think that Ravens Bluff should be “humans-only” congregate here to swap stories about how elves, dwarves, halflings, and gnomes can’t be trusted and are trying to take over the city. Sheer nonsense, of course, but dangerous nonsense—more than once a few patrons have gotten good and drunk and gone out to beat up some poor halfling in an alley or tried to torch a gnome-owned workshop. The Watch’ll have to shut this place down sooner or later; the Bluff can’t afford many more riots like the last one that started here.

Paugh! Let’s move on. Staying on the lane as it winds east along the waterfront, we pass **Barnacle Bill’s Green Beard Shaving Parlor** (HB2), which is both a small barber shop and a large drydock shed where the wizard known to all as “Barnacle Bill” removes barnacles from ships. His fees are double what’s normal for this service, but the cleansing much better than the usual rough scraping ships get elsewhere, thanks to a compound he devised that causes barnacles to peel away in sheets resembling giant scraggly blackish-green beards. He also shaves faces, heads, and bodies, either by spell or the old-fashioned way and can even cause hair to grow—wildly, if a disguise is needed.

If we continued on, Fishleap Lane would take us on into Crow’s End, but we’re going to leave it here in front of the **Hooked Albatross Inn** (HB3) and turn north onto Blacktree Boulevard. The Hooked Albatross, by the way, is a recently renovated hostelry that now offers stabling beneath four floors of comfortable, warm, private bedchambers. They no longer serve anything more substantial than hot buttered biscuits and mintwater, but you can be assured of your horses getting good care if you leave them here.

A block up Blacktree, at the northwest corner of its meeting with Summoner’s Street, that small, modest wooden home is one of the residences owned and sometimes used by an adventuring group of local fame, **Armor & Vengeance** (HB4). Perhaps you’ve heard of them? No? Oh well . . . It’s said to have a subterranean entrance, but I suspect they simply seldom arrive or depart in the daylight hours and spend most of their time away adventuring.

Continuing along Blacktree to its meeting with Rhabie Promenade and then southwest along “the Stroll” (as the Promenade is called locally), we pass another private home in the northeastern wedge between the Promenade and Raphiel Road. This one belongs to a halfling adventurer who goes by the name of **Syn** (HB5)—a “professional procurer” of items not firmly enough fastened down. His house stands at an intersection known locally as “the Spider.” On another corner of this streetmoot—the southeastern one, framed by Raphiel Road and Nightlamp Street—stands a cluster of joined rooming houses owned by **Khaleth & Ulger** (HB6), one of several sites owned by these fix-things-just-before-they-fall-down landlords.

Continuing southwest on the Promenade, we pass an impressive, always shuttered and barred dark stone hall owned by someone who pays taxes under the name of **Shadow** (HB7); it stands facing the city wall in the southwestern angle of the meeting of Rhabie Promenade and Westwall Way South. The Stroll takes us on to this ramshackle wooden home at the corner of the Promenade and Black Visor Street, with that faded, scrawled sign out front: “Pictures Drawn.” Adventurers and far-traveled merchants know that this is **The Mappers’ Workshop** (HB8), one of the Bluff’s hidden treasures. The deaf, quick-tempered old man who dwells here sells a splendid selection of maps covering almost all of known Faerûn; he’s usually to be found painstakingly drawing exact copies of his most popular ones. Few know that old Jork Marpe is a mage, but word is getting around that he hires adventurers from time to time to explore areas in his maps that he considers underdetailed. He dislikes the young, and some find his inquisitive manner—he always wants to know *why* someone wants to buy a map—irritating.

The Promenade degenerates into an alleyway a block south of Marpe’s shop, which turns southeast again to meet Fishleap Lane in front of the Ill Eagle. Here at the point where the Stroll becomes an alley stands the grand



gabled mansion of **Elvira Broadleaf** (HB9), which actually fronts onto the next lane to the east. I'm always struck by its balconied elegance, especially little details like those posts of its back fence carved into cats' heads. Two doors down the alley is another grand house, this one owned, according to the tax rolls, by a warrior who rejoices in the name of **OG Mekillem** (HB10); he also owns a still-grandier (if slightly smaller) home nearby on Westwall Way (HB11).

Turning our back on the Ill Eagle, we take the lane that links it to Westwall Way, passing en route the more modest home of the druid adventurer **Justin Kordt** (HB12). Two blocks up Westwall Way lies one of the more interesting shops in Ravens Bluff: **Oljagg's Rag and Bottle Shop** (HB13). It's nothing much to look at: one-story, brick slathered with cracked and fallen stucco, the shingles falling from the porch formed by its overhanging roof, dust and grease thick upon two large windows crowded with bottles of all sizes, hues, and shapes. All manner of discarded things can be found inside the shop—nothing very valuable, but often something just right for replacing a broken part. If it was in fashion twenty years ago, it's probably lying around somewhere in Oljagg's, under forty other somethings. Oljagg himself is a shuffling, noseless old man with a harelip and the gnarling, stooping disease that afflicts many elders—startling in appearance but warm and affable in manner. He deals in junk and refuse of all kinds and is known for his softhearted, generous business ways. In turn, some of the guilds give him unbroken bottles from their revels for free; much of his profits come from washing and reselling bottles to merchants. His granddaughter Pitha, as beautiful as he is ugly but just as good-hearted, helps out in the shop, accompanied by her inseparable cat, Phoroughpaugh. Speaking of inseparable, you don't know the meaning of the word until you've met the two shop assistants who do the fetching and carrying, two brothers that I've heard were actually born joined at the hip and later separated. Maybe that explains why neither seems comfortable more than a few steps from the other.

I can only think of four other sites of interest in Bitterstone to show you. One is obvious to the eye: that palatial manor house at the southeast corner of Raphiel Road and Crescentcoat Court, which the tax rolls tell me is owned by the successful half-elven adventurer **Morphius** (HB14), whose main residence we'll see later up in Mortonbrane. The second is **Tym's Supple Leather Shoppe** (HB15), a simple one-story home and shop standing on the south side of Black Visor Street between the Promenade and Westwall Way South. The proprietor, the painfully shy Tym Doeskin, is a superb leatherworker, capable of making armor, boots, and just about anything else of leather with proper fit, a style of the customer's choice, and any special features—such as secret pockets—a patron may desire. If not rushed, Tym is the equal of any of the foremost leatherworkers in Faerûn. The third is **Mornbright House** (HB16), headquarters of the Launderers Guild. This pillar-fronted, "L"-shaped edifice has entrances on both Nightlamp Street and Rhabie Promenade; it stands in the triangle formed by those two streets and Westwall Way South. "Cleanliness isn't next to Goodliness," I've heard these ladies say, "It's right up in front leading the way!"

The fourth and last spot I'd like to show you as we leave the neighborhood is a newly rebuilt (with stout bars over its shuttered windows and a locked door-of-bars over its stout, fireproofed oak door) warehouse at the corner of Morigar's Ride and Westwall Way South. This was recently revealed to be a newly established shrine of **The Dark Dancer** (HB17), devoted to the worship of the "good" drow goddess Eilistraee. It had no sooner gone public than it was attacked by a drow-hating mob led by several regulars from the Ill Eagle. I hear the Clerical Circle is debating whether or not to order the place destroyed by public edict, and the Watch keeps a close eye on the place to head off trouble that might lead to another riot. It's widely assumed that the renovations after the last attack included adding defensive magics to guard against arson, some think underground tunneling is also underway to link it with the cellars of other buildings for unobserved access. A lot of fuss to go to just because some people want to dance, isn't it?



Ladyrock

This island in the mouth of the Fire River is considered a neighborhood in the Harbor District and indeed is built over just like the adjacent neighborhoods ashore. Many copper-a-ride ferries (usually small rowing dinghies, but sometimes two or more lashed together side-by-side for greater stability) ply the two river straits separating the Ladyrock from either bank. Ladyrock has become a favorite haunt of sailors and lowlife rowdies, because you can see any Watch reinforcements (to the patrol that's always on duty on the island) approaching and swiftly hide, hop on a ferry, swim away, or simply desist from whatever rowdiness attracted the attention of the authorities and stand around looking innocent. Be warned; it's *always* bad news here if you see a crowd standing around looking innocent. When it happens to me, I leave. Quickly.

To most Ravenians, the Ladyrock is a place they never visit but often glance at. Its seaward side is anchored by a magnificent castle of black stone thickly covered with ivy. This is the old **Ladyrock Lighthouse** (HL1), where the Regent of the Harbor keeps a weather eye on all comings and goings. If you look closely, you can see the ends of the great chains that can be pulled up by huge golem-powered capstans to block passage up the Fire River on either side, preventing pirates and other riffraff from sailing right around the walls and into the heart of the city.

A laneway known as the Ladyrun runs down the spine of the island, straight east and west. Directly across this from the castle, filling the rest of the western tip of the island, is the new premises of the relocated restaurant known as **The Painted Boat** (HL2). Formerly a seafood house located on pilings about 300 yards offshore, the old Boat was literally run over by a pirate ship racing into the harbor during a night storm and burst apart. Incredibly, none of the three proprietors nor their two monstrously big (thirty-pound) cats were killed, and they simply moved the whole business ashore, rebuilding the place and tying up the owners' sloop, the Flying Fish, alongside. Nautical guests tend to follow their lead and simply tie up and hop ashore. The food is still good and still dominated by seafood. Dog and cock fights are no longer regular occurrences here (the on-duty Watch patrol spends a lot of time here, making the freewheeling thieves' wagering that used to accompany such contests now infrequent indeed), but the main attraction is still the entertainment—tumblers, jugglers, clowns,

bawdy minstrels, fire-eaters, and trained animals. There's still a dance floor, and the owners—two brothers, plus the elder brother's wife, the saucy and flirtatious Kalima (universally known as "Bounce" due to her spectacular skill at jumping)—have invested in *silence* enchantments to muffle the sounds of revelry from Ladyrock neighbors.

Modest private homes (of smugglers and fences, many drylander Ravenians believe) fill much of the remainder of the Ladyrock, but there are three other businesses of interest to the visitor: the **Red Sail Tavern** (HL3), the **Stars In Shadow** nightclub (HL4), and the **Ustiligator Paper Mill** (HL5).

The Sail is the busiest of all Ladyrock businesses. Built of salvaged fittings and timbers from many wrecked or scrapped vessels, it's a dim, dark-paneled, smoky place where sailors go to drink and talk business. Landlubbers, authorities, and anyone else not ready to do business with sailors aren't welcome.

The Stars In Shadow is a relatively new establishment whose privacy and luxury are winning it popularity among wealthy Ravenians of all backgrounds. Its beautiful and discreet staff are much admired among the patrons, but its most engaging feature is the row of south-facing "silent rooms," magically shielded from outside prying, where guests can meet for truly private discussions. Much important business is now conducted here, though the rooms are occasionally used for simple trysts. The proprietor, "Silent Cal" Kuiper, is famous for never using two words when one will do; he's a thin, rangy man with a reputation for being able to keep a secret and the absolute devotion of his staff, from the bartender and singers down to the cook and bouncers. Nobody will ask your business here, and if you need to lay low for a while or pass a message to someone who's hard to find, this is a good place to come.

The last spot of note on Ladyrock is not very interesting to visit, but its product is. The Mill produces distinctive fine whitewoven papers, much in demand among wizards and stationers. Still, there's no denying it's a noisy, smelly place. The Ustiligators used to discharge vast amounts of waste pulp into the river. That's been stopped now, but the magical processes involved made their costs rise so much that their papers are now so expensive that only the most demanding clients can afford to buy them.

Temple District

Altarside

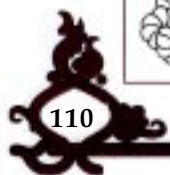
Now we get into neighborhoods I know rather better—busy, bustling, prosperous areas where important and imposing sites and buildings confront the traveler thick and fast. We'll move briskly, dwelling less on the details, because there's a lot to see here.

Altarside is bounded by the city wall on the west and Morlgar's Ride on the south. Its boundaries then run north along Waelstar Way for a block, turn west on Raven Way to Moorland Ride, north on it to Griffon Trail, and then west to the city wall again. This is the least prosperous of the four neighborhoods that make up Temple District, and yet it still holds a brace of holy sites, guild centers, and important businesses.

Let's enter from the seawall, passing through the city wall via the great bronze Gates of the Watchful Raven and striding forth down Raven Way. Immediately inside the wall, we're flanked by these two huge, frowning castles, linked over our heads by two flying bridges where watchful guards are always stationed, with bows ready at hand. This is **Ravendark Castle** (TA1), though most people know it better as "the Army Barracks." The barracks themselves actually occupy the southernmost castle; the northernmost houses many civic offices, including the **Central Office of the Watch**, and is sometimes called **City Hall**.

The very next building on the south side of Raven Way (in the southwest corner of its meeting with Raphiel Road) is rather more modest; a two-story converted manor house that is now home to **Raven Express** (TA2). This small-package delivery service has grown wildly in popularity since its founding (despite recurring fears about confidentiality, and rumors of less than legal dealings on the part of its rotund, fiery-tempered owner, Legov Nairb). Trained ravens carry wax-sealed miniature scrollcases to Raven Express offices in Calaut or Procampur (1 day, costs 10 gp), Tantras (half-day, costs 7 gp), Tsurlagol (2 days, 15 gp), Mulmaster (4 days, 25 gp), Hillsfar (5 days, 30 gp), Saerloon (7 days, 35 gp), Phlan (8 days, 40 gp), and Westgate (10 days, 50 gp).

Continuing eastwards, we come to the imposing battlements of the five-story arch-windowed **Hall of the Raven** (TA3), where knights of the city are invested with their titles and the records of all the knightly orders kept (since the recent fire that gutted the Ravens Bluff Hall of Records). The Hall faces a cluster of former grand homes and prosperous businesses that the alert eye will no doubt notice are all joined by fairly recent brick addi-





tions. This entire block, as far back as Nimble Alley, is now occupied by the **Hall of the Red Ravens** (TA4), headquarters of Ravens Bluff's firefighting force. A false front has been built onto the formerly separate shops to create one of the most impressive structures in all Ravens Bluff. Now, a tall facade of glossy, polished black granite adorned with relief carvings of flying ravens looks out over Raven Way. Be warned, though, that the row of five red double doors are apt to disgorge hurrying fire wagons without warning. The glossy black turret behind is a water tower, and the Red Ravens keep their own stables here as well. Small Red Raven halls can be found throughout the city; over 200 men and women serve in this most vital civic service—and their efforts have undoubtedly saved entire city blocks on many occasions by preventing fires from spreading.

Across Nimble Alley, fronting on Raphiel Road, is **The Lambent Eye** (TA5), one of the newest and most popular of the Bluff's upscale restaurants. Arched ceiling, ornamental ironwork and gnome-work tapestries form a grand backdrop to all the cheery hubbub. Coin-hurlers talk of big Sembian deals and inside news from Turmish and the Vilhon Reach, their stage a low-beamed barn of small booths and smaller tables. Nut-crusted swordfish is a specialty here, and crabs fried in lemon beer a safe hearty standby. The genial service comes with a wide array of wines.

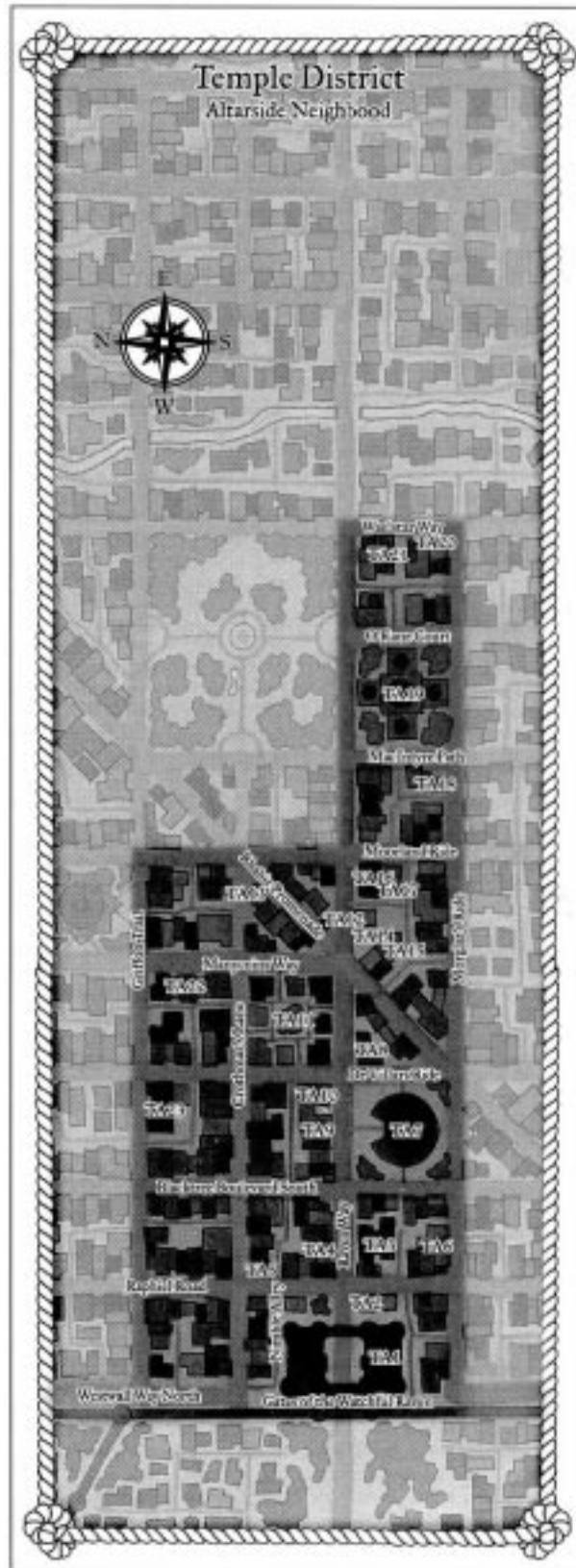
Behind the Hall of the Raven, fronting on Morlgar's Ride, stand the offices of **Albrath's House** (TA6), one of the Merchant Houses serving on the Merchants Council. Albrath's main business is laundry, and there are plenty of not-so-clever Ravenian jokes about the convenience of washing dirty laundry so close at hand for the civic officials who work in City Hall. The buildings nearby are dominated by the offices of small scribes' businesses, ink and quill sellers, modest lunch shops, and others who cater to serving the needs of recordkeepers and other civic workers.

Soaring up into the sky in the next block along Raven Way (and taking up the entire block) is **The Citadel of Protection** (TA7), the Ravenian temple of Helm, built in the shape of a circular keep of clean lines and awesome size. Many first-time visitors to the Bluff mistake it from afar for an armory, or perhaps the seat of Ravenian government, and its loftiest central turret provides the greatest lookout point in the city proper. Huge lenses are set on massive brass frames up there for peering at people and objects from afar in exacting detail—and of course the priests of the temple can use magic to sharpen their vigilance.

Next to the temple, standing in the southeast corner of the meeting of Raven Way and DeVillars Ride, is the small but impressive **Crossed Quills House** (TA8), headquarters of the Guild of Clerks and Scribes. As befits its name, relief carvings of crossed feather pens adorn the exterior walls between each pair of long, narrow windows, and the doorways are carved into arches supported by ravens clutching open books (and peering down forbiddingly over them). Agile Ravenian children often climb these carvings to peer at what's written on the pages; there's a persistent city tradition that no one who has done so will tell anyone who hasn't what's up there. Have I done it? Well, yes—but I can't tell you any more. Thieves, adventurers, and other secretive and agile folk sometimes chalk messages to each other on these surfaces. Maybe the ravens read them; I don't know—they certainly seem to enjoy perching up by their stone brethren.

Across the road from the impressive entrance of the Citadel of Protection are two competing shops run by feuding brothers that sell the widest variety of tapestries, bedlinens, draperies, and buntings available anywhere in the Bluff. Folk come from all over the Vast to enjoy the wide selection of hues, materials, and sizes at **Baldaero's Finest Draperies** (to the west) and **Finandaero's Even Finer Textiles** (to the east; both at TA9). Adjoining Finandaero's, on the northwest corner of Raven Way and DeVillars Ride, is **The Jellied Eel** (TA10), one of the oldest and best-known of Ravenian restaurants. Formerly upscale, it had degenerated into a seedy, dimly-lit hall that featured exotic dancers but was recently purchased by a syndicate of Ravenian knights and restored to its former glory. A few oversized paintings and mock knights' shields of polished brass stud the walls of the long, narrow dining rooms (the building is split into two such rooms down the center, with the kitchens below). Patrons sit elbow-to-elbow, gossiping and lamenting "lost Ravenaar greatness" and "the general slide into cultural oblivion" and other such rot. No one goes hungry on generous platters of roast lemon potatoes, cinnamon-scented rice, and gravy-drenched stag. The beaver pie is crisp-crust but overly oily, the lamb a delight-little pink drops of melting flavor. No eels, I'm afraid, despite the name. Pity.

You'll like this next bit, I think. In the next block east (facing Crossed Quills House) is an unexpected breath of serene beauty in the Ravenian landscape. Unofficially but widely known as "**the Hallow-Halls**" (TA 11)





or the Small-Temples, this block of small, beautiful buildings are temples to all of the major elven, dwarven, gnome, and halfling gods. Beautiful, isn't it? A hush seems to cling to the smooth, curving walls of these holy structures—sometimes I think they seem almost more like tasteful, simple sculptures than buildings folk walk in and out of. A small, beautifully kept grove of trees with a spring-fed pool at its heart stands at the heart of the block, usually crowded (like now) with silent, motionless elves drinking in “the feel of the forest” for a time before going on about their business.

Rhabie Promenade cuts like a sword across the neighborhood. It bisects the residential block east from the Small-Temples, which displays two structures of architectural interest to the traveler: the once-decaying home of the adventuress **Rezara** (TA12) over here and the home of the **Riverside** family of halflings (TA13) over there. During Rezara's long absence, the south wall of her small but ornately carved three-story home collapsed. Rather than rebuild it, the tenants of the upper floors had two support buttresses constructed, took Rezara's belongings down to the storage cellars beneath, and created in the exposed ground-floor rooms the garden of hanging plants, large urns with ferns and flowers, and benches you see here—very popular with bypassers, local retirees, and footwear Watch patrols. By contrast, the Riversides have built a traditional halfling burrow, of sorts, by enclosing a ramshackle hut in earthen banks and planting the same with a forest of creepers to keep the earth from washing out into the streets during rainstorms. Normal doors and gabled windows pierce the now-lush garden walls of the little knoll where elder Banobras Riverside often sits at ease in a loungechair under a shade, watching the world go by while his descendants work and live busily beneath. There he is now—wave; he likes that.

Across Raven Way from “Rezara's Garden” stands the interesting copper-roofed two-story shop known as **Arts Haven** (TA14), though the beautifully carved and painted triple sign hanging out front describes the businesses within more accurately: “Bronrd Carlow's Harmony of Heaven Music Store/The Poet's Corner: Verse for all Occasions, Bartleby Quilling, Prop./Pislewaite's Portraits.” The front of the shop has separate doors for Carlow's establishment (a small, neat room tastefully decorated with a rather sparse arrangement of gleaming-clean instruments and a rack crammed with sheet music) and Quilling's shop (which looks more like a comfortable parlor, dominated by a large and smoky fireplace, than a place of business). Bartleby Quilling is a colorful talespinner who crafts stories, poems, and plays to order. His satirical verses and powerful love-paeans are often in demand by nobles and wealthy merchants seeking to embarrass foes or stir their sweethearts. His stories are less in demand, but the halfling's plays are regularly purchased by traveling players and minstrels thanks to his gift for the biting comment or the sideways allusions to current politics and events that everyone catches but that can't quite be objected to by those they anger. Local mothers adore him for his habit of collecting small children for hours on end and spinning stories in his shop that keep them enthralled (he once told me he tried out his plots on them; if it couldn't interest a six-year-old, he didn't think it'd interest the average playgoer). The upper floor, reached by those outside steps, contains living quarters for the three (who were once a foursome, the Four Winds Adventuring Band, until their companion Felicia was slain or entrapped). Also up there is the studio of the moody warrior Ambrose Pislewaite—indisputably the best painter in the Bluff, with the incredibly lifelike portraits hanging on his walls to prove it.

Behind the Haven stands the grand, fortress-like house of the adventurer **Onyx Deathcure** (TA15), yet another miniature keep, this one with an enclosed porch on top. Deathcure is the owner and landlord of both the attached shops that front on Rhabie Promenade. The first, **Umbrel's Hot Tarts**, is a gnome-run bakery specializing in breads, biscuits, and sweet and savory tarts; much favored by hungry locals, it produces hot wares from dawn to dusk. As a sideline, they also sell crumbly slices of very strong cheese to go with a small loaf as one eats on the run. The second shop is my own **Raraerdo's Throwing Knives**. That's right; the not-quite-thriving business of yours truly, and I might add the perfect source for matched sets of as many as seven identical, perfectly balanced, razor-sharp flying beauties. I even carry some made of bone or fire-hardened ashwood, for use when the gleam off a metal blade might be fatal . . . drop by sometime and I'll give you a good discount. I must say, business *has* picked up quite a bit since I sculpted the target dummy to look like my dearest sister Jacinth—the gossip columnist, don't you know. My, how that woman can talk. Every time a new issue of the *Ravens Bluff Trumpeter* comes out my business always picks up for the next few days. I'm thinking of opening up a whole gallery of targets that resemble famous citizens of our fair city, from the Lady Mayor on down—all in good fun, of course.

Ahem. Back to business. East of Deathcure's keep lies a muddy patch of ground known as “the Tumbling Yard” for its use as a practice field by members of the Fellowship of Bards; this is also where horses are tethered and coaches parked during performances at the nearby playhouse. There, just beyond the Yard, stands the four-story manor house that serves as the **Guildhouse of the Fellowship of Bards, Performers, and Artists** (TA16)—notice how both the entrance on Moorland Ride and the one on Raven Way are equally grand. Next door to the south, actually sharing a common wall, is the **Ravens Bluff Playhouse** (TA17). I particularly like that sign out front: a life-sized bard harping, with monsters, damsels, and sword-swinging heroes all swirling out of his mouth and strings.

The next block east holds one of the Bluff's great success stories. At the southwest corner of Morlgar's Ride and MacIntyre Path stands the stables of **Norge Greenback's Horses** (TA18). The halfling who owns it (a former guildmaster, cavalry officer, and tireless pursuer of Ravenian ladies) is rarely to be found here; instead, he's at the barn, track, and extensive paddocks he owns outside the city—newly built to the best standards with the fortune he received for the sale of his inside-the-walls fields when room had to be found for temples to expand and both Iron Bell Street and Anvil Alley disappeared. Today this city location is little more than a livery stables, buying and selling riding mounts (and a few draft animals) from and to visitors and citizens alike. The fees for boarding horses and tending injured ones are very stiff, but Norge and his staff are the best if you care about your horses. That northern building over there is the main stables and hayloft; the southern houses tack, the nursery, a washing pen, birthing and isolation stalls, and roof-cistern water-tanks.

I hope the priestesses of **The Moonflame** (TA 19), the Ravenian temple of Selûne, like the good earthy smell of horse manure, because they get a lot of it, being directly downwind of Norge's. Their beautiful domed and spired temple fills the entire block to the east of Greenback's (that is, between Raven Way, MacIntyre Path, Morlgar's Ride, and O'Kane Court). I think perhaps it's the most beautiful of the human-built temples in the Bluff—don't you agree? It'll be even more lovely a century from now when those evergreens they've planted around it are fully grown. Note those standing stones: holes cut through them are carefully arranged so as to cradle beams of moonlight (caught and deflected by angled mirrors high on the temple walls) down onto little dancing floors of groomed moss where priestesses and lay worshippers dance in worship or kneel to pray. On a moonlit night, this is a place of almost unearthly beauty. Watch patrols always observe the temple surroundings closely—to keep the barefoot, thinly-clad priestesses from harm, of course. Very popular beat, I understand; plenty of volunteers.

The block beyond the temple is the easternmost part of this neighborhood. Bounded by Raven Way, O'Kane Court, Morlgar's Ride, and Waelstar Way, it holds residences of superior architecture and looks, like the beautiful bay-windowed spire owned by the adventurer **Kriel Illendell** (TA20), whose home we'll be passing later in the tour. Among the private houses next is one small and tasteful hostelry, **The Singing Sword Inn** (TA21), an old and rundown establishment recently rebuilt, like so much else in the neighborhood, into a place of quiet luxury and retreat. Its stables now stands across the back alley to the west, in a gutted former house that backs onto two other houses. The ground floor space in the inn that used to house guests' horses has been converted into the **Sword Tables Dining Lounge**, serving guests and neighbors alike. Quiet murmuring is the rule here; discreet curtains and curving interior walls create private nooks and booths. Deft staff bring sample dishes past for diners to smell, taste, and order for themselves if desired. Soups, stews, and chowders are the focus here, with iced fruit and cordials an unexpected specialty. The usual beer and roasts are available for the unimaginative, but try the mixed-meat skewers (usually quail, hare, lamb, and boar, each spiced and cooked separately) served with an array of mustards, spiced gravies, and mint jellies. For now, another of the Bluff's undiscovered treasures; recommended.

This neighborhood holds at least two more sites of interest. Here on Manycoins Way (where else?) we find the offices of **Horthlaer House** (TA22), a Merchant House beloved of small shopkeepers all over the Bluff—no mean feat, let me assure you. As you can see, it's a tall stone building adorned with many a gargoyle-head; this place is often a hive of activity as sailors from the docks bring samples of goods from their cargoes and runner-boys take messages to the Horthlaer warehouses about the city with instructions to move stock from someplace where it isn't selling to someplace else where it's wanted right away. And of course a lot of folk just enjoy stopping by and having a friendly pipe with old Urumst Horthlaer.

And finally there's this monstrosity: **The Turning Wheel** (TA23), the



Ravenian temple of Gond. The Gondsmen in Ravens Bluff flourished quietly for years by making small, useful everyday innovations—improved double-catches on carry-coffers, for instance, or locks that incorporate sliding bolts. In recent months, however, they suddenly became ambitious and begun to do the bold things (flying ships above the rooftops and so on) that folk have always feared they'd get up to. I think we're just in time to hear the complicated chimes strike the passing hours—yes, there it goes—complete with clockwork show. The front doors of the temple open by themselves, by the way, whenever anyone approaches. There's a small annex around back where at least three clergy are always on duty to fix broken things brought to them (everything from shoes to fireplace-dampers); much of the temple's operating funds come from this sideline. Initially some of the guilds protested that this repair work constituted unfair competition, but that's all died down now thanks to the Gondsmen's thirst for "improving" the design of anything brought to them for mending; some of the results have been successes, others (rather more) spectacular failures.

Holyhouses

Hamed for the temples that so dominate the skyline, this neighborhood is one of the most impressive in the city—perhaps the most striking on all the eastern shore of the Dragon Reach. More luxury and excess can be found where nobles' houses stand in profusion, of course, but nobles tend to erect walls for privacy, and in the interests of comfort and everyday facility stop short of the sheer dramatic effect that temple-builders strive for. So walk with me through the most truly head-turning neighborhood of Ravens Bluff.

Holyhouses is bounded by Griffon Trail on the south, Moorland Ride on the east, then Evensong Ride on the northeast to Manycoins Way, which forms the eastern boundary of Holyhouses as it runs north to Cylyria Street West. Cylyria marks the northern boundary of the neighborhood as far west as Blacktree Boulevard North, which on its run south gives Holyhouses a western boundary as far as Hawk Passage, where the neighborhood thrusts two blocks westwards to Westwall Way South, and thence runs south to meet up with Griffon Trail again.

Let's begin our tour at a site even most visitors will find hard to miss: **The Silver Halls** (TH1). The Ravenian temple of Tyr commands one of the most strategic positions of any Ravenian temple, dominating the views down six city streets. It doesn't squander this opportunity, presenting to approaching onlookers with a massive granite dome supported by a forest of huge fluted columns. Four great entry porticos thrust out from among the ranks of columns, one facing each cardinal compass point (north, south, east, and west), and a stone warhammer as tall as seven men is sculpted as an upthrust ornament atop the dome. During storms, this Hammer of the God catches lightning, protecting an area of roughly three streets away in all directions from lightning-strikes and providing an awesome show to boot as blue lightning strokes crawl down over the dome and pillars. On such occasions, portcullis-blocked tunnels leading to the surface at intersections some distance away are opened by the clergy to allow the faithful a means whereby to safely enter and leave the temple. The Silver Halls was almost destroyed by vandals during the war (an attack thought to be the work of a gang of thieves settling old scores) but has been painstakingly restored to look as much like the original as possible—I can't tell the difference; can you?

Looking northeast along Fire Lane from the temple of Tyr, you'll see an imposing wedge-shaped stone building. Rising three grand stories above the streets, this is **Anvil Hall** (TH2), headquarters of the Guild of Blacksmiths and Wheelwrights. See that device that caps all its high-arched windows? You may not be able to make out the details from down here; it's a wagon wheel whose central spoke is an anvil, the tang facing to the left. The same device is on the wrought-iron gates that are rolled out of the archway walls at night, overlaying the Hall's wooden doors. Some guildmembers use it as a badge, but others prefer a lone anvil, or an anvil wreathed in flames, or a crossed sledgehammer and quenching tongs.

Two doors south down Manycoins Way (and backing onto Kristen's Circle, which rings the temple of Tyr) is one of the most luxurious apartment towers in the Bluff: the six-story-high **Dawn Window House** (TH3), whose tenants are all long-term and wealthy. A grassy "ride" (slashed by a dirt path, beaten hard by the boots of the tenants passing back and forth) separates this stately apartment house from a grandly-ornamented four-story tower that faces the Circle. This is **Endelvines** (TH4), one of two city residences owned by the Ampner noble family in this neighborhood—and sure enough, sculpted stone vines do wander up its facade, bracketing the

windows (and incidentally providing great easy climbing practice possibilities for local adventurers, Red Raven firefighters, and thieves). The topmost boughs of the trees growing in its rooftop garden can just be seen over the parapet adorned with harpy-carvings. As is usual with most Ampner properties, the ground-floor has a tenant business, in this case **Jhuede's Fine Flething**, a good place to buy arrows of all sorts.

If we follow the Circle back northwest past the mouth of Fire Lane, we're confronted by an even grander building that fronts on the Circle between the northern leg of DeVillars Ride and the northwestern run of Evensong Ride. This once housed Jherkryn's, a now-defunct academy for newly wealthy Ravenians aspiring to the manners of nobility; now it's the head offices of **Bhuklyn's** upmarket Merchant House (TH5). Successful adventurers, Golden Rooster knights, and merchants wealthier than most of the nobility can often be seen strolling through its arched front doors.

Off a nameless lane connecting the Circle with Blacktree Boulevard stands a modest blue-painted three-story house. Its slender entry pillars have been painted bright silver, giving the house its name: **Silvergates** (TH6). Silvergates was recently purchased by the new Lady Mayor, Lady Amber Lynn Thoden, as her private city residence—a smart move, I think; choosing so unostentatious a house should allay fears that she has any plans at self-aggrandizement.

Returning to the Circle and our stroll down its western arc, we come to another grand structure, this one occupying the southwestern corner where the southern run of DeVillars Ride leaves the Circle. Distinctively brown in hue and decorated by relief carvings on its sides that depict rampant roaring lions, this once housed a warriors' society but is now the main offices of the increasingly famous Merchant House known as **Firestorm House** (TH7)—incidentally, that's also now the name of this rather stolid-looking building. Note the bright flame-orange banners sometimes hung from flagstaves under the upper windows; it's believed their appearance signals something to members of this merchant concern—but just what seems to be a closely-guarded secret; I certainly couldn't tell you.

Passing down the southwestern leg of Fire Lane from the Circle, we see on the corner a grand manor house—all gables and spouting dolphin water-spouts and mermaid doorposts—on the corner formed by the meeting of the lane with Blacktree Boulevard North. This is **Crownshield** (TH8), the private residence of Sir Alexander "the Noble." Passing on down Blacktree to the surprisingly sleepy crossway of Amandagar Street and taking it eastwards to its meeting with the southern run of DeVillars Ride, on the northwest corner inside a wall held up at intervals by stout stone posts we can see an oddly shaped stone tower. This is **Granitegates Manor** (TH9), the Ravenian residence of the Fleetwood noble family.

Turning to look south down DeVillars Ride, you can't help but notice the signboards identifying the complex of connected former shops and rooming houses in the next block south as **The Hall of Luck** (TH10), the Ravenian temple of Tymora. This holy site is more often known as "Luck House" to visiting sailors, who love to gamble here. I've seen them entering and leaving the place at all hours. Even those who gamble away all their pay from the last voyage can expect to receive sympathetic attention, warm tea, and sit-and-listen company from the more motherly of Lady Luck's priestesses. The temple itself consists of a series of interconnected but formerly quite disparate buildings that fill the block bounded by Blacktree Boulevard North, Fireleap Lane, DeVillars Ride, and Amandagar Street. A small garden courtyard stands at the heart of this block. The buildings comprise a formal temple reception area, a holy hall of worship, informal and comfortable living quarters for priests and lay worshippers who wish to stay (for up to nine days; longer stays are permitted only if the guest is being trained or tended by the temple clergy), three gambling areas, a storage house, and several buildings known as "the Hazards." In these the clergy erect an ever-changing array of obstacle courses, tests, and illusory spectacles to promote the spirit of daring, adventure, and risk-taking in those who undergo their challenge. Jaded Ravenians and visitors who aren't of the faith of Tymora are permitted to experience a Hazard upon payment of 25 gp to the temple coffers, so long as the faithful of Tymora aren't using the facilities at the time.

To the east of the temple block, across DeVillars Ride, is an impressive and distinctive city house of almost cherry-red sandstone trimmed with white quartz blocks around its windows and in a dog-toothed pattern down the edges where it is walls meet each other. The soft, apt-to-crumble sandstone was long ago sealed in a wash of fused, glistening glass applied in a long, tedious, and expensive magical process. This is **Redstones** (TH11), the private Ravenian home of the famous Raphiel noble family. I can't help



feeling sad now, looking at it; not so long ago the late Lord Regent, the much-loved Thomas Raphiel, lived here. And now Sir Ardent Raphiel can't even afford the servants to keep the place open. A sad comedown for a great family.

Walking east along Amandagar Street to Manycoins Way (described by more than one visitor as the heart of the city — *the* street to traverse if you can only walk down one), then turning south on the Way, brings us to another grand stone building—this one a five-story pile dominated by the alternating grey and black pillars of its facade. An interesting shop, **The Stout Staff** (canes, crutches, and peglegs made, fitted, and traded), occupies the ground floor, but most Ravenians know this as **Blackposts** (TH12), another residence of the Ampner noble family.

The next block to the south on the east side of Manycoins Way holds a site familiar to all: **The Tower of Holy Revelry** (TH13), the Bluff's temple of Lliira. Built of red sandstone sealed with a glossy layer of flowglass (within which pulsing, beckoning lights often dance and play), it has four spires thrusting out towards each cardinal compass direction. Each spire sweeps up from the ground in curves from a broad base that tapers to a more slender shaft, capped by a clear crystal dome that is spell-washed each ten-day to sluice away bird droppings. The shape of each spire makes it seem more of a living thing than a built one, and the domes are lit to show off the revelry within to any bypasser. Pleasant bowers of plantings teased and pruned into sweeping curves surround the temple proper; their benches beckoning citizens to sit and gaze on sculptures of beautiful creatures engaged in loving acts or gestures. The ring-shaped statue of the mermaid swirling over to kiss an arching dolphin, their sleek bodies forming a circle, is a favorite climbing-piece for children, who slip and slide on the velvety-soft surface of the statue or just sit in the ring itself.

Across Manycoins Way to the west stands **Manyshields Keep** (TH14), headquarters of the Armorsmiths Guild. This imposing five-story stone building faces one of the many entrances of the Tower of Holy Revelry, and its front wall (facing Manycoins Way) has been skillfully carved to appear like a huge array of overlapping shields hanging in a random pattern. The windows that pierce this facade are each positioned in the center of a shield, forming an irregular pattern rather than the typical rows upon rows. The overall effect is most impressive, and so are the helmed horrors (animated empty suits of armor standing almost ten feet tall) which act as guardians of the guildhouse. From time to time they emerge to tramp up and down in front of the doors—a show of force, perhaps, meant to discourage thieves—or perhaps simple mischief.

The next block south along the Way holds another impressive private house on its east side—five stories tall, this one, all gargoyle-heads and gables, with entrances on both the Way and around the corner on Hawk Passage. This is **Elderstars** (TH15), the home of Sir Uldred Stonefist Deepaxe, Pillar of the Realms, Knight of the Griffon, and current chair of the Knights Council.

Nearby, on the southeast corner of Manycoins Way and Hawk Passage, stands **Oldover House** (TH16), headquarters of the Sages Guild. Looks like the stump of a miniature keep, doesn't it?—a massively-built, stern stone building clad in purple tapestries. Look closer: the giant "tapestries" are actually clever mosaics of tile. The entry doors are up that short flight of steps, shielded from the weather by a deep archway. See how the outside lip of this arch thrusts outwards into the sculpted torso of a bearded man. Whom does it represent? Nobody knows for sure, and everyone argues over it—especially within the guild, where furious disputes have been waged between members over this trivial matter for decades. That book he's holding open in one hand and peering into is blank save for bird droppings, while the enchanted glowing stone sphere ("the Light of Reason") he holds up above his head in his other hand has been "borrowed" so often for pranks, and to light up shallow harbor depths and sewers for lost-item-retrieval-fishing attempts, that a spell has been placed on it to discourage pilferers. I hear that now it emits irregular lightning discharges to anyone touching it whenever it's torn away from the sculpted hand gripping it—little arcs never more than six inches or so long, but strong enough to stun even an ogre, much less your average prankster.

Standing here near the Seat of Sages, you can't help but notice what's across the Way to the west, filling an entire city block. **The Cradle of Pain and Redemption** (TH17) is the Ravenian temple of Ilmater. Though not one of the civic temples, it manages to outstrip many of them in size and grandeur. Surrounded by a cobbled yard laid in patterns of interlocking rings (to "represent the Divine Manacles" of the god, I'm told), and with walls, windows, and doors of elegant but simple construction, it rises to a

central dome surmounted by a cupola. The cupola roof and alternating panels of the dome are of an alloy of copper carefully aged to a patina with a rich, lustrous purple hue. The other, interleaved dome panels are of the same metal overlaid with sheets of abalone—or rather, countless small fragments of shell laboriously cut and polished by the bleeding hands of willing worshipers of the Maimed God that are then pinned in place aloft, tiny piece by tiny piece, by daring clergy who must drive in the pointed pins bare-handed. They are permitted to cry out in pain—but the cry must take the form of one of the names of Ilmater. A surprisingly large number of Ravenians are devotees of the God on the Rack—and I'm told (by those who've tried several faiths around town) that the rituals held in this temple are more purifying and fostering of inner peace than any others. Ah well—once again I say to each his own.

Turning away from the temple and heading east along Hawk Passage for a block, we come to yet another guild headquarters, this one on the southwest corner of the meeting of the Passage and Moorland Ride. **Stonelion House** (TH18) is the headquarters of the Stonemasons Guild. This "L"-shaped building has very high ceilings and tall, narrow, round-topped windows. Its name derives, naturally, from those very impressive sculpted lions that flank both major entrances to the House. You can't see it from here, but that rampart running around the roof of the House shields a fantastic rooftop "garden" of stone sculptures from the view of bypassers. The work of many guildmembers down the years, these lifelike stone creatures include snarling griffons, rearing pegasi, giant serpents, sneering wyverns, and many more beasts of legend. There's an old story that supplicants to join the guild, in the early days, were forced to take either heroic or (depending on who's telling the tale) comically undignified poses and then magically petrified for a month to stand watching and listening to the doings of the passing city (and the guildmembers who used the garden and often employed a helpless supplicant as a cloak-stand, serving sideboard, or for even less dignified purposes). Stonelion House is the only guild headquarters in the city to share premises with independent businesses, the ground floor of Stonelion House hosting the local Red Ravens firefighting outpost.

Filling the next block south (between Moorland Ride and Manycoins Way, with Dragonscale Street and Griffon Trail as the cross-ways) is the Ravenian temple of Lathander. **The Halls of Morning Light** (TH19), more often known as "Rosegirt Halls" (after the charming old many-pillared mansion it replaced), soars upwards and outwards in curving buttresses from a smallish base to much broader upper floors, capped with two lookout spires and a central dome. See how the dome winks and sparkles oddly in the bright sunlight?—that's because many of its panels are glass cut in asymmetrical but exacting facets to catch the rays of the morning sun and cast them down into various chambers below, inside the temple. The whole thing is fashioned of a sunrise-pink stone that some find revolting; others (myself among them) see it as lovely but verging on being overwhelming. Love or hate it, you can't help but agree that it's certainly, er, striking.

A block west down Griffon Trail and half a block north up DeVillars Ride brings us to our next stop: **The Hall of Wonders** (TH20), headquarters of the Fellowship of Jewelers, Goldsmiths, and Whitesmiths, which sports one of the most impressive facades of any guild office. The three tiers of large arched windows rise above the ground floor, but it's the row of oval windows on the first floor that draw the eye, affording views of exquisitely detailed, life-sized metal statues of muscular men and curvaceous women. This statuary was salvaged from hundreds of Chessentan, Sembian, and Calishite tombs, but it's the earrings, bracelets, necklaces, belts, and other adornments that are really on display—all copies of items designed by the Fellowship's master craftsmen, with the originals available for sale inside. Naturally, a percentage of all gems found within this building bear enchantments that allow them to be readily traced; adventurers setting off on dangerous missions to distant parts are sometimes sold such gems at high prices to allow colleagues to find and rescue them should they not return. Moreover, the guild has a strict policy of exacting penalties from thieves of either thrice the weight of any gem, precious metal, or item of jewelry removed (thus if a platinum bar were carried off from the Fellowship's vault, the thief would have to pay back three times that much platinum). Failing that, the weight of items carried off must be matched by the guild's cutting off a like amount from the thief's body. The rear of the Hall, which opens onto an alley, is of unadorned stone—but its doors themselves are guardians, and other enchantments guard the windows and roof of this guild headquarters from unwanted intrusion. All in all a nice place to visit, but only on legitimate business.



Slightly more friendly, if less impressive to look at, is the neighboring guild headquarters up across the road on the northwest corner of the meeting of Dragonscale Street and DeVillars Ride: **Brathkelpt House** (TH21), home of the Brotherhood of Wool Carders and Weavers. Named for the founding guildmaster, whose mansion it once was, this imposing structure is more often called "The Loomspider" because of its sculpted facade, which is supposed to represent the reach across Faerûn of woven goods but looks more like a gigantic spider is crawling on its web to devour the front of Brathkelpt House—or perhaps just on anyone passing through its front doorway. The soft stone of the carved facade was treated at installation with a paste of alchemic substances intended to make it both hard and durable. Thanks to the paste, it's both of those things, but it's also a strange speckled hue of green . . . "The green of corruption," one acid-tongued guildmember dubbed it, and the phrase has stuck. Calling a Ravenian a "greenweaver" is an insult; calling a member of this guild a greenweaver is to deliberately provoke a feud. Splendid tapestries made by guildmembers are often displayed in magically lit windows just above the spiderlike facade after dark, but never during sunlit hours (to prevent them from fading). The staff of Brathkelpt sell work made by guildmembers, typically woolen cloaks and blankets with striking patterns but also—to the sufficiently wealthy—tapestries of all sizes. The two lofty upper floors of this building house the largest looms in all the Vast and, so the rumor goes, several secret guild projects (my favorite is the one about the small fleet of flying carpets, all woven and ready but still lacking enchantment).

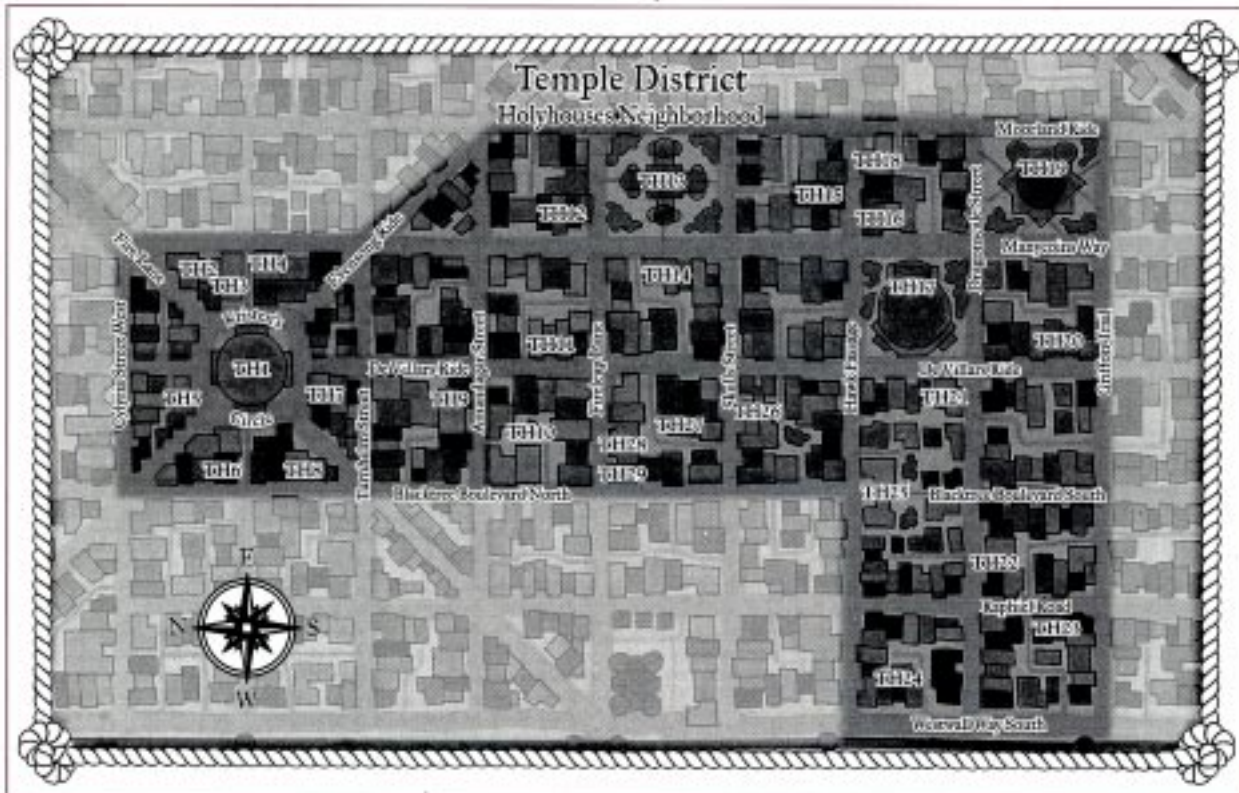
West down Dragonscale Street brings us into this area of many redbrick and brownbrick buildings, most having ground levels made of massive field-stone blocks. Almost all of these house small rental shops on the ground floor and in cellars reached by steps descending from the entry porch with their own small, stout, and securely barred windows right at ground level. Above the shops are usually a floor of offices and then another of private apartments, or sometimes several floors of apartments and no offices. A few private homes can be found in this southwestern corner of Holyhouses, among them the modest granite mansion of **Dolphingates** (TH22), home of the adventurer Greenleaf Thorin, which has two rare phandar trees in its high-walled back garden. Thorin himself planted the fast-growing trees, but the circular dolphin-chasing-another-dolphin stone and wrought-iron gates

were installed by a previous owner, a half-elven merchant of Sembia, now deceased. On the next block over from Dolphingates and a few steps down Raphiel Road stands the small and rather spartan-looking stone home of Sir Larion Lightspar, still commonly known by the name given it by a previous owner: **Starmynstand** (TH23).

West of the rank of houses along Raphiel Road are the most forbidding and rundown structures in the neighborhood, including a few windowless warehouses—and, up Westwall Way South a bit, the infamous **Nevin Street Compter** (TH24), Ravens Bluff's primary prison. Though it's only a block from the nearest temple, the Compter seems a world away from the bustle and splendor of Holyhouses at its best. Altogether a grim place.

That nearest temple is **The House of Loyalty** (TH25), which interrupts Blacktree Boulevard (separating it into a "North" run and a "South" one) and fronts on Hawk Passage. The Ravenian temple of Torm is a relatively modest, spartan pile of stone, as temples go. It's neither a civic temple nor particularly popular in the Bluff (thanks to our longtime rivalry with Tantras, the city that most fully embraces and claims Torm as its own). Still, the worship of Torm is probably the most popular faith in the Vast—although if you go by numbers, I suppose whomever or whatever the orcs bow down to would win—and folk from other cities worship here while they're in town. Then too, certain Ravenian employers insist on their guards, drovers, and shop attendants attending the classes on Deep Loyalty offered to those of all faiths by the clergy of Torm; by city ordinance, the employer must pay the attendance fees for all employees he or she requires to attend. Such classes enrich the temple, and many non-Tormar have praised the "family spirit" engendered in workers by the Priests of Loyalty.

The city block immediately to the northeast of Torm's temple holds the busiest guildhall in Holyhouses: **Carters Hall** (TH26), headquarters of the Cartsmans Guild. As you can see, it's made up of two towers joined to a large, warehouse-like structure in the rear. Carters Hall serves its members as a storage garage for their carts and most precious cargoes, a secure place to sleep, and a place to conduct business and to repair or maintain the conveyances that earn guildmembers daily livings. The tower right at the corner of Skulls Street and DeVillars Ride consists of offices, vaults, records-storage, and "deal-rooms" (where clients can negotiate business with individual guildmembers). Many of these rooms feature maps of areas of Ravens





Bluff detailed down to the last horse-trough, hitching post, pump, and overhanging obstacle; in fact, the best maps of the city that exist. The southern tower is an apartment block where a number of cartmen live and many more sleep over in ready rooms (secure bedchambers) when exhausted after a long haul. The section that joins the towers to the warehouse is a cart stores shop, where replacement harnesses, wheels, axles, fastenings, sideboards, and so on are kept ready for emergency purchase by guildmembers. The large building in the rear, known as “the Shed” to guildmembers, is a huge cart repair shop, with overhead winches that can lift a wagon up into an overhead storage loft or lower it gently down again. The Shed has huge double doors that afford entrance onto both Skulls Street and the alley that passes Carters Hall’s south walls (if it has a name, I’ve never heard it). When both are open, it’s possible to drive right through—though a cartman can be expelled from the guild if injury or damage to a conveyance or cargo results. The guild maintains a staff of guards (skilled in the use of crossbows, which are always kept ready) to prevent thefts or vandalism of guild property when these doors are open.

Just a few more stops, and we’ll be ready to move on to the next neighborhood. Across Skulls Street from the Carters Hall sits the large and impressive headquarters of yet another Merchant House, **Strangestars House** (TH27). The building officially fronts on DeVillars Ride, but deliveries and shipments occur through the rows of massive roll-up doors that front on the alley behind the black-painted, four-story headquarters. Can you see the six jet-black guardian gargoyles that crouch at each corner of the roof? I’ve heard whispers that these monsters spring down to attack anyone who dares attempt burning or stealing from the House. Certainly some strange magical goings-on befell the last thieves to attempt storming Strangestars House, but I’d rather not go seeking the truth about such things . . . no good asking for trouble when enough’ll come knocking at your door anyway.

North across the alley from Strangestars stands an even more imposing structure, but we’ll have to go around to the front on Fireleap Lane to get the full effect. The oval filigree-work on the gates is in a style that one far-traveled adventurer dubbed “Mock-Calishite Gilded Excess,” but I must admit I rather like it. This is **Ondrelspires** (TH28), a newly-opened luxury apartment block with its own private security force and locked outer gates, inner gates, and vaults, so that residents (“the best and brightest among newly successful Ravenians,” according to the landlord—I translate that as “the richest rising merchants”) can keep their valuables secure. Those who want to purchase vault storage but not live at Ondrelspires can do so; a small closet costs 45 gp per month, and I’ve known several adventurers take advantage of the offer. Osk Ondrel, the owner, is an agile little man who sports a shaved head, a large flame-red mustache, and a successful former career as a thief in Amn. He says his experience equips him well for stopping Ravenian thieves with a series of traps and alarms. Ondrel’s rents are high, and extra fees apply if the staff carries out any errands for a resident. As Osk says, “I rob legally now.”

Our tour of many-splendored Holyhouses ends with a more mundane site back on DeVillars Ride, but a good one for an adventurer down on his or her luck to know about— **Littleate & Sons** (TH29), moneylenders. Usually people try to slip in and slip out as unobtrusively as possible, but when rain falls, this spot achieves sudden popularity. The broad canvas awning along the Blacktree side of its premises affords good protection against the wet, and folk typically crowd in underneath it to await the end of the downpour. Hm. Closed. Guess we’ll have to come back another time—maybe when it’s raining.

Swordspoint

Some call this “the forgotten backside of Temple District.” It’s certainly less grand than neighboring Holyhouses, or even Altarside, but it includes the Bluff’s only parkland of importance and many other interesting sites; it’s a neighborhood a lot of Ravenians visit fairly often. This whole neighborhood got its name from the duels that used to be fought here; nowadays duels are officially banned—which only means, of course, that those with differences to settle must be more circumspect about their timing, often arranging a little distraction to call the Watch away at the opportune moment. The five-way intersection at the northwest corner of the park, where Griffon Trail, MacIntyre Path, and Rhabie Promenade all cross, is still known as “Bloody Boots” for the bloody footprints left behind by the wounded survivor of many a long-ago duel.

The logical place to begin our tour is the largest stretch of open ground in all Ravens Bluff: the magnificent DeVillars Park, donated to the city by

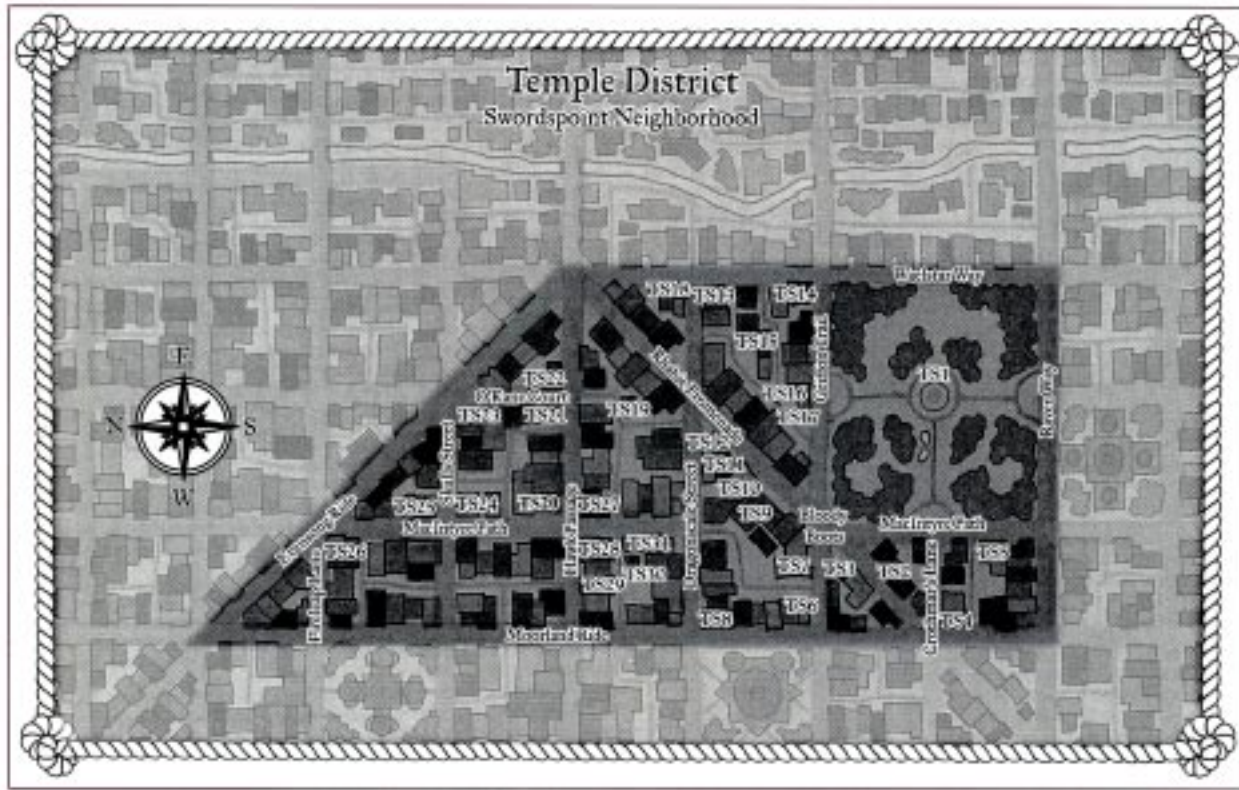
Aunt Laur—er, I mean Lady Lauren DeVillars—and magnificently landscaped by several elven families. Known to all by its nickname of **Fiddlers’ Green** (TS1), this sward is free for all to stroll in to their heart’s content. As you can see, it’s thickly planted with blueleaf, duskwood, oak, shrub evergreens, and even (carefully guarded by strong magical defensive wards erected-and inspected every three days—by the Ministry of Art) two rare chime oaks, which stand in the center of the southwestern quadrant of the park. The Watch always has at least two constables on duty here and keeps a close eye on assemblies of any size on the Green. Some people love the quiet, so minstrels must get a special permit (a “minstrelsy card”—expensive, hard to obtain, and limited to only an hour or two of the day) and no more than six such cards will be issued for any given day. That eight-jet water fountain sprouting from a (sadly) much-defaced statue of Waukeen standing on a rock in a pool at the heart of the park is a special favorite with the city’s ravens for some reason—see how many of them are hanging about?

The triangular city block immediately northwest of the main entrance to the Green was once the site of the infamous **Chemcheaux** magic shop, source of many healing potions and enchanted long swords used to this day by Ravenian adventurers, but—apparently along with the owner Mortimer and at least one employee—vanished in a sudden explosion that I’m told could be seen as far away as Mossbridges (some say the far shore of the Dragon Reach). To this day, spells cast anywhere near this block go wild, erupting in intense and unintended magical effects. Only one Ravenian dared to build on the site of the disaster: the fat, short dynamo Veldarno Khalabari, who was finally able to afford land enough to build the dancing and dining club he’d long dreamed of: **The Raven’s Glory** (TS2). All three of its levels open (by means of gilded balconies and glittering spiral stairs) into a lofty ballroom. The topmost floor has rental rooms for visitors to the city and/or dancers too weary or too excited with the company of someone they’ve just met to find their ways home. The middle floor is a sprawling, many-boothed restaurant. The bottom floor holds stables and safe-storage on one side and a tavern on the other, where a lot of ale and liquors are consumed. The restaurant, known unofficially as “the Ravenbone” (the expression “I’ll meet you at the Ravenbone tonight” has become a Ravenian catchphrase used by jokesters and minstrels all over the city), is a deep, hushed nightmare in blue, with tapestries and dyed fur rugs of royal blue everywhere. Wicker breadbaskets hang on chains above each table, tiny lanterns provide only pinpoint illumination, and the constant stream of roast and stuffed fowl brought past on platters make diners glad they’re here and not in the roaring bar below.

Some of the birds (pheasant, quail, partridge, bustard, duck, heron, and even the gray Vast goose) are scorched or overly dry; the kitchen tries to conceal this with an array of thick, buttery sauces that are all fire and no finesse, and with stuffings that make a single bird seem endowed with half the fresh herbs in the kitchen. Octopus curry is an unexpected delight, but the prize is the Two Mountains Platter—a large oval trencher laden with a mountain of crisp little mushrooms in batter at one end and a sagging obelisk of plump little striped Reach snails basking in butter and wine at the other. By night, half the Bluff seems to eat here, and the ballroom is as crowded with chatters as Manycoins Way at highsun. By day, the Ravenbone is awash with serious merchants entertaining clients, all of them out to change the world (in an important—no, self-important—way). The club has become one of “the” meeting-places for Ravenians of all classes, and Veldarno has reportedly tried to buy himself a lordship outright on no less than six occasions. So far he’s seen no success, but he seems determined to win a title by influence, purchase, or even marriage (just about every noble widow or single lady in the city has been courted by “the Little Persistence” at least once).

North of the Glory, across Rhabie Promenade, stands **Elonia’s Beauty Shoppe** (TS3), run by the beautiful illusionist Elonia Starre and her even more beautiful daughter Salena (who live above the business). It’s a local center of gossip much favored by wealthy women, who come to get their hair, skin, and nails done regularly. Although their clientele is overwhelmingly female, the Starres actually serve Ravenians of both genders and all social classes with hair cuts, shaves, washes, tattooing, illusory beauty enhancements, and the provision of disguises. Many amorous Ravenian males are following Salena’s unfolding career as an adventuress as avidly as fans of the great heroes of valor; I’ve even heard one ballad about her—not half bad, by the way—composed by a local minstrel.

Southwest of the Glory, at the southeast corner where Moorland Ride, Crothmar’s Lane, and Rhabie Promenade all meet, is an elegant spired and pillared private manor, **Sumbrylstairs** (TS4), the home of the elven adven-



tress and fire mage Talila Dawnsong. Those gilded “staircases to nowhere” for which it is named were intended as outside linkages with a tower that was never built—certainly makes the building a distinctive landmark for travelers unsure of their way, doesn’t it? In the same block but fronting on MacIntyre Path with a stand of blueleaf trees behind it and a splendid view of the Green stands **Manyboughs** (TS5), the large and (literally!) growing mansion of the druid adventurer Rowan Wilander. Beautiful, isn’t it? Built entirely of wood enspelled to graft itself onto three massive phandar trees that turn and twist their ways upwards in a gigantic three-story cradle of boughs, the home is a damp, welcoming place of sloping wooden floors, tiny three-step staircases, and spell-driven running water. Visitors get the feeling that they’re literally living inside a giant tree, and it’s hard to believe that this house stands in a city, and not in the heart of an old, deep forest.

By contrast, the small wooden cottage of the adventurer **Leonard Smithson** (TS6), a Transmuter of some note, is far more typical of Ravenian wooden houses owned by “ordinary folk.” It stands on the north side of Griffon Trail, the easternmost of a pair of such cottages on the northeast corner of the intersection of the Trail and Moorland Ride. Right next door is indisputably the grandest building in Swordspoint: **Griffon Hall** (TS7), home to the Knights of the Griffon. Notice the flat roof—equipped for landings and launchings on griffon-back, with hitching rails, a three-sided hutch shelter for waiting mounts, and a large water trough. Its four-story stone magnificence is crowned by very lifelike spread-wing statues of griffons perched along its parapet and flanking its main entrance (which is on Griffon Trail, naturally). The doors themselves can be made to erupt with *blade barrier* spells in the event of an attack (as happened during the recent war, when a street gang attempted to plunder the armory of the Griffon order).

Passing from the grand to the homey, this modest white stone house inside a low, scallop-topped ornamental wall standing near the southeast corner of Dragonscale Street’s meeting with Moorland Ride is **Whitegates** (TS8), the home of Obelarth “Oldwrinkles” Minstrelwish, patriarch of the only noble halfling Ravenian family. Oldwrinkles seems to have troubles growing trees: the two or three planted in the front yard seem to take turns withering and dying, no matter how many replacements (or what species) he plants.

Perhaps the most bustling street in all Swordspoint is the stretch of Rhabie Promenade between Bloody Boots and Dragonscale Street. The southeast side of the street is all large and well-appointed private homes and apartment houses, while the northwest side offers a row of attractions. First there’s an apartment house, then **Broadleaf Manor** (TS9), the grand wooden mansion of the adventuress Elvira Broadleaf (whose *other* mansion we already saw back in Bitterstone). Next comes The Sanctuary (TS10), an apartment building owned and operated by the druid Rowan Wilander. Inside are suites for elves, half-elves, and others who feel at home in the forest, all opening onto a rear atrium that has a pool, mosses, ferns, and thick plantings of tangled shrubs shaded by duskwood and blueleaf trees that are rapidly crowding the twice-raised skylight out of place, and threatening to burst through to the sky. The skylight is now a glass minaret, and Wilander is considering removing it entirely and coming up with some sort of enchantment to keep warmth in and rain and wind out of the lower reaches of the atrium.

Next to the Sanctuary stands the well-known **Crescent Moon Inn** (TS11), a favorite stopover home and taproom for halflings visiting the Bluff (though human and demihuman visitors of all races are quite welcome)—the Minstrelwishes practically live at the place (in fact, since Lady Cassandra Minstrelwish’s recent marriage to the innkeeper, she does live here). The closest thing that the Silent Network has to a guild headquarters, the inn is more modest in size and construction than its reputation would lead one to expect. But the rustic taproom dominated by a truly monstrous stone fireplace simply must be seen by any visitor to the Bluff: it climbs up out of the floor like an ancient tree and features many warming shelves and small rail-less staircases wandering up its rough face, linking said shelves with the floor. The fireplace looks especially huge next to the halfling-sized chairs and tables which dominate the place (although there are a few tables for “big folk,” at one end of the room).

The last building on this stretch of the Promenade is **Leaf in Root** (TS12). Owned by the oft-absent halfling Oscar Sodhome, this pipe and tobacco shop is famous across the Vast (and increasingly, in the Dales and Sembia as well) for the pipes carved from “secret” roots by Oscar and for the exotic tobacco mixes he makes (some are herbal blends, and others strive to leave no strome pipesmoke odor behind). Oscar and his assistant Chug also





sell pouches, tinderboxes, flint and steel, leaf-storage tins, pipestands, and the like. The busy shop, open from dawn until dusk, features a noticeboard where folk seeking hirelings or to hire out their services (adventurers, mostly) can post notices for others to read.

A block to the east, on the southwest corner of Waelstar Way and Dragonscale Street, stands **Sunderside** (TS13), a small but palatial stone mansion owned by the Ampner noble family, long since divided entirely into modest but well-appointed apartments. The Ampners keep one suite here for “when they don’t want folk to know they’re in town.” Anchoring another corner of the same city block, at the northwest corner of Waelstar Way’s meeting with Griffon Trail, stands a pleasant mansion faced with green marble and adorned with pillars carved into the shapes of rampant dragons. This is **Dragonsyr House** (TS14), built by the long-dead pirate Murardo the Black as a retirement residence and now owned by another successful adventuress, the swashbuckling lady fighter Marisalea Cat.

In the interior of the same city block, on the more southerly of the two alleys that run west off Waelstar between Dragonscale and Griffon, stands the **Iron Rose of Swordspoint** (TS15). This former Chemcheaux warehouse houses other magics these days as a quiet, exclusive nightclub whose beautiful gossamer-gowned lady staff defend themselves against the over-ambitious by means of helmed horrors that await their beck and call. The club is guarded by at least seven of these animated suits of armor. The Iron Rose herself, owner and operator of the club, is a disfigured former adventuress whose mangled flesh is always hidden beneath a form-fitting suit of armor. She sometimes goes for walks in the nearby park, always at night and dressed in a cloak that hides face and figure. Few bother this eerie figure, but it’s said that many of the adventurers who frequent this club find her soft grace and friendship irresistible and prefer an hour spent with her to any other night’s enjoyment. She acts as a confidant for a number of adventurers and as a go-between to hold and send messages and small parcels for adventurers unable to do so because of death or long absence from the city. The Iron Rose is both expensive and exclusive; Watch patrols only enter it when they must, and always offer apologies for doing so.

Across the alley from the Rose stand two small shops that front onto Griffon Trail and enjoy a splendid view of the northern path through the park. The easternmost of these is the **Dressed to the Nines** shop (TS16), an exclusive men’s clothing store and haberdashery that specializes in uniforms. A brightly painted signboard out front shows a Ravenian soldier standing at attention, and the spotless shop employs a doorman wearing an identical uniform. Most customers have items made to order (often available as early as the next day), and owner Jordan Whipt sets a haughty and sneering tone that only changes to fawning if you happen to be well-known nobility. Fine cloaks, superior gloves, and I couldn’t wait to get out of the place. My only consolation is the knowledge that thieves and adventurers have begun to use the shop as a source of disguises, much to the discomfort of the proprietor. If he starts asking you too many pointedly suspicious questions about why you want a particular uniform, just lean close, smile coldly, and murmur, “Specialist Patrol, sir.” I like to see snobs cringe.

The westernmost of the pair of shops is **Ember Me More** (TS17), a handsome two-story stone shop where one can find fireplace accoutrements of brass, bronze, and iron (such as screens, grates, tongs, pokers, coal shovels, tinder boxes, and strikers). Slowburn logs, brooms, bellows, and other fireplace-related goods can also be purchased here. The proprietors (who live above the shop) are a pair of twin brothers, Ashley and Woodruff Sweep, who repair and build fireplaces throughout Ravens Bluff, by appointment.

Time to pick up the pace again. The streets north of Dragonscale tend to be the sleepier end of Swordspoint, little known to outsiders. I’m sure I’ve missed some interesting things hereabouts, but I can point out a few high spots. For example, I can identify another of those small wooden cottages (this one on the northwest corner of Dragonscale and Waelstar) as the home of the adventurer **Kriel Illendell** (TS18). And that former coachshed on an alley in the block west of there is the **Sleepy Dwarf** (TS19), a tavern with a reputation for bad drinks, worse clientele, and grubby surroundings (though in fairness, I’ve never set foot in the place, so consider that hearsay and value or discount it accordingly).

Now here’s an interesting one I’d almost forgotten about—there, on the northeast corner of the meeting of Hawk Passage and MacIntyre Path. This shop has been closed since early on in the war, but **Potions, Lotions, & Notions** (TS20) was formerly a good place to buy herbal remedies, beauty aids, and spell ingredients of all sorts. Actually three interconnected shops, it’s been firmly shuttered since its anonymous proprietors, who tended to

appear in public masked and hooded (some say they were illithids; others believe them drow, vampires, or Red Wizards of Thay; I don’t know what to think—maybe they were just shy), donated all of their stock to the war effort. They were decorated by the city for this service, and promptly vanished; contrary to local expectations, the shop hasn’t opened its doors since. I for one doubted that it ever would, what with competition from Bendekar’s Mercantile (which we’ll be getting to later in our tour, over in the Mortonbrace neighborhood), but I hear it’s actually going to reopen as an official outlet for the Wizards Guild.

At the other end of the same block, on the northwest corner of O’Kane Court and Hawk Passage, stands a one-story shop with a lemon yellow awning along its front. This is **Lamps by Watt** (TS21), where you can buy lanterns, chandeliers, torches, sconces, lamps, and all manner of lighting accoutrements for use in lighting your home. The shop is small, brightly lit (of course), and prosperous, specializing in brass fixtures. Across O’Kane Court, on the other corner of this junction intersection, stands a stone house belonging, if I’m not mistaken, to yet another adventuress named Elvira: the half-elven bard and mage **Elvira of the Bluff** (TS22). Some call her a “riddlemaster,” whatever that is. A little way up O’Kane Court on the west side stands a rather nondescript, shuttered shop that the tax rolls identify only by the rather intriguing name of **Firefly** (TS23); I’m afraid I can’t tell you any more about it than that.

Better known to me—and to most Ravenians, if they have anything to do with horses, is the **Iron Bull Smithy** (TS24). The smithy and the house shared by the proprietors (a brother and sister named Smith, as well as the brother’s family) now stands on the southeast corner of MacIntyre Path and Skulls Street; it used to be on Anvil Alley, across the road from Norge Greenback’s Horses in the Holyhouses neighborhood but was relocated due to temple construction. The Iron Bull is the chief source of quality horseshoes and shoeing in the Bluff; you can trust their work with your life. Many do.

Across the road from the smithy, on the northeast corner, stands the increasingly widely known **Kettle of Many Things** restaurant (TS25), which caters to wizards—and their familiars. Run by a pair of retired adventurers, Mijel and Jandra Morigan, its northernmost end used to house **Morigan’s Complete Components**, an overly neat shop that sold everything ordinary in the way of components that any spellcaster could want. Competition from Bendekar’s Mercantile caused Morigan to shift his focus; now he stocks spices of all sorts and sells to both fellow restaurateurs and housewives. Few folk seem to realize that quiet, fussy Mijel is a mage of some accomplishments, and his shop is quieter than it should be.

As for the Morigans’ eatery—well, I can’t praise the Kettle highly enough. Simple fare (soup, fresh-baked bread, cheeses and pies), delicately prepared for those of sensitive stomach, and washed down with Mijel’s excellent mead. Two stained-glass bay windows make the common dining room a pleasant place to eat, and there are private dining rooms available for rent. I’m sure many of the regulars come here as much to flirt with the Morigans’ bold, beauteous, and quick-to-tease daughter Jelima as they do to enjoy the food—but fare this good certainly doesn’t hurt, crazed mages as fellow diners or not.

Apartment houses fill the rest of Swordspoint north of the Kettle, though I’m told one pleasant stone house standing among them, fronting on Fireleap Lane, is the home of the successful local adventuress **Regora Ravensworth** (TS26). Further south, across Hawk Passage from Potions, Lotions, & Notions, a refurbished warehouse marks a recent addition to Swordspoint: The **House of Kuldath** (TS27), a rising but little-liked merchant house thought by some to deal in slave-made goods. The five brothers Kuldath sell carpets, mats, and tapestries out of this headquarters building—and local folk swear that some sort of bat-like guardian monster flaps around the darkened building by night. One of those locals is the priestess of Mask **Kaitlyn McTavish** (TS28), whose comfortable stone house stands across MacIntyre Path from the merchant house headquarters. She’s not the only adventurous presence in this block, either; two doors along Hawk Passage is the modest wooden home of **Kilean the Con** (TS29), and across the alley behind Kaitlyn’s and Kilean’s homes is the business office of the gnome illusionist **Gideon Sagson** (TS30), where he meets with clients to plan spells they want him to cast. Sometimes his patrons are adventurers, but more often they’re nobles or wealthy merchants desiring fresh and striking entertainments for a revel.

The same city block holds one last surprise for the visitor to Swordspoint: **Ye Olde Bluff Jeweler** (TS31), fronting on MacIntyre Path two doors up from Dragonscale Street. This two-story building is clad in polished white marble, with a roof of lustrous obsidian tile. Its showroom is as striking as the



exterior—and filled with things of beauty. The proprietor, Shorlock Revahl, is a swift and skilled jeweler who enthusiastically crafts everything from small finger rings to elaborate tiaras, working mainly in gold and gems. Many wizards come here to custom-order the finest rings, brooches, bracers, and the like for their use in crafting enchanted items. Shorlock rarely disappoints, and his opulent living quarters above the shop are adorned with paintings, figurines, and full-sized statues of great worth (the work of other artists Revahl admires, including a Pislewaite original) to prove it.

GOWNTOWN

One of the wealthiest and most important neighborhoods in the Bluff, Gowntown (named for the many priests who dwell in apartment houses here and hence are apt to be seen in their vestments in the streets, walking to and from temple services) is a safe, heavily-Watch-patrolled area. Adventurers and others openly bearing arms are few, the streets are clean, and vendors hawking their wares in the streets are moved along brusquely by everpresent Watch officers.

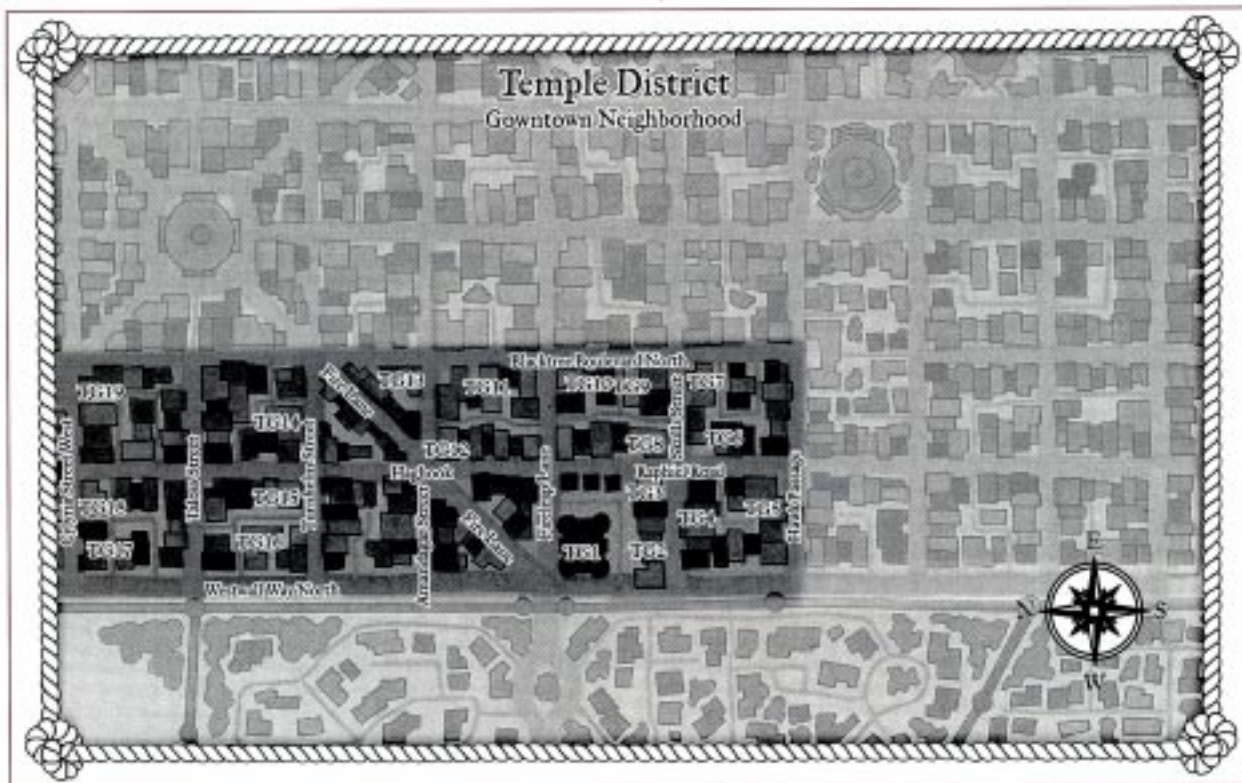
A logical place to begin any tour is the most prominent building in Gowntown, which stands near the west wall of the city with a lone, grim gibbet east of it. This is **Hangman's Courthouse** (TG1), named for the now-dead judge whose home and workplace it was. It still serves as the main courthouse for this end of the city, and as a Watch barracks and lock-up. Confiscated property of any value or large amount is likely to be found here, as are carefully cross-referenced confessions from many years of prisoners and the closest thing the Watch has to a forensic laboratory. A statue of Rupert Hangman has been erected in the circular end of the lane immediately to the south of the Courthouse. I know it's a marvelous likeness, but everytime I stand near it I get a chill, as if he were looking at me disapprovingly. And I swear one time I came by on a foggy night and stumbled over the empty pedestal—but if anybody stole it, they put it right back, because I made sure to check the very next day once my hangover subsided.

Backing onto this grassy lane and facing Skulls Street are two buildings of interest (among the numerous four-story apartment houses). The first of these is **Hengelhouse** (TG2), a stone manor owned by the Ampner noble family that features many stepped balconies and man-sized hanging baskets

of plants (that drip incessantly, residents tell me). This mansion has been made into elegant lodgings of the most quietly luxurious sort, with ground-floor stables and laundry and a tiny walled garden out back. Turstos Hengel was an illusionist of note, slain in battle with pirates almost thirty years ago; the Ampners took possession of this residence in lieu of Hengel's unpaid debts to them. Civic officials of high position dwell here, as well as a sprinkling of very rich retired sea captains (some of them probably pirates, though no one says so). Just down the block, at the corner of Skulls Street and Raphael Road, is the intriguingly-named **Talking Skull House** (TG3), a newly formed would-be Merchant House that has just taken over the moribund Abluuder's Everything Emporium (at one time the Bluff's largest store) but not yet been accepted as an equal by the others on the Merchants Council. Apparently the circle of merchants who own the house sometimes consult a talking human skull on strategic investment matters. Just who's skull this is, and what interests it may have, are dark secrets guarded by the merchants—but I suppose it's as good a way of deciding on investments as any. Talking Skull House is moving aggressively into the crate, barrel, and loading-chute business and is reportedly running into ever-stiffer resistance from the longshoremen on the docks.

Here between the babbling skull and the home for retired pirates, on the south side of Skulls Street, stands a grand, high-gated manor. This is **Zorden Hall** (TG4), the city residence of the Zorden noble family. About all Gowntown ever sees of them, apparently, is their scarlet-topped coach rumbling through the gates. If you're keen-eyed enough—there. Can you see a lone, tiny balcony high on the west wall of the manor? They call it "Weeping Lady Balcony," where a heartbroken Zorden is said to have sobbed for four nights running, until a pirate bent on robbery carried her off to a laughing life on the high seas. They say you can still see (or hear) her weeping on certain nights. The tale may or may not be true, but there's never been anyone waiting on the balcony when I've been by. A matter of timing, I guess.

On the northwest corner of Hawk Passage and Raphael Road stands another miniature castle, this one all soaring towers and frowning battlements. I'll tell you a secret: no one is supposed to know, but this is **Hawksblood Hall** (TG5), the "secret" headquarters of the Knights of the Hawk. Impressive, isn't it? It incorporates stables, armory, infirmary, war room (with extensive maps of the Bluff, its sewers, the Vast, nearby known mines





in the Earthfasts, and identified pirate islands in the Sea of Fallen Stars), and dining room. It's a purely Gowtown joke to say that the Hawks serve only raw meat at their tables, though there is an anonymous ballad about the Hawks laughing as they devour "the flesh of their foes." So far as I can tell, the Hawks rather enjoy their ferocious reputation.

On the east side of Raphael Road just doors north of where the Hawks roost is the five-story-high, darkly elegant headquarters of **Doumath House** (TG6). Known for its fine furniture and woodcarving, Doumath (formerly "Bentbow House") is enjoying renewed popularity as merchants grow wealthy enough to outfit their houses with furniture every bit as grand as nobles own. Naturally, many of the nobles are scurrying to acquire new pieces of decidedly different fashion, so as to avoid all appearance of being "common." And of course successful adventurers who buy their own manors or town houses don't want them to look shabby either; so all in all Doumath is doing just fine—that's one Merchant House I wouldn't mind owning a piece of myself.

On the north side of the same city block, at the southwest corner of the moot of Blacktree Boulevard North and Skulls Street, stands the Ampner-owned manor of **Seiringlast House** (TG7), named for the mage who built it decades ago. Local rumor insists that Seiringlast's mummified body is still hidden in some secret passage in the manor, the victim of one of his own traps . . . and that his ghost wanders the place seeking certain items from time to time (in particular, when a chess-set is moved from its customary table). The Ampners never found any of the fabled magical treasure said to be here, nor any sign of secret passages, but tenants of the apartments that now fill this soaring five-story building sign lease agreements in which they promise not to break open or alter in any way any floor, ceiling, or wall. The chess set remains in the lone Ampner suite, covered with dust. From time to time, its pieces move, as if two unseen masters were enjoying a game . . .

On the northeast corner of Raphael and Skulls Street stands a Ravenian institution: **Glar Maru's Golden Palace** (TG8). I love this place! Four vast (and sagging) floors crammed with just about anything non-perishable that a man with coins spilling out of his purse might want to buy, this store deals in everything. There's an entire room devoted to worn or no-longer-fitting-their-owners priestly vestments, and another of out-of-fashion gowns. This is the place to come if you want to choose a metal mixing bowl from the largest array in the city (eggcup size to one a fully-armored knight can recline in) or buy a stepladder. This is the place to sell (for coppers, I fear) old fixtures you don't want—so you can buy someone else's far more interesting old fixtures to replace them! That room over there is almost entirely filled with spoons. The gently smiling old Tashlutan mage Glar Maru sits by the entrance and watches the world sweep in and out past him. It's said he sends spiders to spy on those he suspects of stealing from him; spiders whose bite can paralyze, to allow an unhampered and still smiling Glar to select appropriate compensation from the goods of those who've stolen from him.

Across an alley from the back of the Golden Palace, fronting on Blacktree Boulevard, stands the famous **Golden Rooster Roost** (TG9), separated from the **Rooster Fitness & Training Center** (TG10) only by an alleyway that many a Rooster has stumbled across, yawning and perhaps staggering a bit, to start his or her day. The Roost is a palatially appointed inn open only to Knights of the Golden Rooster (its lobby is all seamless acres of red carpet and more glittering chandeliers than I have fingers), but the Fitness & Training Center can be used by all knights who at one time or another have belonged to the Golden Roosters. As such, the street outside is often busy with square-jawed, clear-eyed, hard-striding men and equally impressive trim, fit, capable women, all carrying large duffel bags full of armor and weaponry as if they're hefting a few loaves of bread. Odd how many ladies and gentlemen find some reason to stroll idly past these buildings while the Roosters are out going through their paces and working up a sweat. Perhaps they're merely thieves lusting after all the gold leaf that sparkles on carved roosters all along the rooftop parapets of both buildings.

In the middle of the next block north along Blacktree stands **Palraedior Manor** (TG11), named for the noble family whose city residence it is. Made of blue stone with round-topped windows, it's often a blaze of light into the early hours but rarely the site of revels or other noisy events. If you've got some boring war story to tell, this is the place to tell it; Lord Palraedior and his son love that sort of stuff, and his two youngest daughters eat it up (the eldest daughter, Lady Taerimel, is more to my taste; I always get the impression that she'll scream if she hears one more war story, but somehow she manages to control herself).

The six-way intersection we're standing at now, where Amandagar Street, Fire Lane, and Raphael Road all cross, is known as "Haghook" from

an incident many years ago, when a monster of the sort known to sages as an "annis" (hags to the rest of us) was caught here by adventurers with several grappling hooks and slain while held helpless in their opposing pulls. At the southeast corner stands **Glimmertree House** (TG12), the headquarters of a new and fast-rising concern dedicated to exploiting the timber and ore resources of the interior Vast by bringing their hitherto-untapped quality to Sembian markets at prices considerably lower than similar goods gleaned from the Dales or Cormyr. This rapidly expanding house needs more money quickly if they're to rise to the status of full-fledged Merchant House (clearly their goal) and is inviting merchants, laborers, and even visitors just passing through the Bluff a chance to become partners in return for their coins. The elves don't like it, of course, and are trying to muster opposition to anyone stepping up logging in the Vast, saying the region still hasn't fully recovered from the deforestation of orchid days. Could be a nasty feud simmering here; hope it doesn't break out into open conflict. We'll see which side wins out: the instinct to make money or to protect the forests.

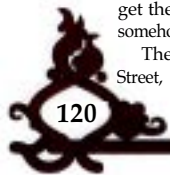
One of the places you can hear all about financial (and darker) dealings in the city is **Phoaraudo's** (TG13), a pretentious but very popular eatery established just before the war on the northwest corner of Amandagar Street and Blacktree Boulevard North. The decor is neat, even severe, but no such restraint is manifest among the customers: the middling merchants and overstuffed priests come here to talk, talk, talk. Lazy, often invisible service, outrageous prices, and downright sneering on the part of the staff are all meant to put you in your place and make you grateful they condescend to let you in the door at all. If you can swallow all that (I can't, frankly), then the food's excellence redeems all: golden shrimp, lamb to die for, delicate shredded pig's ear, poached pear savories, quail in a spicy sauce, and the daily special, which is always worth investigating.

See that truly massive building—a dark stone pile that thrusts a glittering row of four bay-windowed enclosed balconies out over Turnhelm? This is the headquarters of the **Vespers Merchant House** (TG14), elegant dealers in luxury goods. Note the sign thrusting up from the flagstones by its entrance, displaying only a glossy obsidian square inset with a single fist-sized diamond (actually faceted quartz lit from within by a minor enchantment) in the upper right corner. That's "the Sign of Vespers," a little hallmark they put on everything they sell as a mark of quality and status symbol; that's a real diamond inset in the upper right corner. Here you can find crystal glassware, silver dishes, and accoutrements of the finest, most spectacular, most expensive make. Nothing is understated, nothing is too practical. They have over two hundred items to squander a fortune on if you are so inclined. The staff makes house calls on interested nobles by appointment, in closed coaches, to mount private showings. Thieves are warned of vigilant guardian mages and trained stirges.

Across the road, on the northwest corner of the same intersection, stands the gutted shell of the **Ravens Bluff Hall of Records** (TG15), its rebuilding delayed while various merchants vie with one another to purchase this prime location for another luxury apartment block. In the meantime, the Watch is kept busy chasing homeless vagrants out of the scorched cellars and ruins—and report an astonishing number of surreptitious meetings in the burned building between Ravenian lovers bent on assignments, merchants wanting to make private deals, and adventurers on dark intrigues.

Not far away, fronting on Westwall Way North, stands the massive pile of **Marlinspire Manor** (TG16), the Ravenian seat of the Indemmer noble family. That forbidding curtain wall (rising a mere handspan out from the building itself but soaring a good thirty feet up) is topped, at each support pillar, by a sculpted leaping marlin. Between the marlins exists some sort of defensive magical ward that sends thieves falling back, stunned, to the ground—I know; I've seen it. They lie there and twitch a bit, then get up and run off as if fiends were nipping at their heels. Stables, coach storage, and all exist inside the manor, reached by great gates that face down the spur alley that connects with Taloss Street. The Indemmers entertain often in a quiet sort of way, but the neighborhood sees and hears little of the revelry inside this fortress of a house. That's for the best, perhaps.

In the next block up Westwall, at the southeast corner of its encounter with Cyllyria Street West, stand the most ambitious of the Ampner manors-turned-apartments: the twin granite piles of **Windstand House** and **Rashala's Towers** (TG17), whose uppermost two stories (the fifth and sixth) are linked by a two-floor bridge of suites that I certainly wouldn't want to live in-offering, as they do, a long fall onto the neat shade garden beneath. Rebuilt by the Ampners as rental apartments, they were formerly separate manors. Rashala's (the westernmost) was a decaying Ampner residence, the longtime home of crusty old "Aunt Rashala." Windstand be-





longed to the Eldermore noble family until Lord Ampner won it in a gambling game—and discovered it to be crumbling even more than Rashala's. The apartments here are smaller than in most other Ampner apartment houses, home to many an unmarried knight, mid-ranking civic official, and senior Watch officer. More than one tenant has fallen to a bloody death through various secret trapdoors in the underside of the bridge—with the inevitable suspicion of foul play clinging to the tragedies.

The next building east along Cylyria is **Yarnar Close** (TG18), the Ravenian city residence of the Yarvandar noble family. Those magnificent relief carvings of knights on rearing horses stretch along the front of this four-story hall, riding endlessly east. See that statue of a warrior, leaning on his spear and staring grimly across Cylyria at the blameless apartment blocks on the other side, that stands guard at the entry gate? It's known as The Vigilant Ravenian, sculpted by the notable local carver Indrii (dead now some two decades). Connoisseurs considered it a masterpiece, I'm told—and proof of its value lies in the fact that would-be thieves are forever trying (and failing) to carry it off. At least two have died in the process when the statue suddenly toppled over and crushed them. It's made of some dark, mottled, and unidentified stone that resists all attempts to break it, whatever the impact—how Indrii carved the stuff is anybody's guess.

Our tour of Gowntown ends at the southwest corner of Cylyria and Blacktree, where this elegant brownstone serves as headquarters of **Telsark's House** (TG19), its large windows a-glitter with the latest oversized fashion jewelry from lands across the Reach. This Merchant House—or rather, its dashing owner—is rapidly becoming something of a legend in Ravens Bluff, as everyone watches to see what Augluster Telsark will do next.

Market District

This is the most unusual district of Ravens Bluff. It exists more as a tax delineation than anything else—but what an effect that designation has had! Picture just eight city blocks full of decaying warehouses and narrow tallbrick city homes, now just shells in which each room is rented by a different vendor. It's as if half the vendors and hawkers from the old tent city came inside the gates and seized vacant rooms in abandoned buildings . . . because that's more or less what happened.

Now, Market District never sleeps. By the light of its lamps, shining out of the glassless windows onto streets full of refuse and hurrying shoppers, all manner of goods change hands, from live beasts to roofing tiles, from salvaged tomb goods of far lands to the latest lurid books from Sembia. You can find almost anything in the Market, if you search long and hard enough. Why, I once found . . . but never mind. Young Ravenians come here by night to stroll and gawk at jugglers, sword-swallowers, rope-walkers, palm readers, and of course the wares for sale in a thousand little stalls. This is *the* neighborhood to come if you need a copy made of a favorite object—either a quick, cheap more-or-less match (to replace, say, one of a pair of vases) or, if you have the coin for such masterly work, a copy that looks so exact that an expert would have to test it carefully to know it's not an original. This is the only area of Ravens Bluff where you'll see lots of graffiti (and pasted-up handbills, sometimes dozens thick) on building walls, and also the only area where snoring citizens just lie asleep on the pavement, with no pretense at finding proper shelter.

There are, of course, few features of permanence in this sort of neighborhood—but I'll lay those scant few landmarks before you. Standing on Cylyria Street West just east of DeVillars Ride is a large, bar-windowed building that offers stony-faced guards, their arms crossed and their weapons ready, to anyone who rushes in through its doors looking for bargains. This is the headquarters of **The House of Cloevaerus** (M1), importers of clockworks, lock mechanisms and catches, and similar exacting Gond-blessed assemblages. Cloevaerus is struggling a bit under fierce competition from the existing houses (notably Firestorm House), but so far his extensive Sembian connections have guaranteed his survival—if he can't make coins enough with these goods, he'll either merge with Firestorm House or shift to something else. His offices stand four stories high, and the uppermost is where he lives and has opened some sort of private club, the *Gehern Cibus*. I hear it's some kind of restaurant, but I've never managed to wangle an invitation. Someone told me in whispers that she'd seen outlines that looked like illithids at its windows after dark—but an illithid restaurant? In the heart of Ravens Bluff? Some rumors are so wild, even I can't believe them.

Across DeVillars Ride from this den of mystery stands another grand building, this one a former nobles' manor (once owned by a now-extinct branch of the De Sheers family—they have a habit of killing each other off,



you know). Its many-windowed front walls slant inwards to an arched entryway in a welcoming manner—once kept clear of intruders by De Sheers guards, but now the site of a welter of vendors' stalls. Threading through them, we reach the doors of **Beldrid's House** (M2) to find the same flatly menacing guards. This isn't all that surprising; Beldrid Murkyn invests heavily in small trader shipping (that is, goods that cross the Reach in fishing boats and old, small ships of all sorts) and has constant run-ins with pirates that have escalated almost to the point of a private war. He's forever hiring bands of Ravenian adventurers to go pirate hunting for him, letting them hide aboard his vessels that deliberately stray into known pirate waters, only to give any pirates who take the bait a nasty surprise (preferably of the "fireball in the sails, wall of fire along the decks, watch her bum" variety).

Let's walk around the outside of the Market, along Cylyria west to Blacktree, and north up Blacktree to Sylgarth (the northern boundary of Market District). In the southeast corner where Blacktree and Sylgarth meet stands the most distinctive structure hereabouts—four huge stone towers that soar eight or nine stories aloft and hold something massive, rust-streaked, and dome-shaped between their peaks. Quite a sight, isn't it? This is **Purtill's Tower** (M3), Ravens Bluff's original water tower—a clever idea whose designer was a shy and stammering wizard who has long since left the Vast for a safer life in Cormyr. Circular stairs in two of the four pillars link the lofty dome with the ground. You can't see it from here, but this stout structure sports a griffon landing-pad on its roof, with two mooring-masts for use by Halruaan skyships. Since the tower was built three decades ago, such vessels have used the masts exactly twice. If the safety of the city and us all didn't hang in the balance, I'd appreciate these rare visits all the more—the reaction of our local mages when the Halruaans came drifting down out of the sky to shop (using *feather fall* spells to avoid climbing down the tower) was comical to see. Everyone rushed to ready their most powerful spells and puissant enchanted items—and then, whistling, strove to look both ever-so-casual and yet alert, mighty mages at the same time. I'm sure the Halruaans were hard put not to laugh.

Walking east along Sylgarth Street we cross Manycoins Way, and on the southeast corner of that intersection find the building in Market District most visited by those who don't like to shop in such grubby, unsafe chaos: **Nodder & Sons Safe Storage** (M4). Like Davy's on the waterfront, this establishment offers lockable rooms and cubbyholes for long- or short-term rental, provided what's stored isn't flammable, leakable, or alive. The build-



Uptown District Torchtown

Although the boundaries of what is officially Uptown have become much less expansive in recent years, this particular neighborhood hasn't altered in size or extent. It has, however (thanks to the influence of the adjacent Market) altered considerably in character and even name. Formerly known as Urngaff, after a colorful local pirate who brawled and wenched his way to a bloody death here in the early days of the Bluff, this area became Torchtown after the Market soared in popularity. The name was born of the fact that this was the one area of the city (fairly isolated, beyond the Market) that the government allowed to become a never-sleep trading area, a sort of overflow from the crowded vendors' stalls. Like the Market District, it's been overrun by many vendors displaced from the now-vanished tent city that used to stand just outside the city's North Gate.

Torchtown has continued to evolve, with the many small market booths and stalls along the nameless lanes in the northwesternmost corner of the city being rebuilt into small cottage residences. These tiny dwellings are much loved by halflings and half-elves, who can be found here in large numbers. The northern half of Torchtown has become a place where independent (guildless, or even guild-defying) craftfolk dwell and work. This is where books are copied and sold, seamstresses ply their trade, and cobblers make and repair boots and shoes. Counterfeiters and forgers dwell here in numbers, and the authorities largely turn a blind eye. Even many longtime Ravenaar seem to forget that Torchtown exists (except as a name), and it's hard to find someone here unless given directions beforehand—most locals innocently reply "don't know" when asked where other folk live (even their next-door neighbors).

The casual visitor won't find many landmarks among the picturesque cottages (which must be cold indeed in winter; I suspect delivered-to-the-door firewood would be a valuable local currency during the snowy months). Abandoned buildings quickly disappear in cold months and are just as quickly rebuilt the next spring. Let's begin our tour coming in the North Gate of the city—good afternoon, Captain Havor; I see you're looking lovely today, as usual. Who? . . . oh, just a friend. Now, the first site of interest we come to on Manycoins Way, a door shy of Vesper Way, is the offices of **Ways Unknown** (UT1)—that stout, one-story building with a thatched roof and a small tower jutting up from its south wall. That tower's just tall enough to afford a view of the countryside over the city wall; it was commandeered by the army in the late war as a watchpost. This is the home and office of a veteran guide, the unexcitable half-elf Eryn Lashir, who charges by the mile and is willing to accompany adventurers on expeditions.

A few strides farther south along Manycoins Way is **Hogs Head Hall** (UT2), the headquarters of the Fellowship of Herders and Butchers. The guild maintains a school of carving, smoking, and dressing here, so the place is apt to exude a variety of strong stenches, but the fats and bones are shipped outside the city for rendering, and guildmembers are careful to sluice blood running out into the street down the nearest sewer grates with buckets of water. When smoking is going on the aroma is wonderful, but the immediate vicinity isn't beloved by those with sensitive noses or stomachs.

Continuing south, two doors down we come to a large (six-story) warehouse of fairly new construction. It stood empty for some years after the failure of the South Sea of Fallen Stars Trading Company, its builders, but has recently reopened as the headquarters of **The House of the Black Flame** (UT3), which is specializing in clothing, food, and exotic weapons from far lands. Yet another newly formed merchant consortium, the Black Flame also own the square three-story stone warehouse across the alley (yes, that one; it fronts on Sylgarth Street) and are engaged in ambitiously selling their wares all over the Bluff.

Torchtown contains one hidden, purely local street, only a single block long: Dalton Drive, which links Sylgarth with Broken Bit Lane. On the northeast corner of its meeting with Broken Bit stands **The Cup of Coins** (UT4), headquarters of the Merchants Guild; a three-story red brick building whose uppermost floor sports a balcony where members can often be seen conferring, tankards of beer from the guildmembers' bar inside in their hands.

Since the war, Ravens Bluff seems to have surged forward in both prosperity and the hunger and drive of its entrepreneurs; this neighborhood is home to the headquarters of yet another prospective Merchant House. This one is **Four Anchors House** (UT5), found in the former Jaladoss mansion on Cylyria Street, one door east of Westwall. The Jaladoss family were cruel, greedy, arrogant, feud-loving, and much-hated nobility who were killed off in wars with the De Sheers just before Lady DeVillars sponsored the

ing is of stout stone, with very few burnable furnishings or trim, and boasts a large and well-armed garrison to discourage thieves. Most of the turnkeys know all of the customers by face and name and will challenge strangers using keys to get into storage areas.

At the far corner of the same block (the southwest corner of the meeting of Sylgarth and Moorland) stands an increasingly well-known landmark of the Market: **Mad Dolphin House** (M5). It's an untidy barn of a building that acts as a pawnshop for large items—coaches, household lots of furniture, even full-sized fishing boats (which hang from the rafters in massive cable cradles). They recently opened an eatery from which folk can view these wares. Strong beer is the mainstay of a menu rooted in gleanings from extra cargo and burst barrels, so offerings are apt to vary. The marinades on platters are good enough, but the jellied eels too sweet. The berry mashies are nothing short of a triumph, but dried rothé (prepared as rations for the campaign against the Tuigan horde) has the texture of boot leather no matter what's been done to it since. Mystery meats on skewers make one wonder about missing dogs and where all those caught rats go to . . . It's food, but that's all.

Perhaps the only visually distinctive landmark in the heart of the Market is **The Belltower** (M6). This is now the home of an adventuress named Elvira—no, not any of the ones I've referred to so far; there are half a dozen or more ladies of that name in Ravens Bluff; "Shadow" is the only name more popular among Ravenaar adventurers. Anyway, the Belltower was formerly part of a now-vanished temple of a cult that worshipped creatures of the deep seas. The only surviving influence of this cult that I know of is the curious Ravenaar custom, when certain whales or monster-sized sharks wash up dead on the beaches, of carrying the stinking, sometimes block-long carcasses through the streets on the raised hands of hundreds of citizens, whilst everyone hollers and sings and generally carries on. This windowless square tower, built of stout stone much splattered with guano from birds roosting in the cupola, is certainly secure against most intruders, but I can't help thinking it must be truly dark and forbidding inside. It's said to have a trapdoor exit down into sewer passages. The tower leans slightly, but the bell still sounds from time to time; I assume Elvira uses it to signal someone elsewhere in the city in a most public of private communications.





Championship Games. The mansion stood empty for a long time and still hasn't been fixed up much; the statues out front are still shattered, armless stumps, and there are still reportedly holes in its roof that allow flooding of the fourth floor whenever rains fall. Four Anchors invests in shipping afloat and seem to be doing quite well—but I've heard from several old salts the strong suspicion that the Anchors are backing certain Inner Sea pirates, while pretending not to. I must add that this is a dark rumor that's been tacked to the hides of other folks before—not *always* with truth.

The last and most interesting site I know of in Torchtown is **The Quiet Mind** (UT6), the abode and workshop of the independent (guildless) sage Malgaris. This tall, bony, fascinating man seems to collect orphans, who dwell with him here in happy chaos and will spy for him or hurl weapons to protect him with fierce enthusiasm. Malgaris is officially an expert on Faerûnian weapons, with a specialty in metal-bladed weapons. Show him a fragment of a blade, and he'll tell you its age (always), what sort of a weapon it came from, how it was made and used, and (probably) who made it and where. Unofficially, Malgaris keeps track of the ever-changing fortunes and careers of all adventuring bands (not individuals) operating out of Ravens Bluff, including their fates, their successes, and their unfinished business. Some find this touching, but actually he just wants to know where all their weapons wind up.

Come closer, and I'll whisper something not everyone knows but that might prove a lifesaver. Malgaris makes a lot of gold on the side (typically 250 gp a trip but sometimes much less if he's sympathetic to the "customer") smuggling people out of the city. You see, his cellars have a rather special feature: a tunnel under the city wall and out into the countryside to the north. The tunnel rises up into a huge old hollow tree in the woods, well to the northeast of **The Quiet Mind**, and is guarded against casual intrusion by a stuffed mind flayer head, mounted on an archway where the steps down from the tree become a horizontal passage, and flanked by three sprawled human skeletons. It's a route for folk needing to leave the city undetected in a hurry, but Malgaris makes it clear that he won't allow anyone to use it on a regular basis; it's for emergencies only. He frowns on attempts to use it as an entrance to the city and has the means to turn away unwanted visitors. I only know of one trap, but I'm sure there are more: the tunnel ends in a vertical shaft up into the sage's cellars, and he keeps four large boulders suspended in chains above the shaft. If he doesn't like his interview with someone trying to get through the alarm-gong-protected wooden trapdoor at the bottom of

the shaft, he starts pulling winch levers and letting the chained boulders fall. Any one of them can crush a man; three can more or less fill the shaft against the intrusion of anything larger than a ferret, and the fourth and last has been carved to fit the shaft walls with about an inch of clearance, acting as a perfect plug to the passage. The sage also owns a *ring of lightning* (like the *wand*, but usable by wearers of any class), and the passage runs straight far enough that Malgaris can stand at the bottom of the shaft and effectively clear about half the passage with it.

Sixstar

One of the two luxury neighborhoods of the Bluff (Tentowers is the other), Sixstar is named for the intersection formed by the meeting of MacIntyre Path, Broken Bit Lane, and Fire Lane. It's a place where young nobles in their finery have congregated to strut and stroll for two generations now, and the tradition seems firmly established.

Sixstar is an area of three- or four-story narrow, long houses, all belonging to folk of wealth. There are a few businesses (mainly of the office sort), a few nobles' houses, and a lot of genteel quiet. Adventurers who draw swords or make noise in this part of the city will find thin-lipped Watch patrols converging on them in a hurry. Sometimes these are aided by the extremely well-trained war dogs kenneled at Redspires House, which we'll be getting to soon. Those dogs can be successfully commanded to attack just one particular person out of an angry crowd, or immobilize without harming, or hamstring someone trying to escape, or maul without slaying; they can be called off with just a whistle. I understand that "maul without slaying" are their standing orders regarding intruders into Redspires, but I'd just as soon not put it to the test.

The outstanding feature of this neighborhood of the city is, of course, Lake Christina. Let's begin northeast of it, at the largest building in Sixstar, standing among impressive gardens approached along an avenue of duskwoods. This is the **Raven Museum** (US1), usually called just "The Museum." Visitors expecting to see grand displays will be disappointed, although the lobby does have several dusty bell-glass display cases in which dragon talons, old fragments of armor, and crumbling parchments can be seen, commemorating the early days of settlement near the Fire River and the founding of Ravens Bluff. The primary purpose of the Museum was to





allow the guilded sages to clear enough papers out of Oldover House to have space to interview clients and to take notes—and to move enough civic records out of various government buildings to let government officials *find* their desks again. Behind all that clutter, however, it's actually quite an interesting house—I understand it was once the headquarters of the Four Ravens thieves guild decades ago, and the walls are supposed to be full of secret passages no one has ever been able to find.

Nowadays, as you see, it's essentially a great big house crammed with rooms and rooms of more-or-less organized files. It has artifacts on display, yes, because the justification for the founding of the Museum was that all such space-filling material be transported from various elsewhere to here, to a central "preservatorium" of Ravenian history. Stored here are tax records more than a decade old, city agreements and contracts of similar vintage, and all official correspondence. Here are copies of births, deaths, burials, anointings, and weddings, furnished by the various city temples (who also, of course, keep their own records of these events). Here are copies of all the records of the knightly orders, and what few records guilds have been willing (often under great pressure) to make public. Here are maps of the sewers and water lines. Here are reserve copies of deeds (to guard against fires—lucky precaution, that, after the fire that burned down the Hall of Records) and neighborhood planning maps; here are records of all dead court cases. In short, it's a mountain of documentation that it takes a sage or city clerk to find a way around in; anyone else trying to find out something specific will require expert guidance or months to search. Admittance is 2 gp per day. The Museum sells writing paper, quills, and inks and even rents out the services of a scribe or of a librarian to locate or copy documents—but the fees aren't cheap. Nevertheless, to those who know how to find things, the Museum can answer many questions about the city and the doings of its citizens.

From the south, the Museum is approached along a leg of Vesper Way; where this arrow-straight stretch of road meets with Falyern Way stands a grand wooden mansion, with attached stables and a fence. This is the main abode and base of operations of the **Armor & Vengeance** band (US2), one of the most successful Ravenian adventuring groups. Strangers are seldom invited in for tours.

The same unwelcoming attitude prevails at **Redspires House** (US3), the city residence of the Cathone noble family. Protected by trained war dogs and armed servants in livery, this red brick and sandstone-block manor house rises from the shores of the lake amid rolling lawns filled with shrubberies. In the old days, the trick to not having a loaded crossbow leveled at you when you came calling was to arrive wearing a sneer and gilded finery in a coach accompanied by at least a dozen mounted servants. I'm told by those who have attended dinners and revels therein that tall oval windows afford lovely views of the lake, and that tall thin paintings hanging on the walls contain figures that move about by means of enchantments—intruders sucked into the paintings, one smirking Cathone claimed. Nowadays the family, or what's left of it, is in mourning; the unlamented Lord Cathone was poisoned just before the war and three of his heirs died in the field. Only the two youngest daughters remain, the one a wild revel-goer and the other crushed down by the disasters that have befallen them in such quick succession.

Across the lake, on the easternmost block of Sylgarth Street, stands the larger, grander granite bulk of **Anglund Hall** (US4), city seat of the Emerdin noble family. Purchased from a cadet branch of the De Sheers some decades ago and redecorated with royal blue tapestries throughout, it's a grand old house that local citizens strolling around the lake on warm evenings stop and stare at in smiling contentment. It contains a full-sized great hall that can host balls, feasts, and plays moved bodily from the Ravens Bluff Playhouse for a few private performances before "Lord Em" and his guests and family. Redspires may have its war dogs, but Anglund Hall has a lion as its prowling guardian, as well as two pegasuses . . . pegasi? . . . you know, those winged horse things—who have the run of the gardens immediately to the north of the manor.

Ahem. Moving right along . . . **Stormgables House** (US5), seat of the Daradusk family, stands on the east side of Lamorgyr's Ride, at the corner where it meets North Road. It's larger than Redspires and Anglund Hall put together, taking the form of a walled castle whose two main towers rise seven stories into the air. This is partly good defensive sense, given the proximity of that tor (or rock spire) immediately to the east, and the end of any real city defenses at this point—but it's also rooted in the sheer desire to impress. It works for me at any rate; I can't fail to be awed when I turn in at the frowning gates and am met by servants in silvergilt plate armor. Magnificent!

From that height, we might as well plunge into the mercantile heart of Sixstar. Proceeding west along North Road (which runs just inside of the city wall) to O'Kane Court, we turn south, to reach "the Splay," an intersection where O'Kane Court splits into Dagger Street (which runs for a block southeast) and Fire Lane (which cuts southwest almost clear across the city). In the angle of the Splay between Dagger and the eastern leg of Sylgarth Street stands **Malabaerthum's House** (US6), a three-story dark stone wedge of forbidding hauteur. This is the headquarters of a merchant group that has been slowly building its power and reach for many years, encountering many setbacks as orcs and other forces have interrupted commerce in the Vast. Nurnarium "Nurn" Malabaerthum specializes in mounting fast caravan runs all over the Vast, from Mulmaster to Procampur. The rigors of winter travel, brigands, orcs, and other monsters often leave him in need of adventurers and other expendables to help guide and guard caravans.

Across the road from Malabaerthum's, in the southern angle where Dagger Street and Fire Lane meet, stands **Smokeflower House** (US7), headquarters of a thriving Merchant House that ships all sorts of goods back and forth between the Bluff, Turlagol, Procampur, and Altumbel. Some are beginning to whisper that its ships make regular stop-overs in the Pirate Isles, which naturally arouses suspicions. Such rumors are bolstered by the ever-present vigilance of those armed guards, whose presence in turn makes the Watch suspicious. Several surprise inspections of the House have been ordered in recent months and turned up nothing. Despite complaints from Smokeflower about "out of control, overzealous blood-hunting" Watch officers, look for more inspections to occur in the future.

A few doors down from Smokeflower, on the northwest side of Fire Lane, stands **Seekers' Guildhall** (US8), headquarters of the Diviners Guild. A serene, quiet, plain building of gray stucco over sandstone brick, it offers only a simple house-sized door and a brass nameplate to the world. Those



who enter must walk down an entry corridor whose walls bristle with the tips of wands that I'm sure can do all sorts of unpleasant things if even a few of them are real. Whenever I go in on business, I smile a lot.

Hidden (deliberately) from public attention beside the city wall, in the southwestern corner of the meeting of North Road and MacIntyre Path, stands **Longbottle Hall** (US9), the Ravenian residence of the noble family of the same name; both Lord Calvin Longbottle and his brother, the Regent of the Harbor, live here. I'm sorry we can't go inside this long, narrow granite building; it's furnished and laid out as if it were some sort of giant ship. Not a manor house for those who like lots of space to swing about in—but probably a thief-frustrator's dream of secret compartments, hidden passages, cubbyholes, and so on. It does have a long gray corridor hung with alternating mirrors and candle-sconces, so that there's a flickering candle on one wall reflected in a mirror right across from it, and then a candle on the wall beyond the mirror captured in a mirror on the opposite wall, and so on; walking along it gives me a feeling both eerie and stately, as if I were walking to some sort of genteel doom.

A block south of noble gloom and doom stands **The Shod Talon** (US 10). This formerly rundown inn and tavern has been rebuilt since long-sundered kin of the owner, Voron Orama, arrived in Ravens Bluff and sought out their relative. The one-armed innkeeper now has a gleaming metal arm that he's still learning to use (with some degree of deftness but still the occasional mishap) and has remembered how to chatter and smile again. Since peace returned to the city and the rebuilt Talon reopened, elves and half-elves have flocked to the place of evenings for drinks, talk, and dancing—or to stay when visiting the Bluff. Humans and halflings are tolerated in the Talon, but most will feel more comfortable elsewhere. The other Oramas have purchased the long-vacant **Rundelstones Manor** (US11), that large building across the street and two doors to the north, facing the end of the western leg of Vesper Way. I hear they're planning to turn it into tree-filled elven apartments but have done nothing yet. They want to purchase all of the buildings around first, demolish them, and plant a small deep woodlands park on the cleared ground. Knowing Ravenian politics and land dealings, it's a good thing that elves live a long time.

O'Kane Court resumes its southwards run from Broken Bit Lane. Two doors down from that intersection, on the west side, stands **The Sparkling Edge** (US12); a modest, one-story gem shop whose proprietor, Oscar Kerlin, is a fair trader and expert appraiser who asks no questions about where stones came from. Visiting gem merchants can stay the night here in quite comfortable rooms and be well fed in the bargain.

The next block to the southwest holds the local office of the **Red Ravens** firefighters (US13), fronting on MacIntyre Path three doors down from Palamaeyr Street. Some say it should stand farther west, to be even closer to the only habitual source of heat in the neighborhood: **Balathorp Towers** (US14), seat of the Balathorp noble family and home to a seemingly endless round of parties. To cut down on noise complaints, Lord Balathorp purchased all three buildings that adjoin his home and gutted their ground floors to serve as stables space for the coaches and conveyances of his party guests, linking all of the buildings on upper floors to give guests more places to play—or collapse, exhausted, and sleep until morning. Several incidents with thieves taking advantage of the sprawling Balathorp complex to prey on snoring or drunken guests showed Lord Balathorp the need for a private garrison of thieves of his own—who get paid bonuses whenever they capture someone trying to steal something. They're not above planting evidence, dexterously slipping the goods onto someone's person as deftly as they might otherwise extract them. Their unhappy victims can face civic justice in the morning or agree to do an under-the-table task for Lord Balathorp instead (usually spying on a business rival or foe, with full permission to enrich themselves in the process). The Balathorp holdings now extend throughout all but the most southerly pair of buildings in the cluster bounded by Fire Lane, Moorland Ride, and the alley that links the end of Cylyria Street East with Manycoins Way.

Not far down Moorland Ride from all the revelry is **The Hall of Five Arches** (US15), the large and impressive headquarters of the Builders Guild of Ravens Bluff. Known as "Tall Hall" because it rises six stories above the street, this edifice was built to display the skill and wealth of guildmembers, sporting relief carvings of roaring lions and soaring ravens everywhere; one observer commented that it looked like "a building struggling to free itself of a bad case of stone warts."

The next block to the east holds another Merchant House headquarters, and a personal favorite of mine: **Nightbird House** (US 16). Run by women, for women, it specializes in alluring garments of all sorts; I often pick up an

intimate gift here. And I'm not the only one; a surprising number of male buyers find time to drop by to watch the models display the latest Nightbird gowns. Where they find such lovely ladies I can't imagine . . . but I'm glad they do. The ladies sometimes agree to act as escorts to single men who need a partner for some revel, thus insuring that the man they accompany will attract attention when the pair of them make an entrance.

On the southeast corner of the same block, fronting (since recent renovations) on both O'Kane Court and Falyern Way, is one of the best inns in Ravens Bluff: **Volodar's Stardust Inn** (US17). Expensive but worth it, this luxurious establishment features a casino, a dining room, and a nightclub (with jugglers, comics, minor mages, dancers, and sword-swallowers as entertainment). The owners, Volodar and Meroflede Celdonmen (a dapper elven fighter/mage retired adventurer and his human druid wife) are fair and attentive to detail—the casino is straight, the food served is only the best (a full range menu, from delicate roast quail on almonds to mock-turtle "on the shell"), and the wines and spirits are superb; Volodar is a connoisseur. If you have enough gold, this is possibly the best place to stay in all the Bluff.

Returning to the lake along Falyern Way, it's a quick walk north along Lamorgyr's Ride to the last noble residence in Sixstar: **Seabreeze Hall** (US 18). On the east side of the Ride north of the Cylyria dock, this coldly ornate house of many tiled terraces and round windows flanked by scrollwork stone carvings is the Ravenian seat of the Gultoss family. It hosts its share of revels—but no more than its share; the Gultosses are rather reserved, for nobles.

A long block up the Ride stands our last site of interest in this tour: **Maercrossan's** (US19), a recently-opened riverside restaurant that has become a favorite of local residents. Situated with a pleasant view of the lake, this dimly lit, quiet, carpeted hall of many booths and private alcoves is among the most exclusive (and expensive) dining establishments in the Bluff. Jeweled elders and lovely nobles preen and murmur as their fare is wheeled in gilded carts across deep carpets by smartly attired staff. Dark wood and decor falsely suggests tired grandeur, but the food is good—fruits from Unther in brandied cream, sea bass slathered in roast almonds and mushrooms, and tiny wines.

TENTOWERS

This neighborhood was named by an unlettered visiting warrior whose skills at counting were of the "one, two, many" school; he could about manage eight towers, and knew that ten was somewhat more, so "Tentowers" this richest of Ravenian neighborhoods became. There's so much to see here (and many a Watch constable to hurry us along, practically striding at our elbows, if we doesn't look sufficiently rich and dissipated) that I'd best plunge right into it and give you the swift tour. Got your breath? Right, we'll begin in the trees east of the end of Turnhelm Street, right out on the city limit. This lovely glade and round earthen house mark the beginnings of **Mellisa's Glade** (UT1), where our emerald-eyed druid who was until quite recently Lady Speaker of the Advisory Council dwells, working to found her own grove. Beautiful, isn't it?

As we step back out of the quiet, you'll probably notice some men with crossbows; the Watch is always vigilant. Don't wave too suddenly. As we cross Hearthston Hill and start down Turnhelm, this building immediately on our left, on the southwest corner, is **Blacktree Manor** (UT2), the city residence of the noble family of that name. Don't even get me started about his Field Marshalship Lord Charles Frederik Laverne Blacktree the fourth; what Lady Katharine sees in him I guess I'll never know. Now we turn down this first alley, to where it meets Falyern Way. That comfortable-looking house on the corner—the one with the balconies held up by live duskwoods, yes, and with the vines all over everything—is the home of the elven warrior **Ehrendil** (UT3). We'll go west on Falyern, now, and this large, black-marble-clad—well, *palace*—is **Sablegarth House** (UT4), where the Hawkdragons live when they're in town—which isn't nearly often enough to my tastes.

Don't lag behind; we're being watched. Turning back south on Bouldergrinder's Way to Turnhelm again, we're facing two more nobles' houses: on the southeast corner here, with the rose-hued marble pillars, is **Rosepillars** (UT5), the city home of the Skyhawks, and across the road, on the southwest corner, is **Fireflagon Hall** (UT6), seat of the Quelemters. Be warned; they don't get on—the Quelemters are too bizarrely frivolous and the Skyhawks too serious. Let's turn west on Turnhelm here; notice that all around us are grand homes, some of them split into apartments—but these'll be luxury flats, each one filling a floor of the house. This is the most expensive neighborhood in the Bluff, bar none.



As we cross Stonekeep Concourse, we pass this fine stone mansion, **Sladdles House** (UT7), home of a successful adventurer, the halfling—well, burglar—Remy LeBeau. I hear he's thinking of changing the name of this place when he gets it fixed up the way he wants it. Another tower or two in the front yard, perhaps, although I heard a rumor that he's thinking of having the whole place buried under an artificial mound and renaming it "The LeBeau Hole."

This next street is **Tornigel's Ride**; note that there're always Watch constables patrolling past. Don't catch their eye. You'll also always find at least one strolling along **Lamorgyr's Ride**, across the creek. If we glance south, the building with the row of pillars and the crouching harpy statues (lifelike, aren't they) is **Lundance Hall** (UT8), the city house of the Leorduins—perhaps the single most deservedly unpopular noble family in the Bluff. Directly across the road, looking rather lifeless because it stands empty most of the time—yes, that mountain of black granite, with the green marble doors and silvergilt pillars—is **Ostraer Hall** (UT9), the Ravenian home of the De Sheers family, the only nobles who can give the Leorduins a run for their money in the dangerous-and-arrogant-noble department. Lady Niune De Sheers is the last of seventeen brothers and sisters, fifteen of whom killed each other. Frightening, isn't it? Let's not dwell on the thought; we'll walk down the Ride to Amandagar Street here and take the New Dragon Bridge across DeVillars Creek. A long way down, isn't it? Thirty feet; most folk expect the water to be right under the bridge, like a little wading pool.

Fine day, officer, yes . . . we'll turn back north here, to pick up Turnhelm again. This first mansion—here, in white marble, with the griffon-topped spiral gateposts—is **Moontalon Manor** (UT10), home of the Hawkyneflours. It has a beautiful glass dome in back, over the great hall, that you can just see . . . Nice, eh? All it takes is more gold than three carts can carry.

Now we're turning north up Waelstar Way, just a few steps, to look at two more nobles' mansions. On the east, here, with the bay-windowed tower out front, is what the Paerindons—another of the noble families nearly wiped out in the war are proud to call **Dragonslayer House** (UT11). And over here on the west, with a side door onto Falyern Way, is **Boldtalon Manor** (UT12). Yes, it's huge . . . one of the biggest of these modest little noble palaces; the rear turret has seven floors and the front turret six. If the Boldtalons ever get tired of sleeping on their levitating beds—oh, yes; they've got a room where everything floats in midair, too; much in demand at parties by the overweight—and want to go slumming a little, they own more than five *hundred* little apartment houses, warehouses, and the like, all over the Bluff. They must need their fine coaches just to carry the rent payments home each month.

Well, not exactly home. They take it to a place back down Waelstar, and across Turnhelm, on the east—here, **Max the Moneychanger** (UT13) has come a long way "upscale" recently, on the strength of nobles' business instead of catering just to sailors and the down-and-outs. He can afford a golem as well as guards now. For the Boldtalons, he'll change those carts of coins into a few gems and keep scrupulously honest books. Why not? He's making so much legally that he doesn't have to shave things any more. It's made him much happier—and all the rest of us who deal with him happier, too.

While we're here, let's go on down to Amandagar Street and walk the next block west along it. That'll take us between another pair of nobles' houses. If you're thinking there's a certain theme to Tentowers, you're right: unbridled luxury. When it comes to themes, I've always wondered why nobles seem so obsessed with the moon—and for that matter, with talons—grasping lunacy, perhaps? Forget I said that. Here, on the south side, is **Merelder Manor** (UT14), home of the Lintowers, who are as well-liked as the Leorduins are disliked. Almost as big as the Boldtalons' place, isn't it? Those glittering lions in the stonework of the front wall *are* gold, or at least gilded; twenty feet tall if they're an inch. There's a full stables and carriage-house in the wings out back, and I hear the Lintowers own this apartment block next door to the west as well. For all I know, they may well be landlords for the little fruit-and-nut shop on the corner, too; the Manor folds right around it, and Lord Lintower does like his prunes.

Two doors down and across the street is **Starwaters** (UT15), home to the Sinaran elven noble clan. You might expect them to prefer being out in the forests rather than in any city, but here they can at least enjoy a little slice of forest. There's an open central courtyard in there, and sliding doors all around it for when the weather's not too cold. Inside, trees grow up from the cellars, and plants hang everywhere; water piped from a rooftop cistern makes a little brook running hither and yon. No revels here, for non-elves at any rate. I've been a few times, at night, when the stars glimmer in the pool in that central yard like gems on black velvet. Lovely. See the sil-

vergilt trees sculpted on either side of the entry arch? They're some sort of enchanted things—they can lash out just like a roper, to snare anyone on this stretch of street, when the Sinaran want them to. You'll never find thieves or elf-hating mobs hereabouts . . . not for long, anyway.

Let's turn north on O'Kane and then continue west on Turnhelm; we've more than enough nobles to spare. First, on the north just past the alley, is **Stonepost Hall** (UT16). This is the home of the Moorlands, and there are the posts that gave it the name. A bit cracked now, but still impressive. The old lord would have let them fall down before changing them in any way—the old nobles are like that; that's why they're so stirred up over the merchants founding their own council and demanding power, and all that . . . it's change. Nobles hate change. Lady Katharine and her sisters, now; that's another story. Those three ladies know their own minds, and I wouldn't be surprised if they surprise everybody who thinks they're just decorative beauties. Keep your eye on those three: it'll be fun to watch.

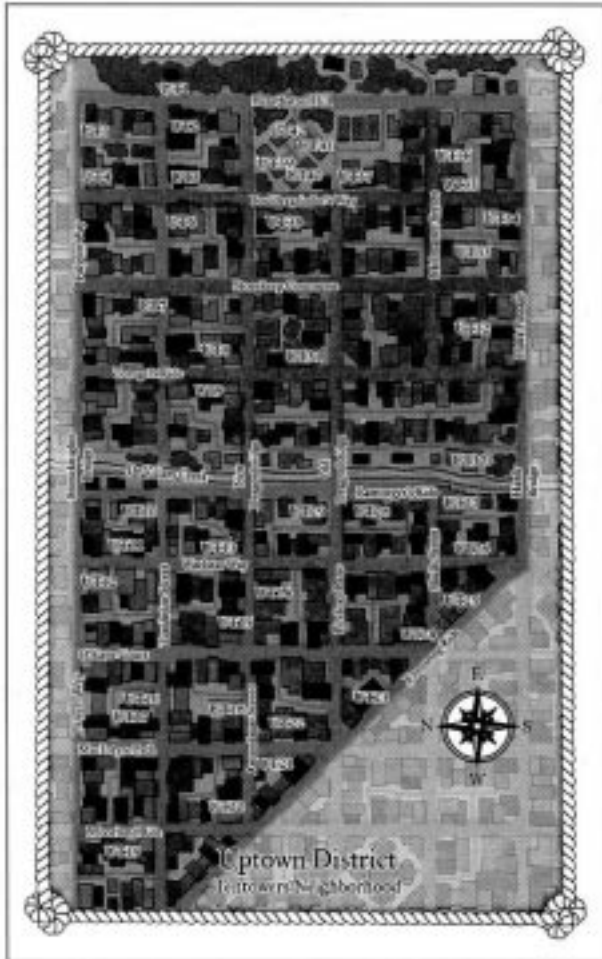
Now this next street is MacIntyre Path, and two doors up it, there on the east side, is **Maldridge Manor** (UT17). Another of the old ones—see the granite facing, there, starting to go? I've always liked these old stone armmen standing guard on the cornerposts here—and so do the ravens. Generations of children in the Bluff have grown up trying to toss rag rings to catch on those mustaches—there must be waist-high mounds of them rotting over the other side of the wall, by now . . . The MacIntyres fell on hard times years ago, but they've coped—you can rent out the manor for a few nights, complete with servants, if you want to impress some guests, and adventurers love to rent their old half-ruined country house to practice dungeon-crawling in. Good people, the MacIntyres; Lord Russell and his sister live in the attic of this old place, in what used to be servants' quarters, but nicer folk you couldn't ask to meet.

Let's turn around and go south along the Path, down to Amandagar again, and turn back east, for half a block. This brings us to another old Ravenaar noble house: **Blackyews Manor** (UT18), seat of the Norwoods. Yes, I know there aren't any yew trees—there were, once, a beautiful avenue of them leading right up to the door. What happened to them? The city happened to them, and they're all long gone. Lord Norwood's rarely here (says visits to the city cut into his hunting time), but Lady Penelope, who's the dean of something over at the Wizards Guild, lives here when she's in town.

If we duck up this alley beside it, we can go clear across Turnhelm, around and behind Stonepost Hall, down the side of MacIntyre Manor, and through this little passage under an old onetime milliner's shop (it's apartments for retired servants now). The alley takes us across the Path and through the next block—see the shops and offices, now, among the luxury apartments?—to Moorland Ride. Across it, almost facing us, is one of the more interesting of those businesses: **Master Etcheen's Chess Shop** (UT19). Marbol Etcheen is a true lover of the game, and a kindly man to boot. He was once a war advisor to King Azoun of Cormyr, and he's won a fortune defeating players all over Faerûn. Ravenian charities see a lot of it these days. He's always up for a game with someone new, but don't expect to beat him—I never have. He makes and sells beautiful chess sets—of wood, mostly, but ivory and marble, too—and for the purses of ordinary folk, he has sculpted and painted clay ones. He has guards that even look a little like chess pieces! Worth a visit, even if you don't love the game; you can really see the skill and beauty of all those chess pieces, laid out on glass like fine jewelry, when they're all variations on the same shapes. Nobles commission him to make family sets and then show them off on proud display—mark my words, they'll be heirlooms one day. I'd buy one myself, if I could afford it.

I mustn't linger longer, or I'll be standing here looking in the windows for hours. Let's take Moorland south to Amandagar and head east again. Here we go; this second shop on the north side of Amandagar, here, is the famous **Lyle's Fine Cloaks** (UT20). Father and son, Lyles both, custom-make cloaks to commission, if you can wait half a month; as you can see through the window, everything's of the finest make, though there's plain traveling gear at the back. Half-elves (who honor their own; the Lyles are half-elven) and Ravenian nobles will shop nowhere else. The elder Lyle's a cloakmaster, and Lyle the Younger's trying to become one. He's in need of a mage to enchant a master cloak, if he succeeds in making one fine enough, but he's been at it for a while, now; his father's not going to accept anything but the best. Nice to know the old standards still hold, eh?

We'll turn south on MacIntyre again, at this next corner; as you can see, we're walking around a trio of quite small houses. Nice, though—just the right size for a dwelling for just one person. The southernmost one, around on the Path, is **Lonetree** (UT21). It belongs to the druid Karlan, another



successful adventurer. Snug, but I suppose not everyone would like such a comfortable nest, standing as it does right across the road from yon castle.

Yes, *that* castle, the needle-spired one with the glossy black walls and all the little crackling purple lightnings washing over them. This is **The High House of Magic** (UT22)—as I'm sure you've already guessed for yourself, what with all the little whooshes and hissings and muffled little cries—the headquarters of our city's Wizards Guild, and a good place to stay away from unless you've rightful business there or would enjoy life as a frog. Fancy an aquatic lifestyle? I thought not. Let's move along, then. Impressive, though, isn't it? On some nights, I'm told, the defensive ring-spells come to life, creating a glowing cylinder that funnels unleashed magic straight up, treating the locals to quite a show.

Now, this next site is also a guild headquarters, though a rather quieter, more usual one, of the "sneeringly forbidding" school of architecture. We'll turn southeast, along Evensong Ride, and here it is: **Bolynstars Hall** (UT23), offices of the Guild of Fine Carvers and Furniture Makers. It used to be the private home of the founding guildmaster, Arkithil Bolynstars, until his untimely death. That's why it looks so elegant, with all these giant acorn flower-planters atop the stone pillars out front, rather than giving us another example of the "thinly disguised warehouse" look.

Let's press on. As we cross Skulls Street and O'Kane, look to the northeast corner. *That* tasteless manor, with its two pillars of stone Ravenians carved to forever be beseeching passersby to laud the owner of the house—I think they look more like they're begging for coins and warning away travelers from a house unclean with plague, myself—is **Wintershields Hall** (UT24), home of the Velgath family, yet another of our noble families. You'd think a large liveried staff of bowing sycophants would be enough for anyone, wouldn't you? Ah well. As I've said before, takes all kinds, I suppose.

Passing on down the Ride, we next come to **Meadowfield House** (UT25), the much more welcoming wooden mansion of Greendale Meadowfield, an elven bard who "made good," as they say. Note its curving front balcony and almost soapy-smooth carved pillars. Lovely. I wish a few nobles would drop by and visit him—to learn a thing or even two about good taste.

Hmmp. Well, we've reached Waelstar Way, so let's turn north on it and see a few more sites of interest. That little shop on our right is **Madame Coth's Silk Shop** (UT26). She's the one who caused a stir recently when a patron tried to slip along behind the tapestries—no doubt planning to slip out without paying—and ran into a dead man standing propped up there in the dusty gloom, with a sword sticking out of his ribs! Of course, it was a wax dummy, but the screams the would-be deadbeat let out were real enough! More people came in to see the dummy than had ever come in looking for silks before; the whole affair has made her rich! Smart woman.

We'll turn east here, on Skulls Street, towards the creek. Hello, officer; nice day, isn't it? Over there it shouldn't surprise you much by now to see . . . another noble's mansion. This one has trees in a little shade garden right down into the creek behind it—very nice—giving it the well-deserved name **Forestshade House** (UT27). It belongs to the Moonglow clan; those elves have been living here since long before there ever was a Ravens Bluff, and they're here still. What? Yes, that's Aunt Laur's—excuse me: Lady Lauren DeVillars' place—well, one of them—right across the stream; we'll get to it later.

First, we must head north on Lamorgy's Ride and see the **Stane Opera House** (UT28). Black marble by Stonethrust Quarrying, architecture by Mulsunder, and chandeliers, inside, by everyone who's ever tom down anything grand in Sembia and wanted to get rid of some dusty old glass. No two of them match, all are magnificent (and large and heavy enough to sink a small fishing boat), and they tend to start tinkling and chiming when the singers really get going. I'm told you can enjoy a lot of performances quite well from yonder house, across the creek . . .

This next pile of black marble, on up the Ride across Fireleap Lane, isn't an annex to the Opera House. It was here first; the Stanes liked the look of this noble's manor so well that they felt moved to copy it. I don't know what said noble thinks of their little act of flattery. Intensely annoyed, I suspect. At any rate, this is **Ravengard House** (UT29), Ravenian seat of the Therogeon family. General Therogeon's a bit too military for my tastes, but if you ever get a chance to meet his father, old Basaltheus Therogeon (universally known as "Aged Parent"), don't pass it up—he's quite a character.

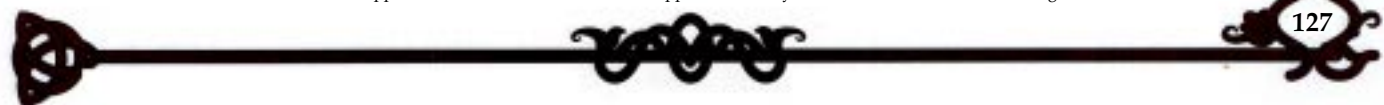
Let's cross over DeVillars Creek again—named after great-grandpa, by the way—on Fireleap this time, by way of the Landelo bridge. Notice the nonchalant Watch officers, watching us from up and down the creek? That's because, once night falls, this ravine is a favorite highway across the city for those who'd rather not answer questions from Watch patrols. These lads and lasses are learning the look of the creekbanks, for better night scrutiny later on.

Look south, along the east bank. The old stone house with the terrace is **Laurentowers** (UT30)—home away from home, I call it. It's where the DeVillars come to meet with folks who'd rather not traipse away east, right out of the city, to DeVillars Manor. I know it looks grand for a private house, but this one's more discreet than most. More comfortable, too, to my taste. There's a spell on the terrace that keeps insects away, so guests can enjoy drinks under the lamps or just the moonlight, right above the water. I'll have to have you all over sometime, if I can wangle you all invitations to one of Aunt Laur's parties.

Let's walk on, to the first cross-street, Torngel's Ride. Those roundtop windows in the huge stone warehouse on the northeast corner look new because they *are* new. This used to be a caravan cargo storage depot, but it's now **The House of the Rose** (UT31), headquarters of the largest and wealthiest mercantile collective in Ravens Bluff, The Tempest Rose Merchant House. From dawn to dusk, this place is a-bustle; most foot traffic in Tentowers is either deliveries to noble households or someone on his or her way to or from this place.

Let's turn south again, along the Ride, past Melmaster Street, to the first alley east beyond it. No rats or refuse here; sometimes it's hard for me to believe that this neighborhood and the docks are all part of the same city. The modest house ahead of us, where the alley turns south, is the home of the adventurer **Triel** (UT32)—or so the tax rolls say; I've never been able to find out more about the owner, but I like the house. All those lovely fiddly bits. Newly built but fits in, almost hiding here behind these apartments . . . tasteful trim and gables, must be roomy enough inside. Why can't all Ravenians live like this?

Yet if they did, we'd have nothing remarkable to see on a tour like this, I suppose. The alley will take us out to Hawk Passage, and we can head east





across Stonekeep Concourse to the next alleyway north. This one makes a jog and then splits. We'll take the eastern branch of it, out of this block—but first notice the stone wall our alley is going around. Hear the singing of steel? This is **Myriad's Fencing School** (UT33), and the yard on the other side of that fence is full of students being trained by Myriad, a one-armed handsome fellow who evidently lost his arm fighting a red dragon (ouch!), and by his fellow instructor Dulanin Sternhelm—who's that rarest of things: a dwarf who enjoys a good guffaw. They're both very good; though the school hasn't been open more than a handcount of years, it's already developed quite a reputation. We can't drop in for a better look, I'm afraid; no one gets in without an invitation, although a friend of mine once saw a blade come hurtling out over the wall—minus its owner—and crash against that drainspout right where you're standing.

Hmm. Hear the silence? They must have stopped to listen to us. Let's not linger. Step lively now, this way, up east along the other branch of the alley. We're passing, to the south of us here, a clothing and cosmetics shop that caters to Ravenian ladies, **Of Style and Grace** (UT34). It used to be a typical gowns-and-pearls place, but it now teaches deportment, dancing, etiquette, hair styling, body shape alterations, and all-over cosmetics to trick the eye into thinking what's fat is slim, and so on . . . the works. Another Ravenian success story. I hear the gossip's good too, which wouldn't hurt. All in all, a very popular spot with the ladies.

As we come out onto Bouldergrinder's Way, look across the road, to the southeast corner of Melmaster Street and the Way. You can see two grand stone houses, one behind the other. The one closest to us, right on the corner, is the home of our Lord Magistrate, Tordon Sureblade. **Sureblade House** (UT35) is as severe and solemn as its owner, but I like the relief carvings of hanging plants that trail down the walls. You never have to water them or buy new ones, even if the foliage is a little gray.

The house beyond Tordon's, one door east along Melmaster, has actually been divided inside into three houses; two with separate entrances onto Melmaster and the cellar opening onto the alley behind. These are all luxuriously furnished guest residences (the cellar is for commoners or servants, but it only lacks the view to equal the appointments of the suites above) used by the city to house visiting dignitaries to Ravens Bluff who don't have, or wish to stay at, their own embassies. All three are still known as **Brambleferns** (UT36), the name given to the house by the long-ago merchant who built it. A stay here is free, of course—for the lucky few who are asked—but the place has more spyholes and secret passages than a haunted fortress. You can't do more than sneeze inside without certain civic officials knowing about it.

When the place is empty, the Watch sometimes trains its Advanced Specialist Patrol (ASP) officers on the art of stealthy eavesdropping here, giving them practice in silently creeping about and listening while their tutors pretend to be unwitting guests letting slip state secrets—and listening for eavesdroppers in turn. This site was once the scene of a furious battle, years ago, when elements of the Four Ravens decided to take advantage of such an exercise to murder a few Watch officers—and got caught at it, a few throat-slittings in. A lot of Ravenians don't even know this place exists . . . and that's the way the Lady Mayor and Chief Constable would like to keep it.

A block up Bouldergrinder's Way, to the head of Fireleap Lane, brings us to one of the most popular sites in all Tentowers: **Gurneth's Goblet** (UT37). This finely-appointed restaurant offers diners three red-carpeted floors of luxurious dining (with a full wine cellar, though this isn't—despite the name—a tavern or drinking club). Despite all the luxury, Turad Gurneth encourages informality and tries to seat diners as far apart as possible, to make them feel relaxed rather than being on show. The nobles appreciate it and come here often. Arched ceiling, ornamental ironwork, and gnome-work tapestries make a grand backdrop to the robust roasts, oversized gilded goblets of clear, cool house wine (Gurneth's own), or full array of more familiar bottles. I recommend their smoked goose awash in leeks, the shrimp in ginger paste, the curries, and the sausage. If you've got the money to spend, this place is worth coming back to again and again.

Only a few more spots now before we move on to the next neighborhood. See that whitestone house, set back a little from its fellows but sporting a small fountain out front? That's house of the successful Ravenian adventurer **Ventor Taxis**, a priest of Mystra (UT38).

Across from it, see that pinwheel of four luxurious buildings? This ambitious complex was begun as the Bluff's first university of higher learning. Never completed after the temples got involved, and furious rows erupted over who would teach what, who would preside, and who would award honors, it was taken over by more level heads—that is, a collective headed by

the DeVillars family. The foundations were used to create two noble residences and two institutions that serve the nobility, all handsome brick buildings four stories in height.

The building on the northwest of the pinwheel is a school—a live-in **Collegium Loyal** (UT39) where elderly, retired servants dwell for free and are paid to teach young, would-be servants how to conduct themselves properly and carry out their duties when serving in a stately home. Courses are expensive but very popular—especially among the parents of beautiful daughters, given the traditional propensity of Ravenian lords to marry their more comely servants. Why, my own grandmother—but enough of that. Wealthy Sembians have discovered this school and its high standards, and since the war petitions to place their more clumsy servants for transformation have come flooding in; the school is debating whether to lower its standards, expand, or simply become ever more exclusive as word spreads to Cormyr and beyond.

The building most likely to be taken over if it does expand is the matching structure on the southwest axis of the pinwheel, the **Raven Coachhouse** (UT40). This has been hollowed out into three vast and lofty halls linked by long ramps, with the fourth floor given over to a vast hayloft; it jointly serves all Ravenian nobility as a storage garage for their coaches or those of their guests. Tack (note the gilded harnesses for long teams of horses) are stored here, and there's a staging area where such teams may be assembled and hitched up, to wheel grandly out onto Bouldergrinder's Way to pick up passengers elsewhere.

The last two buildings on the pinwheel both have pull up towers with bay windows and are more grandly appointed than the two westward structures. These were taken over by noble families whose city mansions had fallen into such disrepair that rebuilding was dismissed as impractical or that occupied valuable land but no longer had inviting surroundings. So these are, for the present, our last two nobles' city residences: the Taldavar family's **Hornherald Hall** (UT41) on the southeast and the Moonbrace clan's **Moongates Manor** (UT42), with its many plantings of blueleaf and duskwood, to the northeast. All in all, a pleasant and striking little corner of one of the most pleasant and striking neighborhoods in Ravens Bluff.

MORTONBRACE

Ramed for the now-dead architect and builder who presided over much of the building of the Bluff in its early days of expansion, this neighborhood lies to the south of rich Tentowers and is known to most Ravenians merely as "where the Coliseum is." If they think of it at all, it's as a residential area of quiet affluence that seeks anonymity, but there's much more to Mortonbrace than that.

We might as well begin at what's by far the largest structure in the Bluff. Built by Lady Lauren DeVillars to host the Championship Games that gave our city its first Lord Mayor and modern government, the **Coliseum** (UM1) is still used for fairs, contests, tournaments, and pageantry of all kinds. It consists of tiered open-to-the-sky bench seating around a flat turf field, all surrounded by an oval promenade track of clay covered with finely crushed brick. Changing rooms and beast-pens are buried beneath the stands, with ramps up onto the field. I'll say this about Aunt Laur; she certainly knows how to throw a party, and spares no expense.

The main entrance of the Coliseum gives onto Raven Way, and we'll go west on that broad street as far as Bouldergrinder's Way, where we'll turn north to go around the end of the stadium. There hang the banners of all thirty-two Ravenian noble families allied to the city, watched over by the ravens from whom our fair city takes its name. They seem to consider this their territory and keep the city largely free of gulls, pigeons, and other aerial pests.

Reaching Griffon Trail, we start east again, following the curve around the back of the Coliseum. Down the northwards alley on our left you can see the local **Red Ravens** firefighting hall (UM2), with its little bell-tower.

Griffon Trail ends by turning a corner and becoming Hearthston Hill, and at that corner stands a grand old wooden mansion, with a wooded garden behind it, belonging to the adventurer **William Warensen** (UM3). A few doors past it on the same side of the road stands one of the most famous shops in all Ravens Bluff: the establishment of **Toysmiths** (UM4), where the gnome brothers Gunder and Relvan Gaewilder make all manner of toys. So many, in fact, that they take to the streets in a cart drawn by a blue-dyed horse several times a year (usually during a festival) and give away toys they haven't space for and haven't been able to sell (or so they say). Generations of Ravenians remember this merry duo as the kindly giftgivers of their youth, and anyone foolish enough to try to rob or offer violence



halfling (and, I think, a retired thief and adventurer) who employs a scarred and grizzled dwarf as a janitor (and bouncer) and an elven mage as a cook. Some secret clings to this establishment, as it did to the former Tea Room, but I haven't yet put my finger on what it is. Certainly there's no feeling of menace. The dining room is open from midmorn to mideven. Despite the increased size of the new inn, it offers only two single rooms and three suites of rooms (all halfling-sized)—but then, few folk stay here. All of Morton-brace (and when something's on at Coliseum, most of the rest of Ravens Bluff) does, however, like to drop in here for a bite and some tea or cordials. A madhouse when the Coliseum crowd is jostling to get served (and Rose responds with palm-sized, four-fingers-high spicy pork pies, scorching hot), but a quiet refuge the rest of the time.

Turning west along Hawk Passage, we cross Stonekeep Concourse and pass what almost looks like a noble's manor house—a stone edifice with two lions flanking the steps out front and a magnificent oval front window as tall as a titan. This is **Dlarngelt House** (UM7), the private residence of the half-elven mage and procurer Morphius, another successful Ravenian adventurer. Around the corner, south a door down Tormgel's Ride, stands the almost-as-grand stone house of the halfling adventurer **Bennie Tallson** (UM8). I've no doubt that other self-made successes dwell in the houses hereabouts, but we're again entering territory with which I'm not overly familiar.

Taking the Ride south to Griffon Trail, just before we reach Flaernar's Bridge (over DeVillars Creek), we turn north again at the last moment, into an alley. The large building with one angled wing that stands closest to the creek, to the west of the alley near its end, is **Wyrrhoard House** (UM9), the headquarters of the Merchant House of the same name. These folks—themselves retired adventurers—rose to their Merchants Council seat by sponsoring adventurers and prospectors, selling them any equipment an adventurer might need to survive in a tricky situation. The monies they gather from this they use to buy many Ravenian rental lodgings—I'm told there's a renters' saying: "If the Boldtalons don't have their hooks in your purse, it probably already belongs to the Wyrrhoarders."

Retracing our way along the alley, we pass a temple complex dedicated to Sune—three buildings, actually: an infirmary and contemplative center to the south, the living quarters of the clergy across the creek, and the main temple itself. **The Palace of Passion** (UM10) hosts many revels, dances-to-exhaustion, and more private Sunite rituals. Under the guidance of High Priestess Morlain and her husband Ilbrar the Iron, a staff of four muscular underpriests and nine beautiful priestesses minister to both visitors and locals who worship the Lady of Love. They have many adherents among the nobility and the wealthy merchants; social climbers are attracted to temple services whenever the Lady Belinda Moonglow, another of the Wizards Guild deans, attends, for she always makes a show of parading through the streets beforehand, beckoning bystanders to follow her.

Cold and lonely folk huddling on the streets at night are sometimes taken in, bathed, fed, and comforted by the Sunite clergy—as are laborers from the docks or the poorest streets, for Sune commands her clergy to always seek followers eagerly. Those who offer violence to clergy or worshippers, who threaten to rob from them, or who seek to turn rituals of passion into offerings of Loviatar, the Maiden of Pain, are firmly shown the door. Particularly egregious offenders are sometimes carried naked down to the chilly creek and dumped in, to be dunked by a priest praying firmly for their cleansing and salvation. Watch patrols often gather on the nearby lane to the west to watch such incidents—purely to make sure such chastisement never goes too far, of course.

Crossing the creek by way of Flaernar's Bridge, we'll turn the other way from where the Watch patrols like to stand watching wet offenders splash and splutter. Heading south along this nameless lane, we come to a sprawling stone mansion more splendid than many nobles' manors. This is **Darksilver House** (UM11), the home of the swashbuckling adventurer (and member of the Ravens Bluff Irregulars) Lord Knight Lorien Keltree Darkarrow, Knight of the Golden Rooster.

A lot has happened to this famous Ravenian adventurer recently. He ran unsuccessfully for the office of Lord Mayor seemingly without knowing it. He lost his wife, Mirial Moonsilver, the local high priestess of Selûne, during a wartime assassination carried out by followers of Talos. He fought so ably in the defense of the city that Lady Amber Lynn Thoden made him a Lord of the city at the war's end (one of the so-called "Fort Lords"). He's not been seen often in public since Mirial's death and has rarely been sober when he was. Darksilver House was formerly the scene of many wild and joyous parties and revels—but it has stood shut and silent since the war. A rumor is spreading that Mirial's body lies in state somewhere in the mansion, and that Lord

them finds that Ravenians will drop whatever they're doing and move en masse to the brothers' aid.

The Gaewilders often anonymously pay for restaurants to offer meals to hungry folk off the street, or arrange for Watch officers to distribute blankets and cloaks, or take someone out of the alleys for a bath and a good night's rest in an inn. They pay for this with the flood of Sembian and Waterdhavian gold that their most intricate clockwork toys (usually lifelike birds and small animals crafted of gold, with gems for eyes) bring in. Adult nobles are their chief clients for such masterpieces; for a time, the fashionable gift for Cormyrean nobles to give King Azoun was one of these, until he started sighing loudly whenever presented with one more addition to his metallic menagerie.

A block west down Shalastra's Ride, in the northeast corner of its meeting with Bouldergrinder's Way, stands **The Storm Dragon House** (UM5), headquarters of a Merchant House, part of the Merchants Council, that seems to deal only in Thayvian-made household goods—and about which certain citizens are harboring growing suspicions. See that strange piece of pierced iron sculpture in the tiled triangular forecourt occupying the space between its diagonal facade and the street corner? That's supposed to resemble a Storm Dragon—which I guess resembles a black twisted flying thing shot through with holes and thrusting forward a dozen talons or more. Perhaps a drunken sculptor could tell me more clearly what it's supposed to look like.

The north side of the next block westwards holds **Rose's Tea Room** (UM6), relocated from its former premises after a disastrous fire. The food is as good as ever: scones to die for, only the freshest curds, cucumber sandwiches a trifle heavy on the vinegar, and meltmouth pastries as good as I've ever eaten. Better yet, I find the atmosphere (quiet and motherly, like Rose herself) as unchanged—and as good—as at the old Tea Room. Rose is a



Lorien spends much of his time guarding it . . . but many have scoffed at this, insisting the clergy of the Moonflame would have seen to her funeral by now.

Immediately to the south of Darksilver House, where our nameless lane meets Raven Way beside Omphrel's Span (the largest, most downstream bridge to cross DeVillars Creek), stands the **House of Desires** (UM 12). Controversy is rising around the right of the clergy of Sharness to be involved in mercantile trade in Ravens Bluff at all, and I'm sure we'll hear a lot more about this place in months to come. In the meantime, this place is heavily guarded by dozens of the largest, most muscular, and most alluring leather-armored women warriors I've ever seen. The building is readily defensible, because it was formerly the Golden Rooster Roost, before that seat of the Knights of the Golden Rooster relocated to larger and more luxurious premises on Blacktree Boulevard. Cats seem to love this place for some reason; you can always see a dozen or so lounging about soaking up the sun.

Taking Omphrel's Span east across the creek, we come to the meeting of Raven Way with the southern end of Torngel's Ride. Turning north, we come almost immediately to the mouth of an alley. On the west side of the Ride just beyond it stands **The Glow Shoppe** (UM13), an establishment that sells means of lighting: torches, oil, lamps, candles, and (rarely) some item that has had *continual light* cast on it. Tuk Loman runs this shop with occasional assistance from his mother and grandmother, who are both retired adventurers. He dreams of being an adventurer like his father (who rode out for "one last foray" and never came back) and loves to hear tales of daring adventures, getting his excitement in the meantime by becoming an expert gambler. He's become decidedly unwelcome in most Ravenian gambling parlors, particularly the unlicensed (and therefore usually very profitable) ones in upstairs back rooms near the docks. Glow Shoppe prices are fair, but Tuk takes no special orders; he sells just what you see in the shop. Lamp oil can be purchased here in wax-sealed glass carafes, pipes (literally, four-foot-long metal pipes capped and sealed at both ends), hand-barrels, and even large 25-gallon "fatboy" kegs.

Taking a few steps north to the mouth of Yhevver Lane and then walking two doors east, we find ourselves standing outside a lifeless-looking grand stone mansion on the south side of the street. This was the home of **Howard Holiday** (UM14), Deputy Mayor of Ravens Bluff until he unexpectedly left town in the dead of night, about a month before the war. He's never returned; except for a thorough search by the Watch, the house as you see it now is just as he left it. Many suspect him of being somehow involved in the war—perhaps he undertook a secret mission that didn't go quite as planned. Not an exciting site, but part of the Bluff's history; you'll often see people stop a moment or doff their hats when passing—as much out of respect for the old, pre-war, days as for Holiday himself.

We'll go the rest of the block east—hello officer, nice day, isn't it?—and then turn down Stonekeep Concourse (usually crowded with rumbling goods carts and wagons) until we arrive here, three doors south of Raven Way on the east side. This old half-timbered shop, here beside the alley, is **Spath Investigations** (UM15). Tevlo Spath is a retired adventurer—quite wealthy, I've heard—who uses an impressive network of informants, and a few skilled operatives, to privately investigate problems for clients. Nothing like thefts or killings, but I'm sure they slip quietly into a lot of locked places to find out things. He charges the common citizenry (most of his clients) very low rates but spins a stiff coin in the direction of nobles, adventurers, and civic officials hiring him for the same sort of work. You need an appointment—set up by his wife, Adeline, six days or more in advance—to see Tevlo. Tevlo seems to know just about every resident of Ravens Bluff, and he can call on a bounty hunter to track down missing people, a cat burglar to find missing items or clues, and a veteran outdoorsman and cheerful warrior to train and organize bodyguards for clients. The Silent Network keeps a close watch on Tevlo and moved to eliminate him some years back—only to fail, for mysterious reasons, and come to some sort of private agreement with him. Recently, someone wealthy has taken to hiring Tevlo to investigate the aims, magic items, treasure, and battle strength of every single new adventuring band that shows up in Ravens Bluff. Just why, even Spath doesn't know . . . or care.

Well, I've saved the most amusing—and, if you don't happen to need Spath's services, possibly the most useful—site in Mortonbrace for last. Two sites, actually. The first and best-known stands on the north side of Selgaunt Street, two blocks south of the Coliseum (having recently relocated here from Crow's End). This is the Ravens Bluff branch of a string of shops all known as **Bendekar's Mercantile** (UM16), which sell every imaginable item or material that'll fit in a shop, isn't alive enough to require regular care or feeding, and can be used as a spell component or an ingredient for a

magical potion. This shop is a single large room with a counter at the back and a curtain-covered door leading to a vast storeroom and a loft where the staff sleep. It's crammed—with books, incomplete chess sets, jars of powders (such as mummy dust, flakes of dragon scales, and pulverized gems) and dried plant parts, human skeletons and a row of grinning skulls, more jars full of dried or pickled monster body parts (lots of ichor, scales, and eyeballs), a large glass-topped coffer full of feathers, fingerbones from various sorts of dead and undead, dirt from coffins and other particular places, and so on. If it's portable, strange, and either connected to magic or sounds like it might or should be, it's here. Ashes from an oak struck by lightning? Handfuls, over here. Shells from a snake-egg kissed by a princess before it hatched? In the green jar over there. The talon of a fiend that's been immersed in the heartsblood of a paladin? How many do you need?

Powerful guardian spells (involving instantly turning intruders to wooden statues or tiny figurines for some months) protect this shop from theft or vandalism, as more than one barbarian has learned to his dismay. The moth-eaten "stuffed" crow perched on a stand near the door is actually an ancient familiar shared by two mages: the scrawny, shuffling, mumbling drunkard Narr and his exact double (created by a poorly-worded *wish* spell). The two mages get along fine and, between hangovers, use their *identify* spells to help classify some of the items brought into the shop by adventurers looking to sell them. Bendekar himself is rarely here, leaving matters in the hands of his attractive, friendly, helpful assistant, Bailey, who helps appraise more ordinary items and help buyers find what they want in all the clutter . . . though I always feel that her eyes are also appraising me (and everyone else who comes into the shop), for some other purpose. Hmmm.

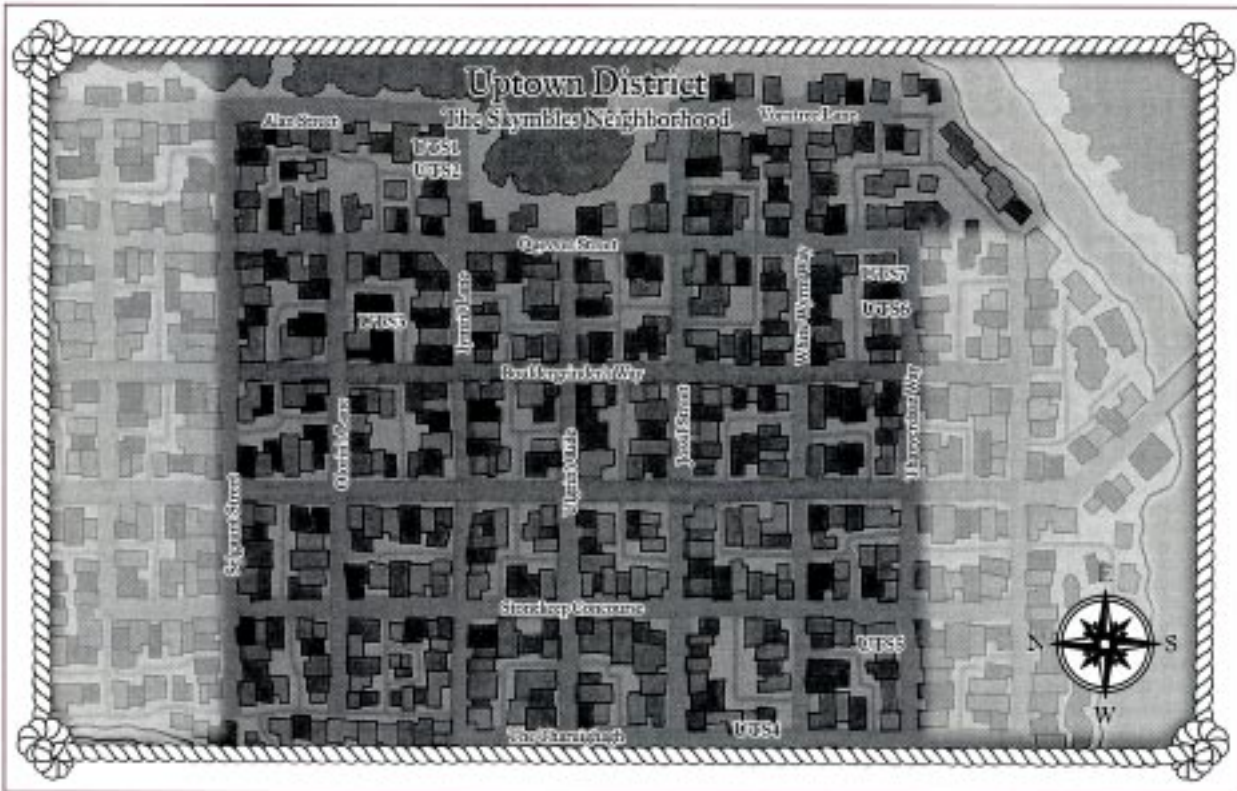
And if you think the clutter in Bendekar's shop is bad, you'd better never visit his house. **Bendekar's House** (UM17) stands on the south side of Griffon Trail, about mid-way between Stonekeep and Bouldergrinder's Way. You can't get in the front door anyway, because there's so much junk in the place—piled to the ceiling, fallen over in heaps, sliding everywhere—that the door is buried from within. The only way in is by the back door off the alley, through the (uncluttered) kitchen. Bendekar has a haughty old halfling named Pence who acts as his pastry-cook and butler, and there's something odd about *him*, too. Armor, copper pieces, interesting rocks, musical instruments, books, games, statues (including the inevitable adventurers-petrified-by-medusae), holy symbols—you name it, Bendekar collects it, outgrowing house after house (his last was in Silverscales; it's still there, filled to the rafters). It's impossible to steal something specific from this place; thieves have tried. Anything you can reach, now, yes, but you'd have to literally climb, crawl, or dig for hours if not days to search for something in particular. Someone who did said there's a beautiful woman—a vampire?—lying sealed in a glass case on a bed in the one uncluttered room upstairs (a feminine bedchamber, all in yellow). Come to think of it, Bendekar's third wife hasn't been seen for a while . . .

Ahem, well, I hope you've enjoyed our tour of Mortonbrace. I predict that it's the neighborhood of the Bluff that'll see the most growth in the next few years, as adventurers want digs and figure out that Tentowers next door is too expensive, too crowded with snobbery, and not worth avoiding the elbows of nobles throwing their weight around just to remind everyone who rules (increasingly, they don't, but let it pass . . .). Remember: "Mortonbrace is the place." You heard it here first.

The Skymbles

Mortonbrace may be a trifle neglected, but The Skymbles is *forgotten* (thus its name). It's where the common laborers of Ravens Bluff live—too poor to have anything of value or to see any life except endless toil, but too respectable to live in hopeless squalor. The folk who dwell here throw themselves into festivals with reckless eagerness, because the rest of life tends to be drudgery. All of the Skymbles is small homes, small apartment houses, laundry hanging on lines everywhere (in winter, too; the water freezes into ice and is paddled off) and warehouses. There's barely a handful or sites to show you. Just a breath or two, and we'll be done with this neighborhood. Try not to look like a tax collector, or a few stones might fall out of the sky at us.

We may as well begin by walking in along Alan Street. That'll take us past **Skymble Courthouse** (UTS1), the only civic building of any kind hereabouts. It's said (and correctly) the local officials are so seldom visited by "big folks" (their superiors) that they earn side money locking away valuables in unused cells for overnight—or a few hours—safe storage. I've heard that occasionally they'll lock up people as well, for the right price—just put



them on ice, so to speak, for a few hours "on suspicion" before releasing them unchanged. A neat way to temporarily get rid of inconvenient people, if true. Let's not loiter, just in case.

Right next door, down Iymbril Lane heading west, is the business **Weeds of Gold** (UTS2). Splendid sign, tobaccos to every taste, and a Watch patrol always in the trees across the way watching the entrance, so let's move on.

A block or so west, and then north on Bouldergrinder's Way, finds us at a place a lot of Ravenians hate to see: the **Shrine of Honest Toil** (UTS3), or city workhouse—"The Grind," the locals call it. Bad debtors have their loans paid off by Brockborten, the proprietor, who then requires them to work unpaid until they've earned out Brockborten's "loan" (plus his five-percent fee). Like the civic jailers, he finds ways of fining them (for bad work, falling asleep, cursing him, gossiping, and so on) to increase their debt, and sells them cheap ale at stiff prices besides. Any resident of Ravens Bluff can buy the services of debtors from Brockborten; those he can't rent out get set to work at looms in the otherwise bare workshop to weave gray woolen cloth (for guard uniforms). It's a grim place, and usually home to ten to forty unwilling "guests," some of whom will be kidnap victims hidden here, outlaws willingly hiding here, or individuals enslaved by forged debt charges. Brockborten is an evil and very rich man, who seems to work with many of the Bluff's thieves and gangs. It's not wise to fall anywhere within his reach. Those dozen or so men loitering in the alley are either some of his guards or some thieves waiting for a debtor to be released, or a press gang looking for solitary targets. We won't tarry, but there's no need for haste. They know me . . . or rather, they've met my knives before. We'll turn west down Olorin's Lane here—no, don't look back, of course one of them will follow to see where we go—until we reach The Tharuighagh. That's "Thar-ROO-igg-gah!" An orc chieftain, or orc oath, or something in the tongue of orcs, I believe. Maybe he's buried under the street somewhere.

South of Jossil, here, on the east side, stands our next site of interest: **Traagor's Tours and Souvenir Shop** (UTS4). If you want embroidered tours of the Bluff, with lots of colorful tales—true or not—this is the place to come. Rooth Traagor and her son Eldwin hire and train local orphans to run the tours and help about the place. They do two to four general tours of the city a day, at a silver piece a head (in daylight; double that after dark). Just outside, no admittance charges or inside looks included. They also do

special tours for two silver pieces a shot: all temples, or all magic sites, or things warriors'll be interested in, or a rakehell tour of taverns and clubs, or a haunted house tour, or (my favorite) the one for lovers where they take you boating, after wine and sweets to nibble in the public parks, and tell about the love-tragedies, and so on. All very nice; you should try it sometime. They also sell toys, a lot of junk that advertises local businesses (tankards, candles, banners, you know), crude city maps only marked with those same fee-paying businesses, and a tunic and tabard slogan-painting service (cheap one-size-fits-all stuff, 4 cp to 7 sp depending on what you want painted on them and if you want it scorched at all to dry the paint). There used to be a beauty parlor and a used gown shop on the floors above, but they've closed, and you can hear the roof leaking through into those empty floors when it rains.

There's really not a lot else left to see in The Skymbles. We can see most of it by staying on The Tharuighagh until we reach Thavverdasz Way, and then going east along that. Here's the first place, on the northwest corner of Thavverdasz and Stonekeep. Yes, it's just an apartment house—though six stories and grander than any other building we've yet seen in The Skymbles. This is **Marlgates** (UTS5), another of the old mansions owned by the Ampner noble family and converted into rental units (here small, cramped apartments with an entire family per room, as a rule). Personally, I find it depressing. Our next site, along Thavverdasz past Bouldergrinder's Way, is another Ampner manor gone to apartments. It's the place with the crumbling mosaic of a dolphin and an anchor, there, called **Alambaler House** (UTS6); I think Alambaler was a favored Ampner son, generations back, who went adventuring and never came back. Angry fathers got him, I expect.

The last site we'll stop at is probably the most welcoming place we'll find in The Skymbles. It's here on the northwest corner of Thavverdasz and Queever Street: **Nimber's Skewer Shop** (UTS7). Not a sit-down restaurant, but a place where you show up at the window, point at one of the skewers sitting under oil in the trays (or, if you've got longer, shout out an order for something specific), pay three coppers, and watch it sizzle. Then it gets slid off the skewer and handed out to you on a piece of old tile or shingle, and you eat it as soon as it's cool enough. Quite a variety of fare, though: fried and battered smallbirds that are all crunch and no meat, skewers of swordfish alternated with mango (light and tangy), eel and sesame



(too oily for my taste), and unidentified fish chunks (these taste like harbor refuse, or like lumps of salt too long in the barrel). When they get quail, though—ah, so velvety in the mouth.

Crow's End District

Anvil

This neighborhood is the heart of power and activity in the inner harbor (Clearwater Harbor) of Ravens Bluff. Some Ravenians say it is the true heart, soul, and driving force of the city, where what happens every day keeps the city alive—and that it would and could keep going, and the character of Ravens Bluff would survive with it, if the Temple and Uptown districts were leveled and laid waste in an instant by some evil spell or other. Whenever this point is raised, someone inevitably comments, “What a good idea,” and everyone laughs, and no more is meaningfully said on the matter—but it came closer to happening in the war than is comfortable.

Anvil is where every Merchant House, shipping concern, and thieving cabal must have reach and presence; Anvil is “where the hammer comes down” (and only the strong survive), as the old Ravenaar saying has it—for all I know, it dates back to the City of the Hammer and the dwarven days. Anvil is the district of the city most awake with groaning carts and sweating loaders at all hours; Market may have more people, but Anvil has more carts and wagons and goods being moved. It is the district of the city that displays the most architectural variety, where more races and folk of different social classes and backgrounds rub shoulders by day and dwell by night. It’s the place most adventurers prefer to play in, when drink and company are their goals. And it’s the place the Watch knows is the true key to keeping the city governed and law-abiding; the Watch stands more thickly on the cobbles in Anvil than anywhere else, though they may be more obvious elsewhere (such as the Foreign District, Tentowers, and Sixstar). Here the constables spread out singly or in pairs, taking regular “beats” so they can get to know every citizen and shop in the neighborhood (and can spot in a moment when something’s not right). A single whistle can bring a dozen fellow officers on the scene in a matter of minutes, with more on the way. Keep an eye out and I’m sure you’ll spot the occasional constable—watching things unfold from a rooftop, or poking his or her nose into dockside loading and unloading, or paying a friendly visit to a shop or warehouse or tavern, just to see that all’s as it should be. As near as I can tell, being no expert, they wander the streets in a deliberately random fashion to prevent anyone taking advantage of a regular pattern.

Like most true Ravenians, I love Anvil—with all its danger, smells, and unpleasantness, it’s the place where one can feel shining-eyed excitement more often than anywhere else. Go and tour it, urge you, and go often—but go alone and you might find more excitement than you bargained for.

Walk with me now, as we see a handful of the many, many sights (there’re more sites of interest in Anvil, I’d judge, than anywhere else, if one really cares to look). Let’s begin where Blacktree Boulevard South ends, nigh the water, not far from the Ill Eagle Inn. A muddy, part-boardwalk, nameless lane that is called “the Dockfront” more than anything else runs along the seaward edge of Anvil and near its corner with Blacktree, on the east side, stands **The Black Lotus** (CA1) apothecary shop. The proprietor, Will Caldan (a bearded fellow with a patch over his left eye who knows some magics, I’m told, though he emphasizes this not at all in his daily dealings) sells herbs, medicines (both powders and cordials), salves and, the whispers run, a few poisons. He lives in the shop, which is an almost square stone building with a slate roof that looks solid enough to withstand the fiercest gales. The Lotus is always busy, and I’ve seen mages slipping in and out of its door; perhaps Caldan sells potion ingredients or other useful herbs a tad more cheaply than the shops in safer neighborhoods. Or maybe he stocks items more reputable shops shun.

If we jaunt along Blacktree to Summers Street and head east to its ending in a meeting with DeVillars Ride, we pass **Shining Scales Hall** (CA2), a solid, irregular pile of a place on the north side that is the headquarters of the Fishmongers Association. Up these warped, sagging front steps (and, inside, sagging floors), into the expected smell of fish everywhere, is a truly magnificent sight: the “Harbor Horror,” a mummified seventy-foot-long eel in its case all down one side of the central hallway. This menace was pulled from the depths of the harbor after a wizard’s spell pushed back the waters temporarily, sending warriors to bodily haul forth the creature that had dragged down and devoured so many dogs, children, halflings, gnomes, dwarves, and small light women. Other sea creatures stand in trophy cases of



their own, but all pale beside that monster. The Fishmongers are good friends and bad enemies; if you’re on good terms with them, Guildmaster Leif Alltheir and his amazing wife Kira can arrange all sorts of favors—but do them a bad turn and you’ll be lucky to get off with a fish in the face and bedful of eels. As for the hall itself, you’ve probably already guessed that its name comes from the unusual external decoration: cedar shakes all down its southern wall that have been puttied and then painted with shining silver paint. This was done so long ago that no one can remember the guildmember who gave the building these giant mock scales—but the guild carefully oils them monthly to keep the cedar from drying out and splitting or any other ravages of weather from marring the silver paint or sculpting-work. It’s a visual curiosity, and somehow both whimsical and proud.

A block to the north of Summers is Black Visor Street; half a block east of the intersection stands a building that was once the site of the now-defunct “Healthier Living” establishment. Now it’s home to **Winn’s Ice House** (CA3), which relocated after their former building burned down (ironic, isn’t it?). The old place was just called “The Ice House,” but now owner Darra Winn, the mage who runs it with the help of her three daughters, added her name to the sign—and why not? They work hard enough. They still use the same underground caverns as before to store ice. In the height of summer the Ice House sells flavored shaved ice to the neighborhood children (and halflings from all over the city) for a few coppers, but its profit comes from rushing wagons of sawdust- and hay-shrouded ice to clubs, restaurants, nobles’ mansions, and the offices maintained by the knightly orders. And its daily bread is earned by providing ice in bulk to fishmongers seeking to keep their catches edible on trips to shops in the Bluff and elsewhere. Local rumors insist (quite unjustly, I assure you) that from time to time the Ice House caverns keep cool other things besides ice, such as bodies awaiting staged “deaths” in the future.

Around the corner of the same block, fronting on Blacktree, stands **Flora’s Flower Shop** (CA4). The Ampner noble family recently purchased the original shop, tore it down, and built a four-story rental apartment building here (with a rooftop garden that is the envy of neighbors for blocks around), with the flower shop occupying the ground floor of the premises rent-free. They kept the penthouse suite for their own use, often (so the rumors go) housing here whichever adventurers they’ve currently hired to carry out unpleasant tasks for them.





Across an alley from this latest Ampner venture into rebuilding stands an Anvil institution: **The Cracked Tankard** (CA5). This “low dive, where sailors snore in their own spew and bosoms are displayed more than honest faces” (as the late Judge Hangman once so charmingly put it, in his own inimitable way) fronts on Red Wyrms Ride; it’s been cleaned up, a bit, since that glowing comment was made. Sailors still come here, ladies still greet them, and there are still punch-ups, drunkards collapsing, and shady dealings . . . but there are also a growing number of “regulars” who regard this place as their own. Increasingly, they keep the peace, foster traditions and a “family” attitude, and growl about the old days, when things were truly dangerous. I like this place, warts and all; it feels rough, and dangerous (and it can be, if you come here looking for trouble)—but warm underneath, rather than menacing or mean. Adventurers like to brawl here, and young sailors too. Thieves keep their heads down these days, and their knives sheathed; too many Tankard regulars like throwing cutpurses through windows—without bothering to open the shutters first.

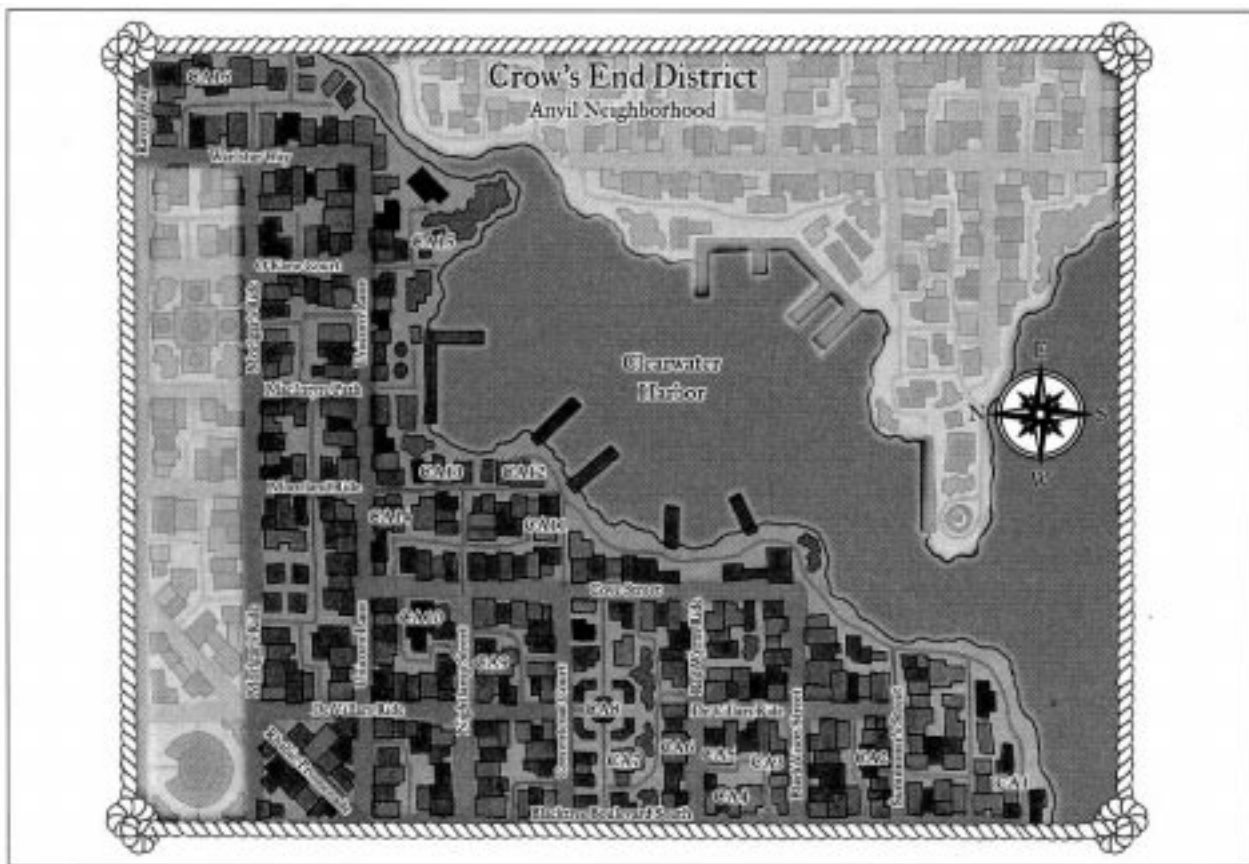
Facing the Tankard just across the road on the north side of Red Wyrms Ride stands the local **Red Ravens** firefighting hall (CA6). This specimen of the city-wide service is housed in an old granary which has a rickety, leaning-to-the-west wooden tower on its roof that local children still like to climb on dares. Silver with age, the planks and beams of this once-proud cupola are warped comically, but the unmistakable landmark they provide makes this a popular meeting-place for visitors to Anvil. More than one duel to the death has been fought with knives aloft in its creaking timbers, watched by a wagering crowd below; the winner is often not the one who’s quickest with the blade but he or she who’s most sure-footed.

Behind the Red Ravens hall, fronting on a nameless lane that parallels Red Wyrms Ride to the south and Crescentcoat Court to the north, is the **Anvil Courthouse** (CA7)—also, of course, the local Watch barracks. Of stout stone and with thick iron bars covering all of its windows, this building was intended to withstand a riot; there’s nothing flammable anywhere on its outside (even the door is clad in sheets of various metals, and the

windowframes are wrought iron; the roof is slate metal-stapled through metal sheathing). Inside are many holding cells; it’s always been intended as a place where two warring crews of sailors could be locked up separately if a full-scale brawl erupted anywhere in “Dockland.” This is the only Watch base that officially houses a restaurant and “wenching rooms,” as they’re affectionately called, where female officers can slip on various low disguises before slipping out on undercover patrol. It’s also the only Watch base equipped with both long ladders and a battering ram (the others all have one or the other, not both).

Just northeast of the Courthouse stands perhaps the most architecturally striking feature in the whole Anvil district: an octagonal central building surrounded by four “corner” buildings. Collectively, these structures make up the **Central Warehouse Registry** of Ravens Bluff (CA8), where—under the watchful eyes of everpresent Watch officers and customs officials—goods are inspected, crated (or re-crated), and labeled. Then their storage destination, in the hundreds of “on-register” warehouses all over the city, is dickered for and registered. In theory, the authorities can track where a particular boot or blade is stored in Ravens Bluff at any given time. In practice, the mere filing of the necessary paperwork is so time consuming that only on very rare occasions can things be tracked down by means of their “registry trails” on short notice. Still, every Ravenian knows that the last button or false Thayvian eyelash imported to the city can be retrieved if necessary—or at least an apologetic note from the thief who removed the item, under pressing financial need. Out of sheer despairing necessity, registry fees have been kept both low and standardized: two coppers per crate, regardless of size.

From here let’s take DeVillars Ride north from the Registry for a block to Nightlamp Street and then turn east. Here we find, two doors up on the south side, **Lamplit Hall** (CA9), headquarters of the Chandlers Guild. True to its name, this building is brightly lit after dark by forty or more flickering flames: individual candles located in copper half-spheres set into the outer walls of the elegant, four-story stone building, with glass window-coverings over each that never seem to grow smoky. What most folk don’t know is that





only one candle is lit every night, inside the Hall: all of the reassuringly glimmering flames one sees from afar across Anvil are magically generated reflections of this one flame. The permanent enchantment is the work of old Ambassador Carrague, dating from his younger, less vague days.

Half a block to the northeast of the Chandlers' headquarters, fronting on Cove Street, is another guildhall: **The Cask of Casks** (CA10), home of the Coopers Guild. This building has an appearance that fully matches its splendid name: from the east, it looks just like a gigantic cask on end, thanks to its bulging second floor (of three), its vertical cedar planking, and the bands of weathered copper that encircle the building. Known as "the Old Cask" to guildmembers, it's (appropriately enough) used largely for storage. The Coopers purchase the best woods for barrel-making in bulk whenever they can find good material at reasonable or bargain prices and store it here in optimum conditions. They have steaming facilities inside and much sealing-pitch stored in a cellar (far underground in old dwarven tunnels, to keep the risk of fire low). The Coopers always keep a keg or two of any potable they're commissioned to encask, and from time to time they gather in the privacy of the Old Cask to drain such barrels, in wild parties that involve a lot of amiable female companionship and wild pranks that—very rarely—spill out into the dark night streets of the Anvil, hooting with laughter, for the common amusement of neighbors and weary Watch officers alike. I've never quite figured out why, but a lot of female Watch officers get invited to these occasional parties, and so far as I can tell they always accept.

Our next site of interest stands on the north side of the nameless lane that continues Crescentcoat Court to the docks. It's an old, two-story stone building huddled among fish-drying warehouses that offers little of interest to the eye on the outside, beyond a simple sign proclaiming it to be **Black Dugal's Music Shoppe** (CA11). Black Dugal Buchanan, the half-elven mage who runs this establishment and builds very fine musical instruments therein, lives alone above the shop. His work is flawless, and (given a year and money enough) I've heard that he can craft enchanted instruments to cast certain defensive or benign wizards' spells when specific melodies are played upon them. Dugal often hires adventurers to transport such masterpieces to their purchasers, or to find and bring him back certain rare woods (such as shadeapple, ondrithin, ringnut, and blentlarn) that he uses in crafting instruments.

Around the corner from Dugal's, on the east side of the lane that runs from the foot of Moorland Ride to meet up with the Dockfront, stands **Vlard's Maintenance Yard** (CA12). Just steps from the water, this establishment repairs ships—anything from rowboats to small cogs or full-sized caravels—scraping off barnacles, resealing the hulls, and giving them a fresh lick of paint. Due to sabotage of ships in drydock by rivals I won't name, but whose businesses we saw outside the city wall north along the shore in the Harbor district, Vlard's was recently rebuilt as a ramp-and-cradle operation so that vessels can be worked on wholly indoors. The owner, Vlard Bluegill, proudly guarantees all work for half a year: if his work fails due to "natural causes"—i.e., for any reason except due to magic or attacks at sea—he'll replace or redo it for free. Ships usually take a month or less to "set right," depending on size and what damage must be made good. Vlard is experimenting with a floating drydock that would be moored in the harbor for use in repairing the largest ships; his small but expert band of shipwrights have the skills to handle any job. A series of "accidents" have befallen his best workers over this last year, though, and Vlard suspects that a certain Corbet Coker is behind these somehow—with the aid of someone within his own staff. But who?

Four doors or so north up the lane from Vlard's stands the principal warehouse and offices of the **Whale's Tail** (CA13), another of the up-and-coming mercantile collectives in the Bluff that hope to rise to the dignity of Merchant House. It's swiftly acquiring a reputation for shady dealings, brawling workers, and possible pirate connections. The signboard, a carved wooden whale's tail with flukes upcurled, juts out of the west wall of this headquarters building, well out over the street—posing a seemingly irresistible lure for youngsters with a hunger for climbing.

A few steps away along an alley (but fronting on Unicorn Lane) stands **Sternbound Hall** (CA14), headquarters of the fractious Leatherworkers and Tanners Guild. This fine black-stained oak building with brass porthole windows and brass front railings has been the scene of many a brawl between furious guildmembers. Smashed bottles were favorite guild weapons until glass of all kinds was outlawed from the Hall; drinks are now served in clay mugs, and the only glass to be found is in the thick, nigh-unbreakable porthole windows. Brawls are fewer these days, too, as guildmembers have

learned a little wisdom the hard way—the factions of their former days were being repeatedly manipulated by various thieving groups and merchant cabals into internal guild battles that cost guildmembers money directly as well as robbed them of any opportunity to act together against merchant rivals (such as pirate-backed leather importers).

Still, I'd rather meet a guildmember in a restaurant or tavern somewhere, noise and lack of privacy notwithstanding, than willingly enter Stembound Hall as a guest. See that prow of a rowboat protruding from an upper gable window about halfway along the Hall's irregular roof? That's a relic of a titanic battle in which rival guildmembers brought along hired mages as champions, and things *really* got out of hand. The hurled boat killed one mage, whose bones are still beneath it—but not before he'd sent eight screaming guildmembers fleeing down the street blazing like torches to drown the flames, and themselves, in the Fire River. It's said that on wet nights their screams can still be faintly heard, racing down the street accompanied by the smell of roasting human flesh . . .

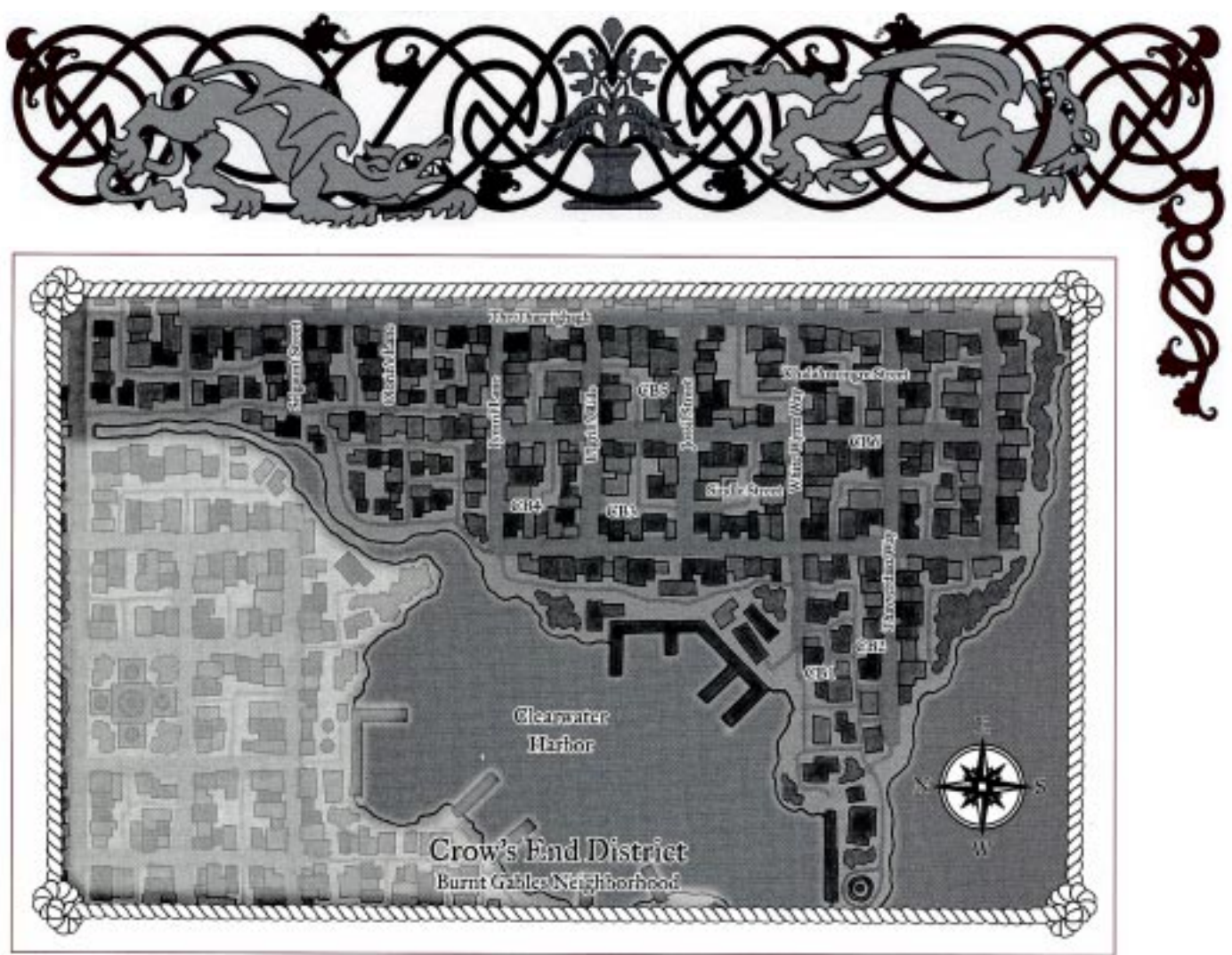
Turning to slightly more pleasant topics, two full blocks to the east brings us to the foot of O'Kane Court and the dirt lane that extends it to the water's edge. On the east side of this muddy, descending track stands a second **Whale's Tail** warehouse (CA 15), where small skiffs can readily reach it with cargo. On its roof lies a long sturdy plank that can be thrust out from the warehouse to boats anchored offshore in the harbor. The Watch has taken to patrolling the vicinity of this warehouse very carefully since a struggling young noblewoman managed to break free of her guide-chains one night while being carried to a ship along this plank. She told the bystanders who came to her rescue that she was supposed to have been drugged senseless but happened to be immune to the substance used. The **Whale's Tail** has naturally denied any knowledge of its premises or staff being involved—but the Watch are making sure that the Tail spokesmen weren't just forgetful or hold to some definition of slavery that the rest of Faerûn might not recognize.

Our last stop in the Anvil is right at its most northeasterly tip, in the small tongue of shoreline just south of Raven Way at Omphrel's Span (the most downstream bridge that crosses DeVillars Creek). Here, on an alley that runs east and then south from Waelstar Way, stands **The Posh Paladin Hotel** (CA16). The establishment's name began as a joke (when it was a filthy, echoing warehouse with ladders for stairs and a loft rope-and-pulley lift to carry luggage upstairs or down) but has become something worn with pride. Down the passing years, the **Paladin** has been slowly rebuilt into a cozy, shabby-genteel hotel, its crude signboard replaced by a living man in silvergilt armor with a wooden practice sword in hand, who takes to the streets and challenges passing "belligerent warriors" to mock duels. In recent days, unbeknownst to the hotel staff, the man hired to be "the **Paladin**" turned out to be a deadly retired Cormyrean weapons master—and several sneak-thieves have paid the price. This danger keeps some of the shadier traders away from the **Paladin** and has definitely increased its reputation. Ravenian ladies now book stays here just to see the lordly Defender of Right close-up. Some even get to see rather more of him, so the rumors go, than just his bright armor.

The hotel is damp, wretchedly cold in winter (insist on hot stones in your bed and hot water in your bath), and plagued by the fishy smell of rotting things in the nearby harbor. But it's also cheap, relatively private (that is, not peered at by Ravenian high society to see who's in town), equipped with many comfortable old armchairs and good stout beds, and it has a friendly, motherly staff. They've been known to strip soaked and snoring sailors, wash them with warm water, towel them dry, and then gently put them to bed—all without waking them. Lockbox services are available, and covert exits can be arranged for four gold pieces per head through a tunnel that links the hotel with a larder-warehouse on the south side of Morlgar's Ride, for those in whom the Watch seems too interested. For a single gold, a whole group can avail themselves of a somewhat cheaper exit, down the fishgut chute straight into Clearwater Harbor—but I wouldn't recommend it unless you're *really* desperate.

Burnt Gables

The cleaner, quieter, more boringly businesslike (and slightly more squalid) east side of Clearwater Harbor is **Burnt Gables**, a neighborhood named for a long-ago fire that destroyed several grand wooden houses that just happened to stand in the way of the expansionist property-owning plans of several senior noble families. Today it's the quieter sister of the Anvil, and a place with few sights to entertain the visitor—unless the visi-



tor is *very* heartily interested in fishing and merchant shipping, and all the gear that goes with those two concerns; almost every building in this area is a warehouse used to temporarily store either boats and their various accessories or trade goods. All this bores me to tears; accordingly, our tour will be a brief one.

We'll begin on the point that some call "the Snout," others refer to as "Fire Point," and still others call "Dragonmembers" due to the legendary fiery death of a black dragon under the talons and fiery breath of a red dragon, in the days when the whole city was just a tavern on the south bank of the Fire River. For map-readers, it's the promontory whose backbone is Thavverdasz Way. Our first stop—just as if we were visiting sailors—will be at the **Harbor Office** (CB1). This was one of the few grand houses that did survive the fire: a charming chaos of porches, turrets, gables, little rooftop ladders, crumbling shingles, and spitting-vulture downspouts. All ships that dock in Ravens Bluff must file ownership and cargo papers here—and most of them actually remember to do so, though the veracity of some of the documents is questionable. Utterly ridiculous claims are investigated on the spot by Harbor Patrol officers: get them to tell you some of their stories about things they've run into on the job sometime. My personal favorite is the one about the ship that claimed to have a full hold of "premium fresh dragonscales" and somehow neglected to mention that a living, subdued dragon was still wearing them!

A few steps to the south of the Harbor Office, if we step around the customs warehouse used to store contraband and other confiscated cargoes, stands **Crimyn's Imported Silks** (CB2), a warehouse that has seen adventurers' battles and monster-importation smuggling in the past and now routinely receives Harbor Patrol inspections. As a result, it has been rebuilt into a high-security, very clean, and well-lit stone storage house now specializing not just in silks but in valuable cargoes of all kinds. Guards are always amply in evidence, Watch observers are always on-site, and Crimyn's is the first place many Ravenians think of when they need to temporarily store valuables. The rates are high, but Crimyn's guarantees against loss, and the firm has even invested in sealed boxes that contain paralyzation *glyphs* that can be displayed to monsters, mages, or other attackers the guards can't readily handle.

The most important buildings in Burnt Gables stand along either Thavverdasz Way or Sindle Street; taking the latter northwards, we soon come to **E.L.F. & Co.** (CB3), standing on the west side between a pair of short-rent sailors' rooming houses. This trading concern, named for the three founders (Eldritch, Lightfoot, & Findrol), used to deal in textiles, spices, and gems but gradually came to specialize in selling sails, rolls of canvas for patching sails and tarps at sea, and replacement masts. Their prices are lower than those of Vlard's, High Seas, and others who do the work for the client; E.L.F. is strictly a pay-and-haul-away business, serving crews who need the means to do it themselves.

At the end of Sindle Street, the most northerly building on the west side is one of the most famous Burnt Gables landmarks. **The Bandaged Wound** (CB4) can be identified by that large red-lettered wooden sign above a door that's always open (amazingly, it doesn't even have a lock or bolts-and-bars). This infirmary welcomes the injured of all races, creeds, and professions, and even aids those who can't pay for healing up front. Run by two Zhent-born brothers (Tiran and Chiron Laventhos, the first a mage and the second a priest of Mystra) and an elven priest of Mystra (Tarron Crystallmere), it serves mainly drunks, members of the Watch, and dockloaders injured in dockside accidents but also caters to adventurers. No judgments are placed on how wounds were come by, and the treatment is superb. Those who arrive injured will always be treated, regardless of their ability to pay; those with the means are often requested to bring back certain rare herbs useful in the making of healing salves, poultices, and potions.

The three proprietors are all dedicated healers who have attracted volunteers and admirers from among the populace to assist them (as well as junior clergy from various local temples who often put in a day's service on a regular basis). Those in need of spells to combat blindness, disease, poisoning, and severe wounds are referred to one of the Civil Temples. One of the three principal healers is always on duty at any time, and they always want to know (for themselves) the true cause of all afflictions. They therefore use detection spells and plague-finding magics of their own devising (which work only when cast by persons who have knowingly come into contact with plague symptoms before) on all patients whose injuries aren't obvious and simple in origin. If such problings turn up nothing, a patient isn't charged for them.



The Wound is a major reason why many sailors active in the Reach consider Ravens Bluff their home port, preferable to other havens. It's also a gift of the gods to the Ravenian poor, many of whom are still alive thanks to the efforts of its relentless dedicated healers. Many a suffering adventurer has praised the gods for its existence and easy-to-reach location . . . and hoped they'd reach it in time. Its resources were stretched to the limit and beyond during the war, with its staff working on wounded brought in from the battlefield until all three literally dropped in their tracks. They've recovered now, I'm glad to say, and are back at work on their chosen task.

Turning the corner onto Iymril Lane and then again a block later to head back south on Khamongre Street, we pass the **Downunda Patisserie** (CB5), the source of fine cakes for special occasions, fresh bread (the cheese loaves are especially delectable—and gone within a few minutes of the shop opening, every mom), hand cakes, and pastries. It's the most popular neighborhood destination for Ravenians visiting from other areas of the city and is always a busy place; the Watch officers always find time to drop by on their rounds. Owner and chief baker Jemima Chisholm recently hired a second family (the Lontles, who own the oarlock-and-fittings shop next door) just to purchase and fetch flour and the various fruits, nuts, seasonings, and other ingredients needed in the baking; her own children work a second shift at the ovens as well as putting out and selling wares. The Patisserie is now open from before dawn until dusk—oh, the name? I've heard it was suggested to Jemima by a passing old and bearded mage who said he was from Shadowdale but had journeyed to "far places indeed," and that bakershops like hers were sometimes called "patisseries" there.

Continuing down Khamongre to Thavverdasz, let's turn back west on it towards the Snout Light. I think this tower would look more impressive—and be a more useful landmark for sightseeing travelers and sailors alike—if it was rebuilt. During the recent war, a band of Talos-worshippers got to work attacking temples, setting fires, causing explosions, and the like in the city; one afternoon they toppled the Snout Light. Something to do, I suppose.

Between Khamongre and Sindle is an alleyway; right beside it stands our last site of interest in Burnt Gables: the **Deephands Nettery & Net Repair** (CB6). This huge, old rambling barn of a building has a rooftop catwalk with hanging hooks, rollers, and cranked pulleys so that on any dry, sunny day nets can be stretched out to dry and be worked on. The shallow-pitched roof is fitted with walkboards nailed atop its shingles to keep the staff from falling as they clamber over nets, sewing and braiding ropes and painting on grease to keep nets supple. Deephands buys old and damaged fishing nets, sells refurbished and new nets, and repairs nets for those not in, if you'll forgive the expression, a tearing hurry. Many folk around here swear that Deephands nets are rented under the table to dealers in illicit goods that can't be harmed by immersion—and used to sink goods in the Fire River, to be left hidden under the murky mud until hooked to the surface after dark and either dragged upstream for unloading outside the walls or taken aboard ships in the harbor for integration into their legal cargoes. Naturally enough, no one is volunteering any specific recent information regarding this practice, but everyone seems to think it goes on—and that those imprisoned in the *Golden Ball* and other harbor hulks occasionally get liquor or even weapons or bottled acid to eat away manacles and chains by such means.

ShadyStreets

The north bank of the Fire River, for a few streets in, is home to this poorest, grubbier, most tumbledown neighborhood of the Bluff. Named for the slum haunt-of-thieves reputation it enjoys, ShadyStreets is home to a handful of surprises, among all the rotting-fish squalor citizens expect to find. Refuse, hanging laundry, and mildewed, sagging, unpainted wooden rooming houses—most of them equipped with roofed porches that run the length of each floor and are held up by old pieces of ships set at crazy angles to serve as braces—are everywhere. Rats and dirty children scramble here and there, and many folk don't care to ever stray off Stonekeep Concourse on their hurried way through this darkest of neighborhoods.

Unless you've a real taste for squalor, there's not a lot to see in ShadyStreets, but I'll show you what does shine forth. Let's begin our tour at The Ravensbridge (also known as Piratesshead Bridge, among many other old names) that links the north and south banks of the Fire River together. Our first site of interest stands hard by the bridge on the west side, fronting on Stonekeep Concourse. **The Salty Dog** (CS1) is the roughest sort of sailors' tavern—the refuge of those with a silver piece to get in, the thirst to want

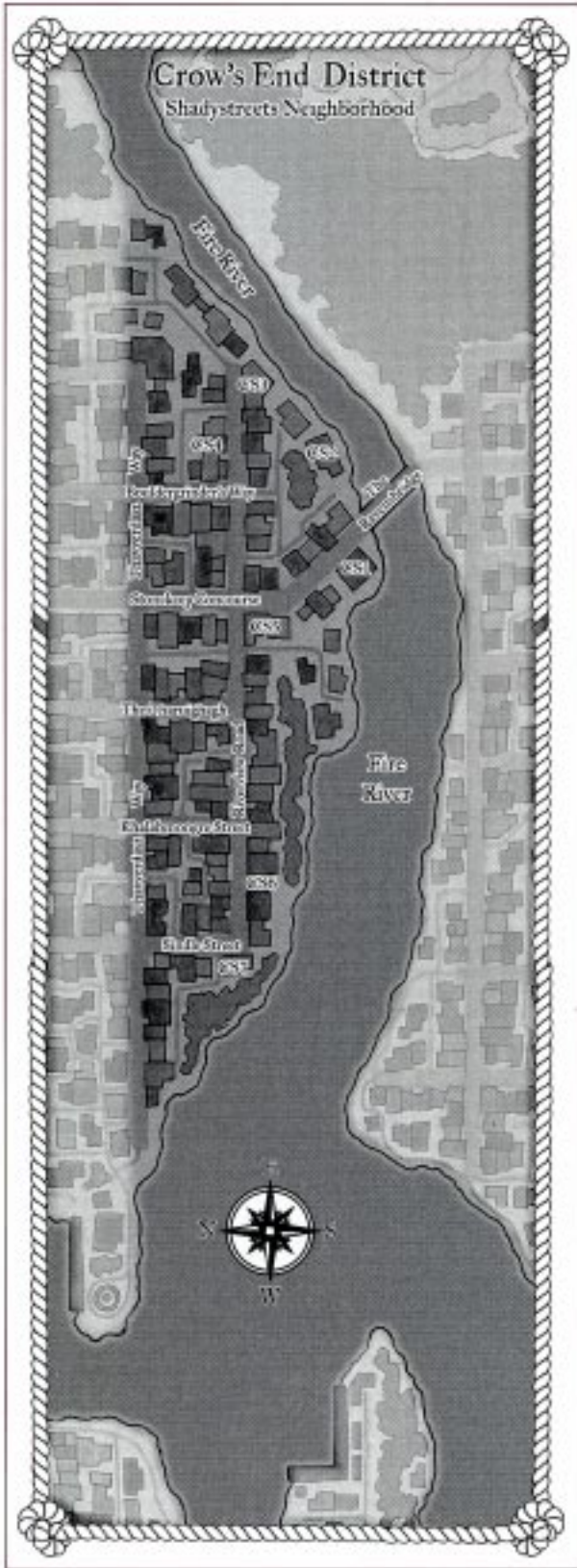
to, weapons enough to dare enter, and a liking for gambling of all kinds. The cellars of the Dog host contests of all sorts, all heavily wagered upon; favorites include rat-killing competitions (in which the dog that kills the largest number of hungry rats during a set time wins), dart throws, arm wrestling, and knife fights. The upper floors are home to those who gamble with cards and dice, to the accompaniment of much drinking; there are four floors above the cellars, with the uppermost, under the rafters, being given over to living quarters for the staff. The largest room, "the Tusk Room" (decorated by a narwhal's tusk running along one wall), is used for private meetings and heavily-wagered-upon games of chess and the like between masters.

It's here that the pirate Miriel Smith lost her boots and breeches in a game of Madknights (a popular local card game) but staked her remaining garments and won two ships and a cargo of eels, happily refused to swap them back. It's here that the mage Mastraero of Calaunt turned everyone who witnessed his defeat at chess into snails—except his opponent, an unscrubbed sailor who revealed himself as Ambassador Carrague, who changed the snails all back (Mastraero was found the next day, much the worse for wear, having been forced to eat ten pounds of salt by the former snails). And it's here that two adventuring bands met to plan an attack on a ruined mansion being used by smugglers and ended up battling the patron who'd hired them—a vampire, who slew most of them before being himself destroyed. In the process, the Tusk Room's lone gable window was created, when the vampire thrust a plate-armored warrior bodily (and fatally) right up through the roof, punching a bloody hole and then stuffing a second adventurer through it—sideways. The Dog is heavily patrolled these days but remains a place that the delicate, easily offended, or unable-to-defend-themselves shouldn't enter.

The second stop on our tour stands at water's edge below the bridge and is reached by means of a muddy alley that runs south off Riverview Road. It's a large, rusty old building entirely sheathed in a clumsy patchwork of battered-flat, nailed-down armor plate and salvaged metal of all sorts, in an attempt to "ward off fire." No sign tells anyone that this is **Spengeloar Masts & Spars** (CS2), but once inside you can hardly miss the racks and racks of smooth, oiled wooden poles that fill the place (carefully espelled to prevent warping, or so the proprietors claim, and in some cases laminated with inlaid strips of weirwood for maximum bend-not-break durability in gales). Spengeloar masts are the best, most Ravenian sailors agree, and this place does a steady—and due to its high prices, very profitable—trade with shipbuilding and refitting yards up and down the Reach, as well as locally.

Two warehouses upriver, fronting on the end of Riverview Road, stands the **Dyddow Barrelworks** (CS3), where Ilias Dyddow and a staff of industrious gnomes turn out casks, kegs, barrels, and tuns of all sizes and several degrees of sturdiness and sheathing (it's now possible to get armor-plated kegs, though I can't imagine why anyone would want such things). Useful as seating, if nothing else, and fascinating to watch—the staves are steamed and bent, the hoops are fitted red-hot, and steam and the smell of scorched wood are everywhere. Small forests of barrels are stacked on all sides, and gnomes run along "trotboards" laid atop them to reach corners not yet quite stacked to the ceiling or to retrieve barrels of specific sizes for clients (if I was being chased by someone I really, really didn't want to catch me, I might try to lose them on those trotboards). A variety of identifying marks can be branded into barrels upon purchase, or the buyers can apply their own marks later.

On the north side of Riverview Road, a few doors west of the Barrelworks, stands the local **Red Ravens** firefighting hall (CS4), equipped with a fire-tower that can actually spray water on flaming roofs from afar. Someone's been setting fires in the neighborhood recently, and I think it's just for the fun of seeing the pumps in action (they are impressive). All this spectacular display is thanks to the good wares produced in the large building that stands in the southwest corner of the meeting of Stonekeep Concourse and Riverview Road: **Lalobaer's Pumps & Piping** (CS5). Another gnome-dominated workplace, this one produces (and, within Ravens Bluff, installs or fixes leaks in) that new-fangled copper piping you might have seen or heard about. It also produces man-driven piston pumps of sturdy quality that can jet forth water with enough force to hurl aside the average person. The Ravens are experimenting with a portable Lalobaer treadle pump for fighting fires—so if you see men and women taking turns jumping up and down in the back of a cart at the scene of a fire, they're doing something practical, not performing a frivolous dance or odd religious ritual. A few of the more forward-thinking Ravenians now fill bathtubs on upper floors of their manor houses by means of



Lalobaer pumps instead of struggling servants staggering up and down the stairs carrying heavy panniers of heated water. Gundiman Lalobaer and his son and two daughters are always at work on new pump designs, seeking the one that will make them fabulously rich—and bring pumped water to every Ravenian and many other Faerûnians. This factory has watchful guards, thanks to a habit practiced by many visiting worshipers of Gond of casually carrying away every pump part or fitting that's not firmly fixed down, for surrendering to waiting Gondsmen priests at the Turning Wheel.

Two blocks to the west down Riverview from Lalobaer's, on the south side of the road, stands a one-story stone building that sports one of the must-see sights of Ravens Bluff: an animated rooftop sign advertising the business of **Signs Painted** (CS6). The owner and proprietor, the illusionist Kavan Brenzan (a moody sort who owns a playful miniature black panther called Eclipse) paints and touches up fine quality signs, wall murals, and shield scenes for warriors. He even paints or sketches folk he's had dealings with for his own amusement (including, of course, many well-known citizens; the Watch has been known to bring folk who can't speak or who have lost their wits to view Brenzan's many portraits, to see if they recognize one).

Even folk not interested in having a sign painted enjoy watching Brenzan's sign (which is the result of a *permanent illusion* spell, one mage assured me). Every quarter-hour, this sign fades to black, and a swarm of tiny winged sprites dart into view from behind it, wielding paintbrushes larger than they are. They dance in the air, painting "Signs Painted" in glowing script, and then vanish around the ends of the sign again. The misspelling remains for a few moments until a grumbling dwarf climbs into view over the top of the sign, stamping on the letters as he climbs down them, and drags the two transposed letters into their proper places. He stands back to view the results with satisfaction and then climbs up the sign again, peering back down at it one last time before vanishing. This animated scene takes about five minutes, and the corrected sign remains intact for ten minutes before it fades to black and the cycle begins anew. Well worth seeing—I don't tire of watching it over and over again.

The last site of interest to us in Shadystreets stands to the west of the western end of Riverview Road, where it turns a corner to run north as Saddle Street. This tall stone building is fire-scarred from many trash fires set against its walls by children at play and sailors trying to keep warm; its doors and lone window are fitted with heavy bars to keep the ropes and charts within safe from theft. This is the **Wavetreader Pilot & Rigging School** (CS7), where retired sailors (pirates, most of the locals insist, because of their peglegs, eyepatches, and bristling whiskers) teach those with a few coins how to steer a boat and handle sails. For a slightly larger fee, they can show a newcomer or landlubber the ins and outs of the waterways around the harbor or give advice for those planning to sail out into the Dragon Reach (routes to take, prevailing winds and currents, good places to avoid, etc.). Much of the space inside the building is given over to a full-sized rigged mast with sails that students clamber around on, working the sheets and yards while the instructors bark orders and inform them—at a pleasant, casual full bellow—how fortunate they are not to be doing this on a rolling, pitching ship lashed by a full-throated Reach storm. Buckets of water hurled into faces with deadly accuracy give students a taste of what it's like to work sails blind in the face of lashing rains, and there's a pulley-trough in the rafters that can be filled with water and dumped, full-force, to give students a taste of clinging to the yards and spars for their lives when tall waves come calling. Sometimes live eels or an octopus or even a small hungry shark will be added to the trough to give students an extra scare. I've heard it's all great fun; some students even finish the course.

The Shutters

Facing Shadystreets across the Fire River is the last neighborhood of Crow's End, known as "the Shutters" because it's dominated by warehouses firmly shuttered against unauthorized entries by thieves. Not many folk dwell in the Shutters except private hired garrisons of guards, and those who do aren't much better off than the folk of Shadystreets, though here residents can dig for clams or build tidal mud-weirs to catch eels (yum!) and other edible marine life. When gulls swoop down, children throw sticks and stones to try to fell the birds for the family stewpots, too. Only the ravens are safe here; any other animals are fair game—those of you with edible familiars, take note. It won't surprise you to hear that this is another neighborhood little visited by sightseers.

Yet it holds some sites of interest. Let's begin as we did with Shadystreets: on the Ravenbridge, which carries Stonekeep Concourse across



the Fire River and links the city together. On the east side of the Concourse, steps from the end of the bridge, stands **The Last Jack** (CT1), an inn that has a tavern taproom on the ground floor in which the Watch are welcome guests and the atmosphere decidedly quieter than in the Salty Dog across the river. The Jack is where folk come who don't find the rough sailors' crowd of the Dog to their liking, or who just want to sleep (in the three floors of small, simple rooms that each hold a candle-lamp on a shelf, a water-ewer and cup, a chamberpot, and a bed with a rope frame, straw mattress, and two wool blankets). The taproom is full of people talking, chattering, and chuckling, but rowdiness or loud shouting will cause instant ejection; this is where the weary go to relax. Old salts love it, despite the watery beer, truly awful sausage, and indifferent bread with peppercorn butter. Fried fish here comes from the salty bottom of a barrel and have long since lost any recognizable shape or species. The one saving grace is the tomato-and-onion chutney, into which ropy hot-throat spices have been boiled; if you like its fiery taste, it can be spooned liberally onto everything else to disguise all other tastes.

Two doors west of the bridge stands **Fish Tails** (CT2), a factory that I'd like the proprietors of the Jack to visit—and buy from. In this drafty old warehouse, sailors too maimed or stooped with the aches to crew aboard a ship any longer chop, mix, sauce, bread, and light-fry fish (all the slop parts, not just tails) to make hand-sized round fishcakes that I consider superior to most such meals—if one *has* to eat fishcakes. Turtle, crab, and squid all find their ways in among the fish, but the sailors indignantly deny tales of rats, cats, and other dryland creatures occasionally making involuntary contributions to the mix.

If we continue west along Karen Court to Castles Way and take either alley that runs west from its end within leaping distance of the water, we'll fetch up at **Ambra's Small Boats Rental & Harbor Rescue/Retrieval** (CT3), whose name fairly sums up what business Ambra conducts from this ramshackle old house. Ambra herself is a feisty little verbal whirlwind of a retired adventurer—human, but little taller than a halfling!—whose mane of glossy auburn hair is longer than she is tall. Her house has been cobbled together from pieces of old boats, and looks it—almost like a delightfully arranged wreck on the shore rather than a home and business. Ambra lives here as a sort of den mother or perhaps shared wife—I've never worked out which—to seven halflings, who can mount impressively energetic sculling in dashes across the harbor to rescue drowning victims or to dive down for lost items. I'd always thought halflings hated water, but these little fellows are nothing short of amazing. They also help Ambra maintain the fleet of a dozen or so rowboats, dinghies, and skiffs that can be rented here—all very small boats not meant for the waves of the open Reach but only for river and along-the-shore work. A briefly popular pastime among nobles (now being revived by prosperous merchants with time and money enough to play) is the "harbor party" where each participant rents a small boat from Ambra's, complete with rope fenders and full mooring-gear, and all of the boats are lashed together into a floating "drift-island" that wanders around the harbor, clumsily steered from time to time with the aid of long poles. More than once Ambra has had to rush out to a party island with pumps to put out fires that threaten her entire fleet, so she's more interested in renting party boats to lovers and plotters than to folk stupid enough to try cooking roasts on spits by building fires in the holds of wooden boats.

Next door to Ambra's, on the east side of Deepaxe Way at its harbor end, stands **Delmer's Ferry** (CT4), which offers all comers rowed rides across the river, fees varying by how many folk and how much gear is taken, and where it's taken to (jaunts out of the rivermouth harbor and along the shore north or south are very expensive, and specific destination docks must be agreed upon before departure). Bald but dashing, Wamaer Delmer and his fellow strongly muscled warrior-employees are ready to whisk running clients away from pursuers in a few instants and have shields in each boat that can be raised and fixed in place to ward off hurled bottles, arrows, spears, and flung chairs. Delmer's boys are often invited away for an evening by ladies with money enough to host them to revels, and they cheerfully avail themselves of such opportunities—sometimes leaving the ferry office shut, with all its boats inside. Wamaer Delmer is a good dancer and enjoys an awesome bedchamber reputation around town—and several of his men habitually oil their thews before each shift, to attract the eyes of ladies who might hire them later. There's even been the occasional ferry ride that took a very long time to cross the harbor, or went for a discreet side-trip along shore, but Delmer frowns on such practices; the chances of bad weather, sharks, or pursuit by angry husbands all add up to risks too steep for his liking.

Delmer is something of a legend along the river; he once outrowed a skiff under full sail to land Watch officers on a dock before hurrying pirates got there. He also once rowed a band of accused pirates away from a furious Watch patrol. He can be summoned to take a package across the harbor from one





dockside business to another by blowing on a shell horn on either Ladyrock or at three places along the northern shore: by the Harbor Office, near the end of the city wall, and near the Ill Eagle Inn. In calm water, when haste matters more than staying dry, Delmer can make a rowboat fairly leap out of the water when taking small packages or a passenger no bigger than a halfling on a harbor crossing. He even works in winter, stringing a line across the harbor to hold onto when storms are bad and using a metal-sheathed boat to ride up and over floating chunks of ice.

In the block west of Delmer's, bounded by the shoreline lane, Deepaxe Way, and Karen Court, stand our last two sites of interest in The Shutters. The first is **Muldryn's Chainworks** (CT5), where sweating smiths hammer out heavy-duty chains ("short lengths our specialty," as the sign says). The emphasis here is on massive strength, not pretty looks or miniature links; no jeweler would be interested in Muldryn-work, but it's durable, dependable stuff. Drovers come here to find wagon-links, citizens with large gates sometimes order gate-lock chains, and the occasional warrior or drover who wants to wield a chain as a weapon will order a length of chain with a solid grip on one end. Anskaler Muldryn is reputed to be one of the strongest men in Ravens Bluff; he once lifted up an entire coach to pluck an injured child from underneath it.

Two doors south of the Chainworks, across an alley and fronting on Karen Court, stands **Fruits & More** (CT6), the closest thing The Shutters has to a grocery store. Sugars, jams, and compotes galore are brought here for sale by both townfolk and nearby farmers—and certain of the staff have begun to make cordials by pouring cheap spirits into jars full of berries and just letting it all sit for some months. The results are sometimes vile but occasionally marvelous!

Under the hard stares of the many warehouse guards, most visitors tend to leave The Shutters as swiftly as possible—let's follow their fine example.

Southside District

Pumpsid

A curious mix of poverty and prosperity, this easternmost neighborhood of Southside stands in the protective shadow of one of the most impressive building complexes in Ravens Bluff: the newly-rebuilt **House of War**, Ravenian home of the god Tempus (SP1). Lay worshipers are met at the approach avenues by armored priests of the god, who accept offerings on the spot. A huge wall of riven shields, battered weapons, and bloodstained armor fills the space between the two paved temple lanes. Holy escorts are provided beyond this point, so our tour will turn aside to less sacred sites, such as the **Brothers Galgolar Pawnshop** (SP2), which stands on the south side of Hammerstone Street half a block east of Stonekeep Concourse. This three-story stone building is the home of twin brothers, Jeffers (the honest one) and Malachi (the other one), who loan funds across a counter in exchange for goods brought in as collateral. They take turns running the shop, rarely lending more than 500 gold ravens to anyone, and the goods they take in exchange (which, of course, they sell if the debtor defaults) range from children's marbles to active golems, from good leather gloves to grand gilded coaches. Magic items can sometimes (rarely) be found among the shop stock, although the Watch and Wizards Guild confiscate any such items offered for sale if they find out about them. When the most valuable pieces are sold, adventurers are often hired to escort them to their new homes—sometimes clear across Faerûn.

Those interested in borrowing should be aware that the collateral must be acceptable to whichever brother is on duty, and that loan repayments follow government-set rates. Loans of 10 gold or less attract 1% interest and are due in 15 days; loans of 11 to 50 gold are at 2% interest, due in 30 days; those of 51 to 100 gold at 4% interest, in 60 days; of 101 to 1,000 gold: 5% interest, 120 days; of 1,000 to 5,000 gold: 10%, 240 days; and of 5,001 to 10,000 gold: 20%, due in 1 year. Be aware that Malachi considers these rates unreasonably low and has been known to as much as double them when dealing with those he believes are visitors to the city, pocketing the excess monies. The shop is open from sunrise to dusk. Don't worry if you accidentally address either brother as "Gallowgar;" it's an old Ravens Bluff tradition.

Almost hidden by trees and rundown rooming houses on the south side of Stonekeep End (where it turns north to become Landleen Lane) is our next stop: **Cliff's Bard & Swill** (SP3). This has recently become the closest thing in Southside to a nightclub (that is, drinking with entertainment). It offers patrons (who come to hoot and catcall and have a good time, drinking deeply) a succession of entertainments, from jugglers, trained animal

acts, and comedians to minstrels and dancers (performers from Mooney's circus often perfect their acts here). Some of the performers include a lizard man, a minotaur, a kenku, a pseudodragon, and a giff. The most popular features are local wisecracking comedians (who never fail to satirically comment on current Ravenian events) and, of course, the dancers. The music is good, many of the dancers can sing well and enjoy close (in some cases, very close) friendships with regular patrons. Private rooms can be rented for covert meetings or by those who overindulge.

From time to time, special occasions are celebrated here, such as Tale Nights (funny stories only), Haunt Nights (ghost stories and songs only, with the dancers all made up as vampires or other undead—and a priest hired to animate skeletons to dance), and special events, such as the launch of a new merchant consortium, a new wine, or a visit by an exotic group. In this last year, such events were hosted by two adventuring bands seeking to recruit new members and for a demonstration dance ritual by the drow of the Dark Dancer shrine to Eilistraee that one patron described as "the ultimate thrill of my life"—poor fellow; must not get out much. A pair of crabmen serve as security bouncers in the club, with a pair of far more capable giff as backup.

In the angle between Zeldazar Street and Samarglast Lane stands **Magestrand Manor** (SP4), the palatial whitestone mansion of the quiet, reclusive mage known as Oracle, formerly Minister of Divination in the Ministry of Art and now a member in good standing of the Wizards Guild. Thieves are warned that the white statuettes flanking the front doors and placed here and yon among the garden plantings and as rooftop corner ornaments are known to animate and attack intruders. I could say more, but frankly I don't think it'd be healthy. You know wizards—and it's the quiet ones I worry about. Let's move along.

Our next stop is a little less luxurious but much more interesting. On the east side of Zeldazar Street, just before its meeting with Brightbuckler Street, stand the new quarters of the **Ravens Bluff Sanitation Facility** (SP5). Like the original junkyard it replaced, this place stinks, pays for garbage by weight, and is run by ol' John Porter. Metal, glass, and other things that can be melted down and sold are sorted out. The organic refuse gets bought by farmers for use as feed or fertilizer. Scraps of wood get stacked and carted off to Torch-town or the harbor. Anything that no possible use can be found for is fed into a well-guarded *sphere of annihilation* owned by the mage Marian Wicksal (who's never without her pet pseudodragon, Rouge). The sphere has to be the





worst-kept secret in Ravens Bluff; children often show up at the yard asking to see it. I suspect that some of the folk who come to see the sphere (visitors are required to don a suit of restraining armor “for their own safety” that keeps them chained well away from the sphere as it eats some garbage) are really here to see ol’ John. His parents were the last guildmaster of the mysterious Four Ravens Thieves Guild, and some think that John Porter has taken their place and has a network of contacts throughout the city so well hidden that not even the Silent Network can uncover it. Better not to ask. The ravens obviously like this place, though—see how many of them are around? Maybe that’s how rumors like that get started. By the way, if you ever drop by and he’s not here, try up at the city graveyard east of here, on a bluff overlooking the river; he works there as well as a part-time gravedigger.

Our last stop in Pumpsid is to see its largest building (outside of the temple complex). Actually two joined stone warehouses that run along Samarglast Lane for half a block before turning along Helhavryrn’s Walk, the headquarters of the **House of Whelk Merchant House** (SP6) is always a busy place. The House employs many fisherfolk down on their luck to make fish pastes and fishing nets. It buys catches of fish (to make the pastes from) and jars (to sell the pastes in) and sells nets, fish pastes, and ship gear such as ropes, anchors, turnpins, oarlocks, rudders, hinges, grab-irons, and so on (buying its stock all over Faerûn, as cheaply as possible).

By the way, where the name “Pumpsid” came from has been forgotten; most sages think that a horse-powered pump for irrigating farm fields must have been located here back when Southside was mostly farms.

Tlasbras

Named for a half-elven adventuring hero who saved Ravens Bluff in its early days from a stealthy attack by a huge warband of orcs who slipped down out of the Earthfast Mountains, Tlasbras is home to the famous—or infamous; if you prefer-magic-studying and -governing body known as the **Ministry of Art** (ST1). It’s dotted with the homes of mages who are, or were (before the Wizards Guild defections that followed the war), Ministers in this organization. Prosperity seems to stream outwards from the Ministry; homes and shops are neat and well-kept near it, not so grand farther out. The Ministry meets and works in a complex of three buildings in a park. The western end of this park is marked by a nameless lane, beyond which stand three dormitories for Ministry understaff and apprentices, and the huge home of **Harasiim the Blue** (ST2), which fronts on Hippocampus Street. Fully as large as the smaller of the two main Ministry buildings, it’s built to resemble a mock castle, with tapering turrets, oversized banners and battlements, and multiple portcullis which slam down in an almost rhythmic sequence every dusk. Harasiim is a handsome Turmishman who held the Ministry seat for Abjuration before defecting to the Guild. Immediately to the north of “Blue Castle,” along Hippocampus Street, stands the more modest—but still large and luxurious—home of the old half-elven adventuress **Emellin** (ST3), who holds the Ministry seat for the school of Alteration.

Turning east onto Drovers’ Run, the third door along on the north side is actually the bronze double doors of the black-marble-faced **Echo Hall** (ST4), abode of the Minister of Conjuraction, Alskander of Chessenta, who’s said to entertain many Ravenian ladies in this high-ceilinged, rather bare, and always gloomily-lit tile-floored mausoleum of a home. By the way, there’s no truth to the rumors that Alskander’s a vampire—I have it on good authority that those tales started at a revel when he rose out of a coffin to surprise a certain lady, purely as an amorous prank.

Our next stop is a brisk walk across the neighborhood to the southwest corner of the meeting of Zeldazar Street and Conant Court, and the two-story stucco building there that houses **Burnhart’s Outfitting** (ST5). This establishment sells traveling gear to caravan merchants, pilgrims, and adventurers—everything from wagons and small boats down to holy symbols and pot-scourers. The Burnharts play the part of wealthy, influential merchants, but most customers see them as swindling hard-bargain artists, someone whom you only deal with when there’s no alternative. A lot of the money they make is gambled away by the magnificently dressed Frek Burnhart, the owner of the shop.

Next stop: the northeast corner of Stonekeep End and Castles Way, where stands the most unusual of the **Red Ravens** firefighting halls (ST6). Rented from the Ampner noble family, it’s the keep of what was once a castle. Rising six somber stories above the street, it provides a good lookout over the neighborhood, (where it’s by far the tallest structure) and spray-over-above protection for almost a block around.

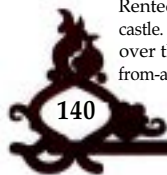
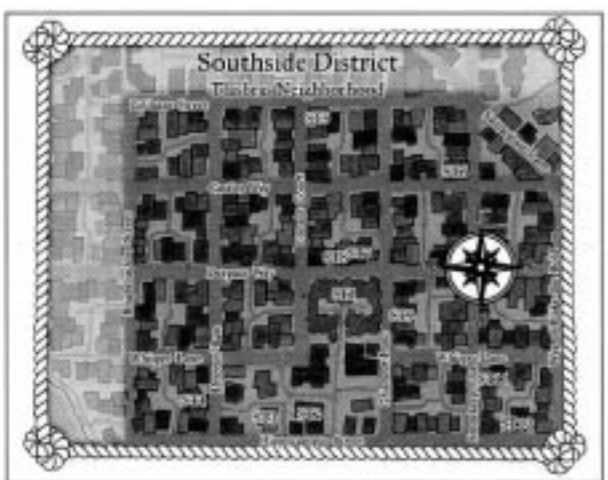
Our next two sites of interest are adjoining houses that stand on the east side of Deepaxe Way, across from the wooded park of the Ministry of Art. The more southerly of these two mansions is **Garnetgables** (ST7), the home of Larraine Blacktree, the severe aunt of Lord Charles Blacktree. She held the Ministry seat of Fire Magic before defecting to the Guild, where she’s reportedly found new happiness and vigor training many young sorceresses in her ways of magic. Though the doors of the house stay firmly shut by day, occasional bursts of flame and excited laughter at all hours tell of the magical activity within.

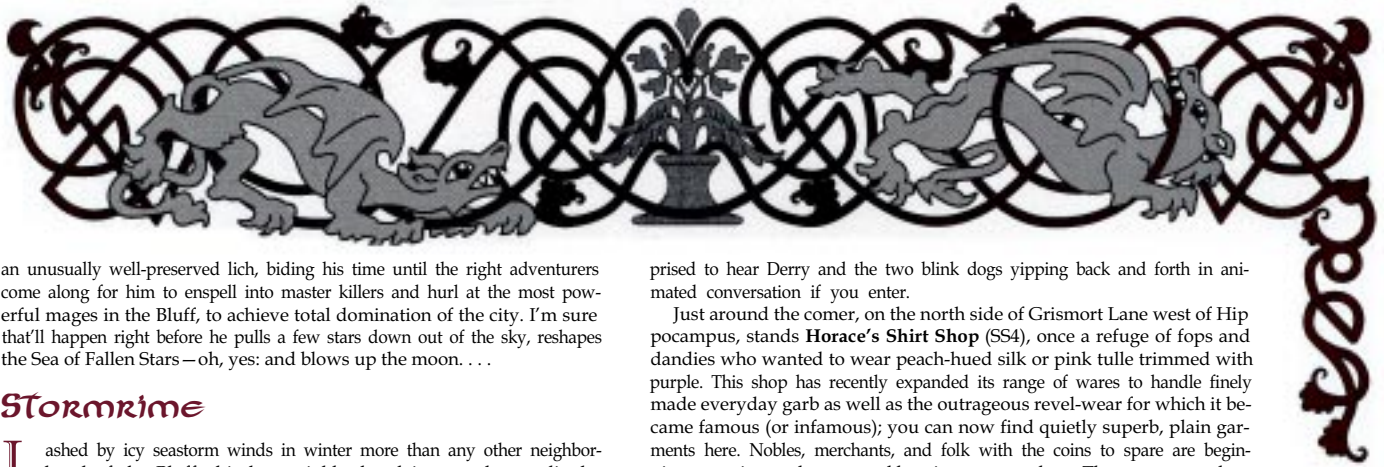
The house next door to the north, **Morningsun** (ST8), is the home of Sylvia Dawnwatcher, a Lathanderite who once held the Water Elemental seat in the Ministry but left to join the Wizards Guild. It’s guarded by a water elemental who lives in a pool that encompasses much of the ground floor. The elemental is a longtime companion and friend of Dawnwatcher, not a magically coerced servant; it’s free to come and go along water-pipes that link its pool with the river and Reach through a series of floodtide chambers and overflow caverns. The pink pillar inlays on the gates are rose-quartz, and quite valuable. Enchantments protect them, but I’m not sure of the details—nor anxious to find out the hard way.

Facing the park’s south side, on Grismort Lane, stands our next home worthy of a look: **Manscorpion House** (ST9), the home of Sardoli Quislin, named for the monster statues that adorn its high walls. There are tales of these animating to attack thieves, but a wizard’s testimony from some years back suggests that a manscorpion wizard dwells with Sardoli—or that Sardoli can change into a spell-hurling manscorpion, or summon one from somewhere to defend his home against intruders. Whatever the truth, the home incorporates two handsome glass domes in its roof that let shafts of light down in to catch the rising waters from two indoor fountains. The floor of this large fountain hall is of white marble but little else can be seen from the street, and Sardoli doesn’t entertain uninvited guests. So that’s that.

Our next site is on the east side of Hippocampus Street, between Stonekeep End and the Way of Blake the Bold. Called **Shadowholme** (ST10), it’s the silver-pillared home of the gold-elf mage Cluhurach Fair-Eyed. Once the Minister for Enchantment, Cluhurach has now gone over to the Guild like so many of his fellows. The house is named for the shadowtop trees that surround it and seem to move slowly about it—thanks to a detailed and clever *permanent illusion*.

A little to the north and east, the southwestern corner of the intersection of Stonekeep End and the southern leg of Whisper Lane contains one of shabbier structures in Tlasbras: the cobwebbed, gloomy one-story rubble-stone shop known as **The Sapient Sorcerer** (ST11). Here an absent-minded mage sells spell inks, vellum, quills, inkstones, and scrollcases of all sorts. Olcrannon Fossa’s right side—face, arm, and all—are blackened and scarred; among his frequent mumbblings about red dragons are regrets that he took its fire “rather, um, too squarely . . . um.” He loves to gossip, and trading tales with him usually results in decreased prices—but I’ve heard that he’s not quite the old dolt he appears to be. He did win one to-the-death mages’ duel with an angry customer that he shouldn’t have, a year or two back. There are murmurings about what lurks under his eyepatch. Some think that he’s really a powerful Red Wizard of Thay or perhaps even





an unusually well-preserved lich, biding his time until the right adventurers come along for him to enspell into master killers and hurl at the most powerful mages in the Bluff, to achieve total domination of the city. I'm sure that'll happen right before he pulls a few stars down out of the sky, reshapes the Sea of Fallen Stars—oh, yes: and blows up the moon. . . .

Stormrime

Lashed by icy seastorm winds in winter more than any other neighborhood of the Bluff, this last neighborhood is named accordingly: "stormrime" is the sparkling white salt-laden cake of glare ice that coats everything in the wake of a really stiff storm, leaving footing treacherous and getting about out-of-doors a tricky dance of slipping and sliding. Less prosperous than Tlasbras, it nonetheless has its share of mages' mansions.

We'll begin our tour of Stormrime on Drovers' Run, between Wyvernar Street and Pepper Street, where on the north side we find a sturdy two-story stone building with a dove-gray door and sign displaying the bound-wrists symbol of the god Ilmater. The sign identifies this as one of the reasons I am proud to dwell in Ravens Bluff: the **Hand of Mercy Children's Hospital and Orphanage** (SS1). Here a brother and sister who are both Ilmatari priests run a hospital open to all but specializing in treating illnesses and injuries of children. Sister Mercy and Brother Kindly Hande keep a happy home, but thanks to the recent war the "Hand" family consists of a score or so children right now. Don't be surprised to see a male drow elf (Valandrin Telenna, better known as Dusk, a member of the Ravens Bluff Irregulars and a onetime candidate for the office of Deputy Mayor) about the place. He's wary of women—something to do with his upbringing, I suppose. He told me once that everytime he spoke to a woman he couldn't stop thinking that if he said something wrong she'd feed him to the spiders. Tsk, tsk.

Our next stop is a neat, clean building in the corner of the meeting of Hippocampus Street and Xander's Lane. See that small sign beside the door, reading: "Hoaten Thee, Scribe—Documents Written, Read, Translated"? Hoaten Thee is the man inside, all right, but this establishment is never known by any other name than **The Sign of the Quill and Scribe Shop** (SS2). Inside, you'll find the expected clutter of books, tomes, parchment, maps, scrolls, quill pens, and bottles of ink. You can buy anything to do with writing here—slates and chalk, wax tablets and stylii, charcoal sticks, quill pens, various colored inks, brushes, vellum, parchment, and even bound blank books. This place competes a bit with The Sapient Sorcerer, but whereas that store focuses more on mages, the Quill and Scribe serves every literate need.

Hoaten Thee is a much-loved and respected man in the Bluff—it's said he can read any language, and he's always polite, discreet, honest, and fair-priced. He translates documents brought to him, drafts and writes letters, wills, and contracts, and witnesses agreements and wagers. His service is a godsend to illiterate adventurers, believe me. Once an adventuring mage, he's now retired (at well past seventy years of age), affable, and absolutely trustworthy, always maintaining the confidentiality of his clients. He has two beautiful granddaughters, Solandra and Zylara—competent scribes but much sought after by young Ravenian men for more friendly purposes. Hoaten is almost always to be found wearing a high turban; he's a spry, oft-amused man who seems to be able to remember *everything*, down to what rings someone was wearing when they came to see him at eleven o'clock on a particular day thirty-odd years ago!

In the next block down Hippocampus, we find the **Friendly Familiar Pet Shop** (SS3), the home and shop of a well-known retired adventurer, the warrior Derry Brandondale. I love to visit this place, and whenever I do I always wonder why I don't make it around to this side of town more often. It's a large, clean single-story stone building with an open-air courtyard at the back and a painted sign out front depicting a black cat sleeping on a treasure chest. Derry sells common and exotic pets, trains animals, and cares for sick or injured pets and wildlife. He has two friends and shop guardians, the blink dogs Seth and Armas, but otherwise keeps no intelligent creatures for sale (only briefly, for healing purposes); he considers keeping such "thinking beasts" to be a form of slavery and can wax quite eloquent on the subject. You can almost always find a hawk, songbird, cat, dog, or small snake for sale at this shop, but Derry is quite familiar with far more unusual creatures and often answers queries from adventurers on the habits and fighting tactics of dragons, wyverns, gorgon, catoblepi, peryton, stirges, and the like. He frequently hires adventurers to capture exotic "monsters" to fill special orders for pets—or to help him free some intelligent animal from what he considers undeserved captivity. Don't be sur-

prised to hear Derry and the two blink dogs yipping back and forth in animated conversation if you enter.

Just around the corner, on the north side of Grismort Lane west of Hip pocampus, stands **Horace's Shirt Shop** (SS4), once a refuge of fops and dandies who wanted to wear peach-hued silk or pink tulle trimmed with purple. This shop has recently expanded its range of wares to handle finely made everyday garb as well as the outrageous revel-wear for which it became famous (or infamous); you can now find quietly superb, plain garments here. Nobles, merchants, and folk with the coins to spare are beginning to notice, and covet, and buy in great numbers. There may soon be a brightly lit branch of this shop in Temple District, I'm told, or perhaps in the Sixstar neighborhood in Uptown.

The northeast corner of Xander's Lane and Wyvernar Street holds our next stop in the tour: **Stormcloak House** (SS5), a handsome greystone mansion still owned by Marilene DeVillars, second cousin to Lady Lauren DeVillars and the former Minister of Illusion. She left the city to dwell quietly in the countryside a few months ago—no one knows why. While she's gone, she's rented Stormcloak to an all-female adventuring band, the Nine Talons, who reportedly delight in summoning monsters and then battling them all over the house, damaging it considerably in the process. On one occasion the smokes pouring out of the house grew so bad that several of Marilene's former colleagues from the Ministry entered the house to see what was befalling, receiving a very frosty reception from the interrupted adventurers (which they returned, with interest). When the Nine Talons went so far as to threaten to bodily pick up the "trespassing" Ministers and toss them out the windows, the Minister of Invocation, Variance Klane, plucked a sword out of thin air and set it to circling the house. That was three weeks ago, and it's still there—ah! there it comes into view now, gleaming in the last light of the sun as it tirelessly orbits the uppermost story of the house—Marilene's reading cupola, where some of the Talons can be seen of a morning, sipping hot drinks and glumly eyeing the circling sword. Whatever powers it may unleash if tampered with are unknown—but none of the Talons have been tempted to give it a try. Fortunately it ignores bypassers, like us, and also folk merely entering or leaving the house—except the Talons, whom I imagine are bored silly by now with their enforced idleness.

Around the corner on Pepper Street (on the east side, between Xander's Lane and Grismort) stands a large, impressive three-story stone building with a gleaming silver hawk on the door. This is the **Silverhawk School** (SS6), where the retired half-elven adventurer Angel Silverhawk trains willing warriors in the ways of fighting. Angel (a muscular, hard-drinking sixtyish fighter and thief who can still swing a blade or tumble and spring with the best of her pupils) lives on the top floor with her students. Classes take place on the middle floor, and the ground floor is given over to a *very* secure armory (four successive *glyphs*, I'm told), a pool, and a practice gym open to anyone who wants to spend three coppers and some time. There are quintain-type dummies for thrusting practice, if the instructors are too busy, and a weapons-check and cloak-check security office. Angel's three servants can all give weapons training, and whoever is "manning" the entrance has magical means of paralyzing even the strongest foe. This place is very popular with the young and with visitors to the city, because Angel treats everyone as an equal, demonstrates everything, and likes to drink, eat, and carouse with her students. She encourages would-be warriors of all races and both genders to join the school and likes jokes (not pranks, it should be noted—be warned).

Our next sight worth seeing is a one-story stucco building with a slate roof, standing on the north side of Stonekeep End midway between Pepper and Wyvernar. **Ye Who Dares** (SS7) is the home and workshop of Johan Branding, who with his family turns out armor of reasonable quality and prices (not the finest work, and certainly not for shiny show, but available at about 80% of the common price, item by item). Adventurers love this place, and Johan always takes fatherly pride when the day comes for one of "his" adventurers to "trade up" from chain to plate, or from plate to full field plate. His three sons and two daughters are attractive in looks, agreeable in disposition, and skilled in making serviceable armor. One daughter, Kitrina, loves to flirt with adventurers and often carries messages or keeps items hidden for them. A light sleeper, she can be awakened late at night by rapping on one of the rusted-out shields that hang on the back wall of the shop: four times rapidly, then pause, then another rap, then another pause and one final knock. If she answers, be aware that the heels of her small black boots are actually needle-point daggers—a little bit of insurance she adopted at her mother's suggestion, just in case.

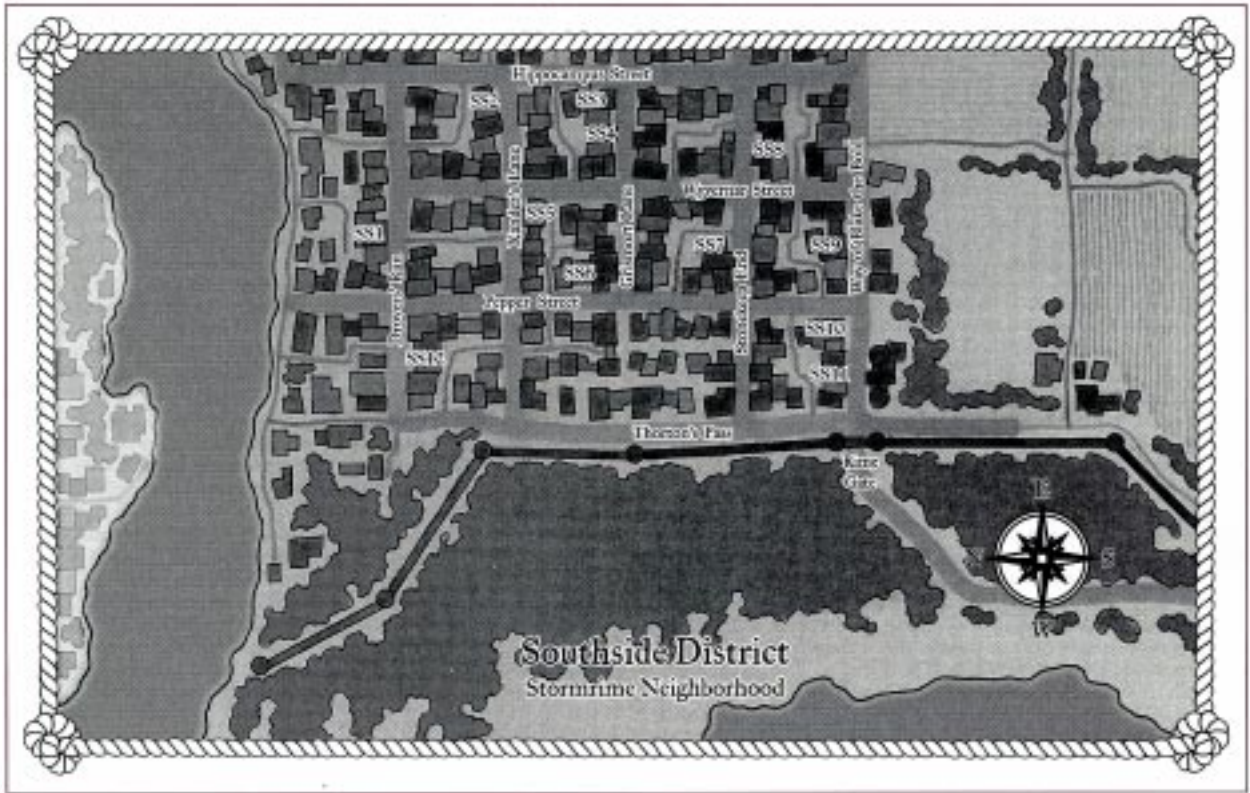


A block to the east along Stonekeep End, on the south side, a large painted blue star on a door tells travelers they've found the offices of the **Blue Star Trading Company** (SS8), one of the oldest surviving merchant organizations in the Bluff. Owned by Lord Chancellor (and sometime Acting Mayor and guildmaster) Arvin Kothonos, it trades in weapons, silks and other fabrics (especially fine textiles from the southern shores of the Sea of Fallen Stars), and items brought out of tombs, ruins, and dungeons by adventurers. There have always been whispers that the Blue Star must have pirate connections—shins bearing Blue Star cargoes never seem to get boarded and raided—but there's never been any proof of illicit dealings. The Blue Star stands open right through every night, trusting in its garrison of veteran warriors. A new, and very popular, service they've begun offering is organizing caravans; for rather stiff fees, its staff will put your package on a wagon going to their depot in such-and-such a coastal Inner Sea city, for delivery within the month (or tenday in the case of the Reach, Sembia, or the Moonsea).

Our next stop is a large, three-story stone building on the north side of the Way of Blake the Bold, the **Boar's Head Inn** (SS9). Formerly a butcher shop run by the Cedmac family and known as "The Pig-In-A-Poke," this expanded into an inn in a year when hog-slaughtering underwent a sudden slump. Recently torn down and rebuilt, now the butcher shop takes up one-half of the front (with kitchens behind it) and the inn lobby and restaurant the other. This place is popular with the locals because the food is good and the ambiance quiet and relaxed. Rooms are well-appointed and comfortable, like staying in the home of a well-to-do, established, and not socially pushy merchant. A carved wooden boar's head greets customers in the lobby, beyond which is a small, cozy restaurant running to nice booths and too many pillars, breaking up a room that always smells of sizzling bacon. As long as you like pork in its various guises (including a marvelous leek-and-hock soup), this is the place for you. They have handrolls of black bread with strong cheese, just to liven things up, and for dessert a savory dish of chilled almond cream; a choice only the gods (well, some gods) could improve upon. If you don't mind literally being on the edge of the city, these are accommodations that'll please you—and you can ride off with fresh-cut or smoked meats to go (Boch Cedmac maintains a smoke-house not far away).

Half a block westwards, in the northwest corner of Pepper Street and the Way of Blake the Bold, stands the Ampner manor of **Talontrumpets** (SS10), rented for over two decades now to Begoas the Inquisitive, the Minister of Necromancy. This three-story manor with front fountain and fern gardens is known to be guarded by undead animated by Begoas, including crawling claws, a monster zombie that completely fills the main passages of the house from wall to wall when it walks, and a watchghost believed to have once been a female human companion of Begoas. At any rate, she has some sort of symbiotic connection with him; when he doesn't leave her behind as a guardian, she's with him, sometimes even wrapped around him like a cloak. In recent months, Begoas seems to have begun watching for something or someone, going out to prowls the city by night muttering about "those who come to open what should not be disturbed." He refuses to elaborate on whether "what should not be disturbed" means a tomb, a gate, or something else—or who "those" are. Talontrumpets rises four stories above the street and descends at least three cellars below, with the lowest cellar regularly flooding with seawater. Its front hall boasts two fat helix-staircases that twine around each other as they ascend to the floors above. Since the arrival of Begoas, a gleaming black casket has rested on a stone plinth between the bases of these two stairs; it's said to be empty of all but sleep-dart traps that can be triggered by the unwary, something meant to scare intruders away, not house a vampire or other undead—at least, that's what they say. . . . Some local citizens firmly believe that Begoas is a vampire, but he insists that such is not the case. He "can't help what folk believe," however, and if it keeps thieves away from his house . . .

Three doors down from Talontrumpets, heading west along the Way, stand the offices of **Swiftfleet Guides** (SS11). This halfling firm, owned by the very shrewd Baladric Tarkingtoes, offers caravan escort and guiding services. The "Swiftfleet boys" have lots of fun carousing together but are justly proud of their skills at horse archery—that is, firing shortbows from horseback (at full gallop, if need be). They train their own horses (most halflings have limited success in the saddles of mounts not used to a halfling rider; these lads ride full-sized horse, not the usual halfling ponies) and go about their work with enthusiasm—even gusto. It was only after a dozen years of hiring the Swiftfleets that I discovered some of their "boys" are girls; the female staff take on only the most trusted clients because many





customers think (wrongly) that young halfling women can't provide the protection they're paying for. The Swiftfleets use a white-fletched black arrow as their badge; anyone who injures one of their lads can expect to be expertly tracked down and introduced to the business end of a great number of similar arrows.

Our last site of interest in Stormrime is **Garuddyn Manor** (SS12), a large mansion that stands on the south side of Drovers' Run, just east of its meeting with Thornton's Pass. Named for its long-dead builder (one of the first merchants with hopeless pretensions to nobility), Garuddyn is the home of Variance Klane, the Minister of Invocation at the Ministry of Art. This battle-scarred onetime Cormyrean War Wizard delights in revels and joins dances with the same glee and energy as her apprentices. She's also be known to slide down banisters and launch herself gleefully into her escort's arms, silken gown and all. In battle, however, she is all no-nonsense efficiency—and at need can get that way, from the mirthful height of revelry and merriment, in an instant. Her house is more quiet and somber than most expect, showing guests a front hall of sorrowful "after the battle" statues that show her full awareness of the cost of war. The inner rooms are all quiet luxury, the dignified home of a woman set off from others by her scars and unhappy past.

So there you have it: Raraerdo's whirlwind tour of the City of Ravens, Gateway to the Vast, Jewel of the Fire River—and my home. I love this place, and I hope you will too. There are hundreds of more spots we could visit, but the sun's set so that will have to do for now . . . after all, you'll want to do some exploring on your own, won't you? Don't forget to look me up in a few months when you're an old hand at finding your way about and share *your* discoveries with me. I'll be looking forward to it. Till then, I'll say "goodbye for now."

The Vast



The Vast" is the name given to the relatively sparsely settled, rolling farmlands that lie along the eastern shore of the Dragon Reach. On the north and east, this region is bounded by the Dragonspike Mountains (except for a gap where the High Country thrusts east towards Impiltur). To the south, the Vast is generally accepted as extending through the Earthfast Mountains to the lands that shelter under the direct influence of the coastal cities of Procampur and Turlagol.

The origin of the term "the Vast" has been lost with the passage of much time, but most sages believe that it derives from "Vastar" or something similar, a name in use when orcs ruled all these lands, some two thousand winters ago.

Vastar: Orcs Rule The Vast

In those days, men were not seen on the northern shores of the Inner Sea, save in occasional daring (or desperate) raids or exploring bands. Elves ruled the deep-forested western shore of the Dragon Reach from fabled Myth Drannor, dragons laired about the Moonsea and held sway over its lands and the broad gulf of the Reach itself, and orcs ruled the eastern shore of the Reach—a brawling rule of constant coups, counter-attacks, and strife with all other inhabitants of the mountains.

Despite the chaos, the birthrate of the fecund orcs allowed them to recover from even the bloodiest civil strife or dragon raids (for young dragons were wont to dine on roast orc, plucked from hillsides and gatherings by the talonful). Orcs grew so numerous as to gather into raiding hordes every dozen summers or so. These great, undisciplined hosts of warriors would build or seize ships and sail away south to plunder and slay. Few ever returned, the survivors spreading out across the warmer, richer southern Realms, and so the overcrowding of Vastar was regularly relieved.

To build their crude, ramshackle ships ("barges with sails," one disdainful elven observer called them) the orcs felled the timber of The Vast repeatedly, until little remained and they had to seize what they needed from the elven shores across the Reach. The orcs soon found that if they sailed across the storm-torn Reach without securing a landing-place first they were doomed to a swift death under elven arrows and magic ere they could land. So army after army crossed the River Lis (then known by its full elven name of "Nuathlis") at the northern end of the Reach in the years between hordes. Time after time these armies found the elves waiting for them. The hail of arrow-fire on orcs slogging slowly through the marshy banklands of the Lis brought great slaughter, earning the Lis the nickname "Blood River," still in use among orcs and half-orcs today.

In such raids, in crude farming, fishing, and mountain-hunting to feed themselves, and in mining and the forging of weapons, the orcs of Vastar occupied their time. Proud and reckless, they often mounted raids to seize goods in short supply but never staged strategic attacks to weaken enemies gathering strength nearby nor worked any diplomacy or trade with the lands around. They formed no formal tribes but dwelt in groups following the most charismatic (or brutal and feared) orc heroes—large living groups known as *glauraur*. Human sages are correct in labeling *glauraur* as the fore-runners of tribes but most erroneously believe they were large family groups, or clans formed of allied families. In truth, the orcs of Vastar were all inter-related, and once children were reared little attention was paid to the human idea of "family." They concerned themselves with power and hedonism, chiefly enjoying the torture and devouring of hunted-down prey and gossiping about the endless struggles among the orc chieftains to gain greater standing and so win "closer to the Overking." The orcs were a mighty people, who—so long as some prudence was practiced when dragons were a-wing or elves about—gave little thought to any foe ever rising to challenge "the teeth of Vastar."

The Coming of The Dwarves

And so, in the end, the proud orcs fell. Dwarves, mining in the mountains, came west and south underground, following veins of good ore, and met with the orcs in the lightless ways of the deeps. After the initial





kirmishes, the dwarven war-councils determined that no orc who had seen a dwarf in the mines must be allowed to live, so that no word would get back to the orc chieftains of any organized foe. Lesser goblinkin (mainly goblins and kobolds) enslaved by the orcs to work the mines were ignored by the dwarves—so they never told their cruel orc masters of dwarven activities they saw or aided their orc overseers when the dwarves came slaying.

The deaths of many orcs in the mountains were ascribed to the great struggle for the throne of Overking (created by a monstrous orc known only as Ologh and left vacant upon his death in the jaws of the great Wyrn of the Peaks, the black dragon Iyrauroth). Warring factions among the orcs fought each other up and down Vastar for eight blood-soaked summers and winters, until Grimmerfang defeated (and ceremonially spitteed, cooked, and ate) the last of his rivals, renaming Ologh's court of the Hollow Mountain "Mount Grimmerfang."

It was to be his tomb. The dwarves had worked in secret with a few men and elves to develop a steel whose bite was poison to orcs, and with its aid broke out of the mountain caverns to, in the words of the sage Fairin Ice-mantle, "run in waist-high riot across the land." Fairin had grave misgivings about the use of the "orcslayer" metal, fearing it would be only the first step in the making of many alloys harmful to other races, bringing ruin to all. His *Treatise Against Blood-Metal* survives in libraries in Sembia, Cormyr, and Waterdeep (and perhaps also in the ruins of Myth Drannor), giving us the only first-hand account of the dwarven victories.

The secrets of making "orcslayer" blades, and even just which mountain is Mount Grimmerfang, have been lost over the years. The few dwarven elders who can still identify the Hollow Mountain do not speak of it to humans or elves (Elminster says he's never investigated in person but believes it to be the first peak north and east of Mount Wolf). The victorious dwarves drove the orcs far to the north and south into the mountain heights. Claiming all the Vast as their own, the dwarves founded a surface kingdom in 610 DR. "The Realm of Glimmering Swords," dwarven songs call it, though it also had a less grand, everyday name: Roldilar. Dwarves built themselves stone towers and brought herds of sheep, goats, and shaggy-hair cattle up from the lands south across the Inner Sea to roam the rolling grasslands cleared by the orcs. The dwarves devoted themselves to drinking (concocting fiery, legendary potables to do so), mining, and the making of wondrous armor, finery, adornments, and weaponry. Little of this



work would they part with in trade—just enough to buy more livestock or else honey (which many dwarves love, especially in mead) from halflings who dwelt in woodlands here and there along the shores of The Inner Sea.

A few bold men came to dwell in the region at this time, notably the powerful mage known afterwards as Maskyr One-Eye (his vale is today the site of the human village of Maskyr's Eye). In those days (645 DR), men were few north of the Sea of Fallen Stars, and they went quietly and well-armed. The beast-men (ogres) held Thar, goblinkin were furtive and few after the orcs' defeat, and the dwarves held the lands east of the Dragon Reach from where Mulmaster now stands to what is now eastern Impiltur. Maskyr was exploring, looking for a place far from the affairs of men to build himself a tower, when he found a certain wooded vale much to his liking. Shrouded in mountaineers as he came upon it one morn, it lay quiet and beautiful, and he decided that he would make his home there—and there alone.

King among the dwarves then was one Tuir, called "Stonebeard" for his grim stoicism and slow humor. Tuir set his throne deep under Mount Grimmerfang, where the dwarves had once slain the orc-king to seize control of the realm. Maskyr sought audience with Tuir in his halls one day and before all the Court asked the Deep King his price for the vale. At his words, silence fell like a cloak throughout the great hall. Maskyr had learned patience in long years of seeking out and experimenting with the Art, so he leaned upon his staff and held his peace, his eyes meeting the stony gaze of the Deep King. Tuir stroked his beard in thought for a time. He could see that this human must command the Art, and in some power, too—and yet he was loathe to give up any land to humans and trusted powerful mages not at all. Finally, he said gruffly "The vale is yours, from rim to rim and beneath the grass as deep as four men stand upon each other's shoulders, upon one condition only. Pluck out thy right eye and give it to me, here and now, and the vale is thine."

And to the astonishment of the Roldilarren Court, Maskyr did, without hesitation. Tuir, with new respect for this human (he'd never thought anyone would pay such a price), commanded that no dwarf disturb the archmage's studies nor intrude upon his borders. Maskyr the One-Eyed lived contentedly alone in his valley for several hundred years until he vanished (presumably slain) while on an interplanar journey.

During that time, the power of the dwarves waned, orcs came again to the northern Vast, and humans came in numbers, to hurl back all other creatures and claim the Vast for their own. For all the songs and tales, the rule of the dwarves was short-lived, perhaps forty years in all. Orcs "breed like nothing else on or under Faerûn; they put even hares to shame," as Elminster so delicately put it; all too soon, they rose again, and the dwarven kingdom vanished like an elephant swarmed by a million ants. The dwarven defenses were broken by defeats at the fords of the Vesper and in the battle of Deepfires, a long and bloody fight that raged throughout the underground ways of the mountain for nearly twenty days. This infamous struggle (649 DR) is still remembered in dwarven laments and sayings, such as "I feel as if my axe was broken in the midst of Deepfires," often uttered by dwarves who are sick, depressed, in pain, or simply overwhelmed by a multitude of woes.

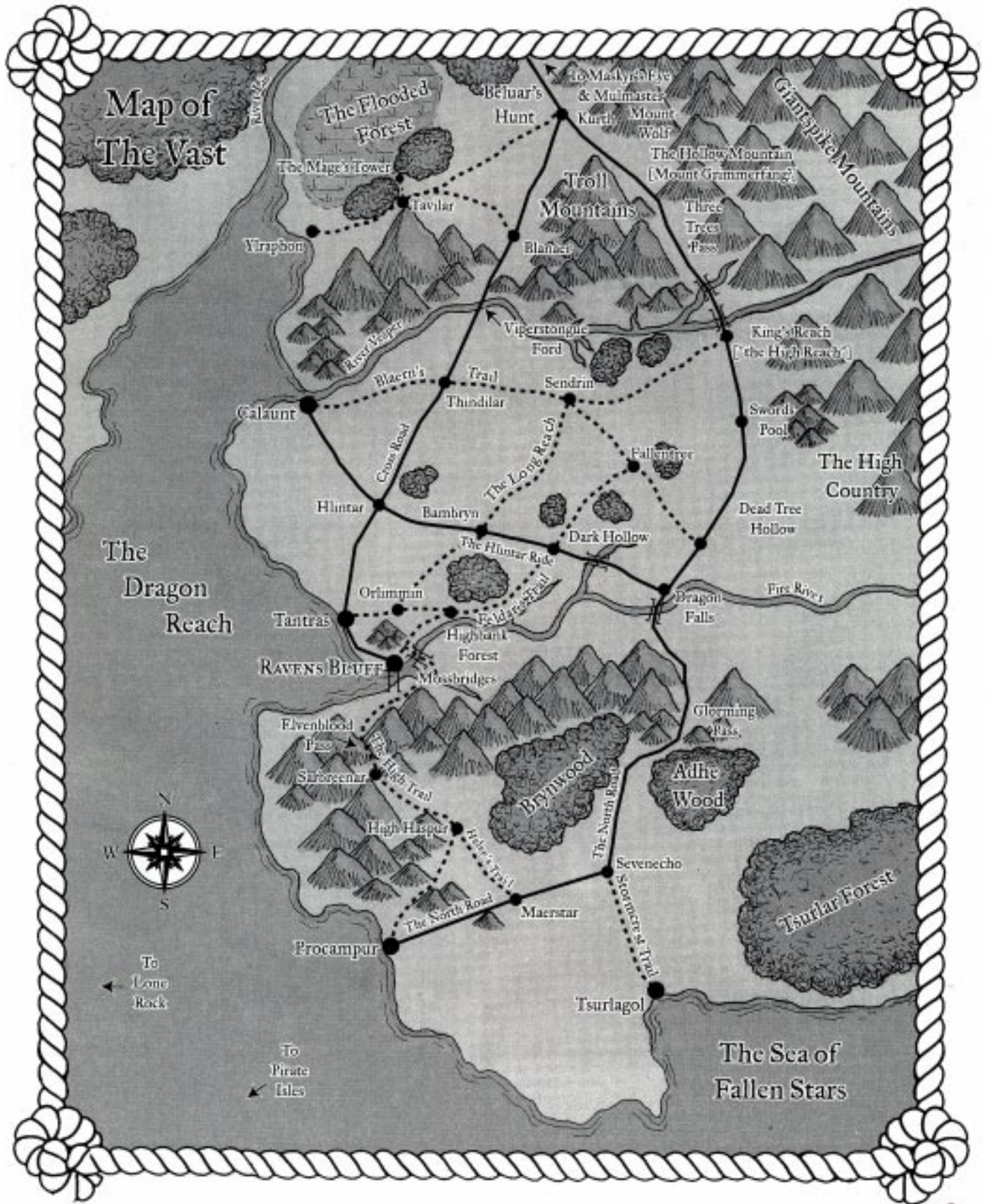
In the aftermath of this disaster, the weakened dwarves retreated east and overseas southwards. Tuir was the last Deep King to claim the surface lands or even to be known of there. If an organized dwarven kingdom still exists in the area, it must be deep and quiet indeed.

The Vast in Human Hands

Into the power vacuum left by the collapse of the dwarven kingdom came humans, mainly by ship from the crowded southern lands across the Sea of Fallen Stars, and began to settle south of the Fire River. The humans spread rapidly across the Vast, clashing often with orcs and the wild menaces of the mountains (notably leucrotta and trolls) who had grown numerous preying upon wounded and dead dwarves and orcs all across the war-torn land. Men cleared land for farms, collected fieldstone into low walls, and built good roads. Adventuring bands built themselves small keeps and collected "shield taxes" from nearby farmers in return for a promise to protect them against attack. Such defense (usually against orcs, trolls, and brigands) typically came by means of mounted warriors, bolstered by a minor battle-mage and a cleric of Tempus or Helm—and usually came too late.

Still, humans, as one elven writer of the time put it, "breed almost as recklessly as the burners" (i.e., orcs), and their swelling numbers, aided by immigration as much as by birthrate, soon absorbed the former inhabitants and pushed the predators of the Vast back into the mountains and wilder







foothills. There seemed a higher number of those who cheerfully seek out adventure among humans than among the other races, too. Bards of the Vast sometimes call this “The Time of Glorious Fools,” after the many adventurers who took on hopeless odds and undertook foolhardy attacks—and, astonishingly, won almost as often as they perished. When good roads linked Mulmaster on the Moonsea and Procampur and Tsurialagol on the Inner Sea to the rest of the Vast, and several years of bountiful harvests followed, human rule of the area was assured. The ports of Calaunt, Tantras, and the old dwarven city of Sarbreen (later to become Ravens Bluff) quickly found use by trading vessels from Sembia, Impiltur, Aglarond, and the city-state of Westgate seeking farm produce and selling fine cloth, ironwork, locks, and weapons. The harbors became trade-stops, in addition to their established uses as pirate rest-and-repair stops and immigrant-ship landing-places. Human settlers explored the nearer and more accessible mines of the area and prospered further. Many of the larger farmers grew wealthy, bought up surrounding farmers, and began calling themselves “lords.” These country gentry were often retired adventurers, while others lost their lands to adventurers looking for a place to retire, who thus replaced them as the local lords. Even today, many of these petty lords are folk of considerable ability and dangerous to cross. Among the most wealthy gentry today in the Fire River uplands near Ravens Bluff are Lord Thalmir of Mossbridges (CN hm W12), Lord Malaph Serpentshield of Dark Hollow (NE hm F14), and Lady Estele Greymantle of Highbank Forest (CG hf 11th-level Priestess of Eldath, dedicated to nurturing and rebuilding woodlands within her holding).

Although orcs and various monsters continue to infest the mountains, raiding down into the Vast now and then (especially during harsh winter weather), barring some great disaster human rule of the Vast seems assured for now and years to come.

The Vast Today

The three largest settlements in the Vast are the cities of Ravens Bluff, Tantras, and Calaunt. Exploring the rivals of Ravens Bluff in detail is beyond the scope of this work, but it is worth noting that most rural folk in the Vast view Tantras as a “god-ridden” place of “suspicious, unfriendly folk,” (thanks to the many worshipers of Torm who reside there) and consider Calaunt as an openly evil, sinister place: a den of thieves, dominated by arrogant idiots. Anyone acting in an arrogant, dangerously silly or foolish manner may be called a “Calaunt-head,” or told “oh, go back to Calaunt.”

Many of these same rural folk view Ravens Bluff as a colorful, dangerous place of chaotic intrigue. Some of them even call it “the Mad City.” These views are hardly surprising, given the judgment of the prominent sage Elminster of Shadowdale, who recently commented that the cities of the Vast “aren’t exactly stable and easy-going places to dwell, now, are they?” When asked for advice folk should heed when traveling in the Vast, Elminster added: “Beware—there are beasts and secrets sleeping in those mountains that had best be awakened only by someone with a ready blade and fast spells, if they would live to boast of it Another watchword of the Realms springs to mind as fitting, too. Remember: bandits and orcs are always with us. Slay one and three stand up in the same place. Kill one at thy gate, and expect to find another waiting under thy bed. Conduct thyself accordingly, and live longer.”

The Countryside

The countryside in general consists of rolling farmland, the fields being used for all manner of crops suitable to the climate and for grazing. Low stone rubble walls divide the fields; where a farm fronts on roads, these have often been encouraged to grow into wild hedges. Woodlots have been left here and there among the farms, although these are small in both area and tree-height; they have grown from the scrub left behind by orc treecutters centuries ago. Small brooks and streamlets are plentiful, but these seldom join up into the large, named rivers; instead, they tend to drain into pools and thence by underground ways seep down towards the sea. Some spring up again later and repeat the process. This crazy jigsaw of a water table is due to the broken, tilted layers of rock that underlie the deep soil of the Vast; dwarves say that it looks like a vast cauldron of ice chunks was stirred and then allowed to freeze with the ice sticking up at odd angles. Sinkholes, caves, and rifts are plentiful but very small; local farm children can often hide from visitors in an “empty field” by using small stone nooks and tiny sinkhole pockets that only someone intimately familiar with the ground

would find. Many farmers hide their wealth in such holes, while others build privies over them.

Where the farms end, the forest proper begins, broken by occasional stone outcrops as the foothills rise up into the mountains. Like the woods and copses dividing the farmlands below, these trees are largely regrowth sprung up from saplings left behind by orc treecutters long ago. The local druids (see page 27) carefully tend this second-growth forest and have encouraged some sylvan creatures to relocate there from older, more distant forests.

HUNTING

Boar, deer, and black-masked bear roam the forests of the Vast and can be found, well roasted, on local inn tables. The Vast is known around the Inner Sea for its succulent roast stag, the meat being of the highest quality and size. Traditionally, this dish is served on large platters, the first bearing the full rack of antlers to the tables, surrounded by sweetmeats and choice cuts.

Hunters say that game has remained surprisingly plentiful over the years. Most sages specializing in such things believe that the High Country has acted as a sort of protected breeding-ground over the years, and only the rich food offered by farm plantings tempts the choice game down into the farmlands, where the woodlots and wilderland groves offer shelter between feasts.

Most hunting is done in the scattered woods, either by a few archers on foot or by four or more stout men armed with spears, daggers, and clubs, hunting with the aid of trained dogs. The first method requires more skill and delivers game in better condition. Hunting in the foothills and on the wooded mountain flanks has always been a more dangerous game, undertaken only by large, well-armed bands, as wolves, orcs, brigands, and monstrous creatures have frequently attacked overbold hunters in the hills. More worrisome still, strange and dangerous creatures have begun to appear near the fey, mist-cloaked marshes of the Flooded Forest on the northern edge of the Vast. Giant owlbears, stirges, and other, rarer creatures that local hunters have never seen before and for which they have no names have increasingly been encountered by the unlucky. Hunting near Ylraphon is now done in large, well-armed bands, who never camp overnight in the woods if they can help it but return by torchlight with ready swords.





Customs

Folk in the Vast tend to keep to themselves and see themselves as one with the land they inhabit, loyal only to their local village or community. The countryside is beautiful but dangerous, and from their earliest days humans in the rural Vast go armed. Even the youngest child allowed out of its mother's reach will have a sling and a belt-knife. Most folk in the Vast are contented with their homes and their lot in life but are always eager to hear news of the wider Realms "outside." Such news gives them much entertainment, and they also enjoy ballads—even ballads they've heard a hundred times before.

Local bards of distinction are few, but many bards who wander Cormyr, Sembia, the Dales, and the Vast prefer the eastern side of the Reach above all else. "They treat you as a friend, as an honored guest, and as someone deserving good coin and the best food," said one. "Whenever I come into an inn, even if there be five or six harpers already gathered, smiles light up the faces of folk there, and they call out to me as if I were an old friend. Soon, I am. I'll keep walking those roads until I'm too old to walk anywhere." Wandering minstrels often to be met in the Vast include the sharp-tongued and keen-witted Nalabar of Selgaunt, the jovial and well-loved "Happy" Mamblat of Hillsfar, and the beautiful half-elf lady Sshansalue Wonderharp.

Several unique local festivals are celebrated throughout the Vast. These tend to be more energetically celebrated in the country and paid less attention in the cities.

- **The Arming** (on the fourth day of Tarsakh) commemorates the rise of the farmers and merchants together to defeat raids from the mountains south of Ravens Bluff, orc raids along the North Road, and brigand and pirate attacks throughout the Vast. On this day militias are mustered and inspected, well-polished weapons are proudly worn, and youths of both sexes are given gifts of weapons or armor in coming-of-age ceremonies, in token of their now being old enough to join the local adults in defending their farms and villages. Weaponry contests draw spectators and challengers from miles around, followed by feasts where the ballads are sung, local troupes act out famous duels and battles, and many a tale of deeds of valor is told and retold.
- **The Plowing** (6th Mirtul) is the traditional day when the ground is broken for planting all over the Vast. Neighbors often work together, with local teams traveling about to break ground for the entire community. Casks of beer aged winterlong are opened at sundown for an evening feast. The free plowing continues for up to four days, until each farmer in the neighborhood has at least one field ready for sowing.
- **Hornmoot** (14th Kythorn) is an old, fading holiday. In the days of the dwarven kingdom, it marked the first trading-day of spring between humans and dwarves, when the dwarves emerged from their underground halls at the ending of winter. The dwarves would blow horns in the mountains to signal their coming, and the humans replied with horn-calls of their own in settlements that wanted to trade. Dwarves still come to these moots (and lesser ones held on the fourteenth of each month from Kythorn through Eleint), but each year there are fewer dwarves. Traders come from as far away as Amn to get good axes and swords from the Stout Folk at these moots.
- **The Bone Dance** (9th Highsun), a hunting-festival hosted by clerics of Malar, involves a nighttime combined pageant and feast held around a bonfire. Magically animated bones of huge stags and other beasts enact stirring hunts, with the very young and very old members in each community taking the parts of the hunters. All the participants consume much food and drink late into the night, rising early the next morning to set forth en masse to track down and slay any local predators or dangerous monsters known to be active in the vicinity.

Temples & Clergy

In common with the agricultural lands nearby (Sembia, Cormyr, and the Dales), the Vast is a place tolerant of many religions. All major human faiths can be found in the Vast, notably those of Eldath, Chauntea, and Torm. The latter came in person to his temple in Tantras during the Time of Troubles, and his avatar's fall devastated an area north of the city walls, leaving it an area of twisted and tortured rock where no magic works and spellcasters of all races feel sick or faint. Shrines honoring the "travelers' gods"—Tymora, Tempus, and the newly-restored Waukeen—may be found throughout the region. For example, King's Reach and High Haspur have shrines dedicated to Tymora, both administered from a small temple in

Mulmaster, while Turlagol, Calaunt, Tantras, and Ravens Bluff all have temples of Tymora of their own. Waukeen's temples suffered gradual decline during her imprisonment but seem likely to make a quick recovery following her recent return. In addition, shrines and the occasional temple to other gods can be found across the Vast, most of the temples being within the major cities. One relic of the fallen dwarven realm still to be seen here and there along the North Road are boulders etched with the crossed battle-axes of Clangeddin, Father of Battles—and many local warriors pray to both Clangeddin and Tempus before they go to war in the mountains.

Inns and Roads

According to most travelers, the best inns in the area are not found in the cities or even in the Vast proper but in the wilder stretches of road linking the Vast with neighboring cities. Arguably the finest of these is The Wizard's Hand in Maskyr's Eye in the north; close behind come a pair of southern inns: The Worried Wyvern in Sevenecho and The Elf In Armor in High Haspur.

The Hand, some eighty winters old, is named for the vanished wizard Maskyr One-Eye. The Wyvern is comparatively recent, not quite twenty years of age, and dominates the hamlet of Sevenecho (named for the family of the innkeeper), located where the main overland road from Procampur meets the Turlagol Road. The Elf in Armor is named after the elven warrior Beluar, who aided the dwarves of Tuir's fading kingdom in their battles against the orcs. Beluar and his small band of elven riders perished in an orc road-ambush in the mountain pass south of Ravens Bluff, known ever since as Elvenblood Pass. Beluar is buried in Sarbreenar, the hamlet just south of that pass. From his resting-place, the High Trail runs south to High Haspur, where it forks to run southwest to Procampur and southeast towards Turlagol and a junction with the main North Road.

Farther north, Belaur's Hunt and the rival Rolling Heads Inn both commemorate Beluar's most famous victory over the orcs. Routing the humanoids at Viperstongue Ford (where the Cross Road from Kurth to Hlintar crosses the River Vesper), Beluar's forces pursued them north into a rugged line of hills southwest of Kurth, and thence north along the road as far as Maskyr's Eye, where Beluar himself slew the last of the orcs on the road outside the town smithy. The hills west of the road, between Kurth and Maskyr's Eye, are locally known as "Beluar's Hunt" and have given their name to one of Kurth's two inns; the rival Rolling Heads Inn at the other end of town takes its name from the most notable token the routed orcs left behind.

Some travelers mark their progress not by the inns but by landmarks on the roads in between. South of Maskyr's Eye, the border of the Vast proper is marked by Mount Wolf, towering high above the North Road. Of old, many gray wolves laired near the peak, until local hunters saw them as far too efficient competition for the highly prized stags and greatly reduced their numbers. There are no known passes through the mountains from the Vast to eastern lands, although rumors persist of hidden ways through the peaks from the easternmost reaches of the High Country to Impiltur. This range of peaks that wall in the Vast on the east is sometimes called the Giantspike Mountains.

To the south, the road runs through the market town of Kurth and into Three Trees Pass (named, it is said, by one merchant of Sembia talking to another long ago, when both had explored the dwarven lands in hopes of opening up a trade-route from the dwarven mines to the River Vesper). The mountains on either side of the pass are sometimes called the Troll Mountains, although few trolls are seen there today. They have been almost eradicated by the dwarves who live in mines high above the Pass—once-rich mines that now yield only a little iron and less copper.

South of "the High Reach" (a nickname used to distinguish the town of King's Reach from "the Reach" or Dragon Reach, the great arm of the Inner Sea that divides the Vast from the Dales), the road leaves the mountains, crossing rolling hill-country. Its southerly route roughly divides the walled farms of the Vast from the High Country, a large expanse of grassy hills and rocky moorland inhabited mainly by shepherds and their flocks. Several small stop-over camps may be found along the North Road as it crosses this rolling open land, each by a pond or stream. At least two of these sites boast inns, The Nine Swords at Swords Pool and The Blue Stallion at Dead Tree Hollow.

The High Country

Local legends—even in the days when the orcs ruled—have always held that the High Country was home to an elusive, unseen people. Wanderers' reports of sightings have been few and contradictory, so the exact nature of



the inhabitants is not known: guesses include dryads, sprites, dopplegangers, treants, feral halflings, and some unknown fey race. There are areas—particularly small, hidden dells crowded with old, moss-covered trees, sparkling pools, and the occasional standing stone—that prudent shepherds always avoid. If weather or mischance brings an experienced shepherd into one of these areas, their custom is to leave as soon as possible, move quickly and quietly, light no fires and cut no trees, and leave behind one or two sheep tethered to a stake, with a loudly-spoken but humble apology for trespassing. The less prudent take their chances, but fewer return to bring back tales of the hidden dells.

Sheep-trails crisscross much of the High Country, but the Hidden People tolerate few buildings. Most shepherds use simple, temporary turf-huts. A few lonely, widely separated stone towers standing in the eastern-most reaches of the High Country are said to belong to powerful, reclusive mages, who are left alone by the Hidden People because they turn back most of the orc bands that wander down from the surrounding mountains.

Treasures of The Vast: An Adventurer's Guide

*Treasure? Aye, lots of it in the Vast, lad;
why didn't ye ask earlier?*

Oh... I see; ye wanted to live a while, first.

Buirin Thalshond,
merchant of Tantras
Year of the Prince



Ravens Bluff is a city of adventurers, and such folk tend to see the Realms in terms of treasure sites. Cities, with their constables, laws, and crowding, tend to be another matter, and the following adventurers' "Treasure Tour" of the Vast leaves all of them out. Although many expert sources were consulted in the compilation of this tour, this is a by-no-means exhaustive survey of where the loot is (or may be) in the countryside.

Adhe Wood

This wood is old and very thickly grown. The giant trunks of trees stand close together, rising like dark lances eighty feet or more. Duskwood and shadowtop are the predominant varieties, with some felsul and oak on the southern edges of the forest.

The depths of Adhe Wood is a place of perpetual gloom, home to many spiders and ettercaps. Some ancient and evil magic works in the heart of the wood—perhaps a crazed mage given to experimentation or an artifact that warps the local wildlife—and the result is a wild variety of spiders. The sage Alither of Lyrabar believes the source of the numerous spider mutations is a diseased or magically altered deepspawn ("the Father of Spiders"). Another sage, Othla Multar of Spandeliyon, believes that drow are behind the arachnids, breeding and release them here to guard an entrance to the Underdark. According to this theory, drow emerge from time to time and steal southeast into the Tsurlar Forest, where they trade with pirate ships in hidden coves. No adventurers have investigated the true cause of the wild variety of spiders—at least none have returned to tell others what they found there.

Arachnids encountered here may be of any size, and most have strange spell-like powers and body weaponry (such as hooked slasher-claws or sting tails). They stalk each other and intruders in an endless bloodlust. Local lore in Tsurlagol whispers that the bloodless, web-shrouded husks of many fallen adventurers litter the forest, and that the ruins of an old temple they were trying to reach can be glimpsed from the North Road—a temple shrouded in spiderwebs and adorned with statues of rearing snakes whose eyes are gigantic emeralds. There is much argument among citizens of Tsurlagol as to just which god this temple is dedicated to, but everyone seems sure that it is a storehouse of a fabulous collection of gems. Strangely, the inhabitants of the nearby hamlet of Seveecho profess to have never heard such stories—but they never go near "spider-haunted Adhe Wood" either.

Bambryn

This way-village is a place of horse-ranches and hedgerows, located where the trail known as the Long Reach crosses the large, well-traveled road known as the Hlinter Ride. Its pastoral beauty and easy access to

trade-routes makes it popular with successful and not yet entirely retired merchants and adventurers looking to build manor houses. Wealth is everywhere in Bambryn, albeit guarded by hired armsmen, and tends to be invested in fine horseflesh and luxury crops (such as flowers whose freshness is augmented by cantrips before shipping elsewhere, or truffles and other exotic fungi). Portable treasure that can be seized without a fight is less plentiful, but there are tales of a highwayman's lost loot.

Iljack of the Black Blade was a daring brigand who swung a dull black broadsword with magical powers. He terrorized the central Vast in the early days of human habitation, stripping peddlers and dwarven metal-traders alike of their goods. On many occasions Iljack narrowly escaped death, using the magic of his blade to spirit himself out of traps and bloody ambushes—and he would return the favor by hunting down and assassinating anyone who led a strike against him, wherever they ended up (even if he had to travel to Procampur or a more distant city to do so).

In the end, this thirst for revenge claimed his life. He hunted down a merchant who was riding to wed a sorceress—and she rose from their bridal bed to hurl Iljack out the window of her tower in Procampur. The highwayman made the flight out over the water in the heart of a swarm of fireballs, and only ashes and a blazing blade struck the water below. Iljack's booty, widely believed to be hidden somewhere in Bambryn (his base of operations), has never been found. A stone marked with a black sword was found buried under a tree felled by a storm—but under it was no treasure, only another stone bearing the words: "Moved it all. See me for your share." Under these words was the black sword symbol.

From time to time, adventurers still come to Bambryn looking for the highwayman's treasure. Those who go looking around manor house grounds are usually welcomed in an unfriendly fashion by war-dogs-or worse.

Beluar's Hunt

This area of rolling hills is the site of the elven warrior Beluar's great victory over the orcs long ago. Today, it is a grassy wasteland where the occasional brigand band lurks and wild horses roam. Popular Vast folklore says that some of the drumlin hills of the Hunt hide barrow-tombs of great antiquity, as well as shallow and hasty warriors' graves from the early days of human rule in the Vast. Such tales are given support by the disaster that befell a Dragon Cult expedition some twenty winters ago. They dug away a hill around some stones that looked to be broken pieces of pillars, opening up a tomb that was home to a lich whose skull-head had antlers like a great stag. The stag-headed lich slaughtered them with its spells in a very short and terrible time, tearing their bodies apart with phantom claws. It then strode around the nearby countryside, slaying every living creature it met with, before retreating into its lair and using spells to bury itself again. The only surviving witnesses were scared mages in Tavilar and Kurth using scrying spells quite independently of each other, so their tales ring true. The lich still lurks somewhere under the grassy hills, presumably guarding some powerful magic.

Veteran adventurers note: rumor has it that the Dragon Cult force found and carried off more than one tomb-treasure before unleashing the lich. Many of them speak longingly of searching the hills again one day. Then someone always speaks of the stag-headed lich—and silence falls.

Blanaer

This waystop village is the local market for scores of sheep and cattle farms—a place of stock-paddocks, manure piles for sale, and other exciting attractions. "Stinks like Blanaer" is a popular Vast expression. Lost or perilous treasure is not something most folk associate with this hard-working center of farming. Still, there are some tales of riches hastily buried under manure piles and in the heart of busy stockyards, guarded by the ever-present hooves, horns, and sheer bulk of the cattle.

These treasure caches, the tales say, were buried by thieves on the run from treacherous comrades or vengeful victims, or by metal-traders from Kurth on the run from brigands. It is certain that bodies have been found hanging from roadside trees in Blanaer on more than one morning in the last decade and that in earlier, more lawless days brigands fought openly up and down the Cross Road in the vicinity. Coffers, rotting saddlebags, and even water-pails and nosebags full of coins have turned up in Blanaer's pastures and manure-piles from time to time, but only the gods know if there is more booty to be found here.



Brynwood

The large forest of Brynwood rambles up and down many rocky outcrops and steep-sided ravines, covering a large area north of Maerstar and Seveecho. This trackless, tumbled terrain is as difficult to travel through as the Stonelands north of Cormyr—and like that infamous region, the Brynwood hides many a monster. It was once home to many korred and satyrs, but these two races disputed territory with each other, and in the strife that followed both fell prey to monsters that grew steadily more numerous, until the original inhabitants have almost disappeared. Human incursions have cleared much of the land between the mountains and the Tsurलगan coast, but the Brynwood remains a deadly heart of the woods that no human dare try to fell.

Legends whisper that a clan of evil shapechanging creatures dwell here—spell-using beings who can appear as female humans to lure male adventurers into the forest depths and then change form into giant spiders, wolves, owlbears, or huge snakes to devour the hapless men. A rival legend holds that the women are human who take animal form to discourage intruders of all kinds. A minstrel even composed a ballad about one of them, a white-haired, scornful mage he called “Snowhair the Sorceress.”

Whatever the truth, at least three notable adventuring bands—the Company of the Talking Shield, The Men of the Purple Sash, and The Skullsword Reavers—have vanished while exploring Brynwood in the last decade, and Harper rangers have been heard to mutter unhappily that “something evil lurks in that wood.” One tavern-tale popular in Impiltur tells of an ancient, many spired castle at the heart of the wood where the shapeshifting women dwell, devising powerful spells. According to this story, they use magical *gates* to travel to Westgate, Telflamm, Airspur, and even Waterdeep with a single step. There, the tale whispers, they gather magic by stealth and poison, slaying or drugging wizards and seizing what they can. One day these “Bryndar,” as the tale dubs them, will emerge from their woody retreat to try and rule the Realms by their magic, if they aren’t stopped in the meantime by brave (or foolish or lucky) adventurers. The truth of this surprisingly vivid and persistent tale remains unproven; Elminster believes that someone or something is spreading the tale or keeping it alive in order to lure adventurers into Brynwood for purposes unknown.

Calaunt

This medium-sized city perches at the mouth of the River Vesper, just as Ravens Bluff sits at the mouth of the Fire River. One of Ravens Bluffs four sister-cities in the Vast (the others are Procampur, Tantras, and Tsurलगol), it is a squalid, depressing place, full of tumbledown buildings and rotting slums. Only a few upperclass merchants and successful adventurers can afford to live in the manor houses along the city wall. The city’s chief business is tanning; mariners say you can find Calaunt in the densest fog by the stink alone.

Calaunt is ruled by Supreme Scepter Bellas Thanatar (NE hm F12), a former adventurer whose regime is supported by his six former adventuring companions, “Bellas’s Band.” These Merchant Dukes, as they are called, became rich by following Bellas’s orders and richer still by helping him run Calaunt. The “free city” also has a standing army of six thousand soldiers led by twenty captains (5th-level warriors), each paired by his or her own battlemage (twenty 4th-level illusionists). A navy of six ships helps keep the pirates at bay—although rumor has it that the pirates find more welcome here than in most other ports on the Dragon Reach. The average citizen or adventurer from

Ravens Bluff will find no welcome here, as Calauntans both hate and fear their rival to the south.

There is much magic here, but of a heavy-handed nature, intended to support the rule of the Supreme Scepter and his Merchant Dukes. For example, six great stone golems stand beside the city gates, their purpose as much to cow the populace as to protect the city. Any magic brought here by outsiders tends to be confiscated by the rulers “for the benefit of the city” and then used for their personal aggrandizement.

Daily life here is dominated by two large temples. The House of Scarlet Hooks is a grand temple devoted to Loviatar; its high priestess, Shaleen “Talonkiss” Oomreen (LE hf P14) is aided in her duties by twenty-four priests and priestess eager to spread “holy pain.” Less daunting to the visitor is Moon-

silver House, the temple of Selune, led by high priestess Wyndra Syrylstone (CG hf P19) and twenty-two priestesses. Smaller shrines to Auril the Frost-maiden, Malar the Beastlord, Talos the Storm Lord, and Lliira the Joybringer all have their adherents as well. And behind the scenes, a large and active Thieves Guild, the Shadowcloaks (widely believed to work directly for the Merchant Dukes), prowl the twisting backstreets of this dark town.

Tantran merchants who trade here have taken to hiring adventurers and mercenary hireswords to guard their warehouses, caravans, and goods being loaded and unloaded in Calaunt. Some of these hired heroes recently spent a frantic evening hacking gargoyles or similar winged, fanged things out of the air—creatures that seemed to teleport from place to place at will. Those who had fought gargoyles before said that these beasts were much more dangerous: huge, quick, and cunning. So far the plague of “Calaunt gargoyles” seems not to have spread beyond the city—but the surviving adventurers noted with concern that the gargoyles ignored Calauntan targets, suggesting that they are either under the control to this sinister city’s leaders or that the Merchant Dukes have reached some mutually beneficial accord with the monsters.



Dark Hollow

This small village gets its name from the tree-cloaked valley where Fel-dar’s Trail (from Fallentree to Mossbridges) crosses the Hlinter Ride. Dark Hollow has always had a fey, dangerous reputation across the Vast. Folk see it as a place where faerie dragons frolic, brownies and other woodland beings play pranks on intruders, and many crazy would-be wizards dwell in little ramshackle cabins in the woods and try to devise spells that will allow them to rule the Realms—spells whose experimentations often prove disastrous for anyone nearby.

In such a place, monetary treasure is paltry; wizards never have enough coin for the very expensive business of working magic and are often reduced to selling potions in order to put bread (and a little cheese) on the table. Some merchants from Ravens Bluff and Hlinter do a brisk business in selling these hedge-wizards spell components and fragments of artifacts or broken magic items, buying up potions in return for their trouble. Adventurers often find this a lucrative trade but a dangerous one: thieves are always alert for such valuable loot—so much so that guarding a traveling “magic merchant” is a steady job for some adventurers in the Vast.

The hedge-wizards of Dark Hollow range in levels from 1st through 8th (most are 1st to 4th), and all alignments are represented. Their magical treasure—spellbooks and scrolls, collections of rare components, and working magic items—is considerable but often hidden in extremely ingenious ways, and heavily trapped and guarded to boot. More than one wizard has wands built into his or her desk, so as to fire at intruders standing in front of it with-



out getting up or moving his or her hands. Others have had their familiars transport their valuables bit by bit to locations unreachable by human- or demihuman-sized burglars.

More than one thieving band has found Dark Hollow's reputation to be a convenient cover for stashing loot, choosing a wizard's woodpile or compost heap to bury a pot or well-oiled sack of coins. There's just one problem: recovering it. That kitten playing on the woodpile may very well be a familiar who guards its master's property diligently (including the stash, once it's been put in the woodpile). A familiar might also report the "donation" to its master moments after the thief has left, so the wizard will have long since spent the coins before the thief returns for them.

Dead Tree Hollow

This onetime camping-place on the North Road is a small valley with its own ponds, marked for years by a huge, gnarled old oak whose trunk was as large around as many cottages. Only the rotting stump now remains: the druid who made his home in the hollow tree years ago was burned out of it by a hungry dragon (perhaps the dragon that laired in nearby Dragon Falls). Dead Tree Hollow is today a sleepy little wooded village, known for its fiddlehead (in season) and fern-frond soup, exotic mushrooms (much prized by gourmets around the Dragon Reach), and its excellent wagonworks.

The Hollow also has its own treasure tale, more unlikely than most. An elven carriage is said to be buried somewhere in the Hollow (perhaps sunk in one of the ponds): a magical, flying conveyance from long ago, still packed with the gem-adorned silk gowns and jewelry of the haughty elven lady who died on it. Her bones—and those of her guards—may well lie with the fallen craft, too. They were slain by a furious elven mage (a scorned suitor) whose spells smashed them from the sky and then buried them alive. This happened a very long time ago, but elves in the lands around remember the incident because of the extreme wealth of the lady in question (she had outlived six husbands and taken all their wealth for her own).

Adventurers still search, from time to time, for the final resting-place of Lady Alauthshae—but be warned: the entire Hollow is a dead-magic zone, where no spells work. This effect is said to be the price of the reckless spells hurled by the angry elf-mage Ilthurny long ago.

Dragon Falls

The largest settlement along the North Road between King's Reach and Tsurlagol is the village of Dragon Falls, named for a spring that cascades down a bluff beside the road and runs down to the Fire River. Of old, it was the lair of a fearsome red dragon named Halarglautha Firewings. Some say that the Fire River's name comes from the devastation this great wyrm wrought on orc, dwarven, and human encampments and settlements up and down the river, until a human adventuring band finally slew it. Rather than cart off its hoard of treasure, the survivors founded a stronghold on the site; their headquarters eventually became the fortified *Inn of the Dragon* and the center of a growing village populated largely by their descendants. Dragon Falls stands where the North Road and the Hlinter Ride meet, just north of the Fire River.

The village stands on a crag overlooking the only large cataract on the Fire River. The original dragon's lair and much of its treasure were destroyed by the adventurers who slew the wyrm with their spells, but a vast pile of coins remained to be divvied up by the dragon-slayers. Each share was then divided again and again among their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Some say the last coins were spent long ago, but persistent rumor would have it that a lot of the old hoard still lies buried in small caches under the cottages and gardens of the village (adventurers who show up with shovels won't be welcomed). There's also an old local belief that the dragon made its lair here (rather than on a taller, more easily defended peak in the nearby Troll Mountains) because it knew of dwarven storage-caverns full of gold under the crag and hoped to eventually trick, bribe, or bully smaller creatures to dig down to the riches and bring them up to it.

Elvenblood Pass

This rugged mountain pass carries the High Trail through the mountains between Ravens Bluff and Sarbreenar. Its reputation has always been one of danger due to frequent rockfalls, hunting stirges, wyverns, and other mountain-dwelling predators, and brigands. More than a dozen narrow ravines, all thickly cloaked in trees, cross the trail. These are home to the bandits, many of the flightless monsters, and, rumor insists, much treasure fallen

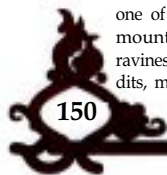
from the devoured bodies of victims or seized from those robbed on the road. Among the coins and trinkets buried or stuffed into rock crevices in the Pass, legend whispers, are at least two great treasures.

One is the coffin of the long-dead human wizard Naer Tlarra, said to contain his spellbooks, wands, staff, and a twelve-pointed magical crown that allows the wearer to use the powers of all magical rings placed on its spires as if they were worn directly (overcoming the usual limit of two operative rings at one time). The tales say that a ring rests on each point—and at least two of them possess rare and unusual powers. No tale hints that Naer (who lived almost a thousand years ago, in what is now Chessenta) is undead. His ten-foot-long stone coffin is said to be guarded from thieves by several layers of spells and bound guardian creatures and is probably buried (or at least hidden in overgrown by now) as well. It would be far too heavy for wagons or carts capable of negotiating the Pass to carry.

The other great treasure said to be hidden in or near the Pass is the royal treasury of Westgate, stolen from King Glaurauth "the Great" in the days when that city-state was the northernmost human settlement in the western Inner Sea lands. The thieves were traced by Glaurauth's wizards and hotly pursued. They fled by ship to anchorage at what is now Procampur, and took their spoils hastily north into the mountains, as the spells of the Court Wizards of Westgate slew them one by one. Elite troops from Westgate followed the thieves and caught up with them somewhere in the Pass. The canny thieves set off avalanches and mounted ambushes, but their pursuers outnumbered them thirty to one, and the spells of the wizards made the outcome inevitable. The daring thieves perished or were captured—but the spellhurlings and clash of arms had not gone unnoticed. A thousand orcs streamed out of high caves and the ravines and fell upon the forces from Westgate.

The Pass ran red with blood, and to this day travelers can see a grisly relic of one wizard's last stand: he sacrificed his life to power an *everdance* spell that whirled a dozen orcs forty feet up into the air and spun them in a circle. The orcs died and their bodies crumbled to bone fragments and powder long ago, but this debris still circles endlessly above a ledge overlooking the midpoint of the Pass.

The forces of Westgate were doomed, but they held out long enough to hide the riches they were about to die for. The few surviving thieves joined forces with their pursuers to help conceal the treasure with all their skill. Unless someone has found the lost regalia since, it still lies somewhere in the Pass.





According to the royal auditor's report, there were six large strongchests and almost twenty smaller coffers and hand-chests, containing many necklaces of gems, a collection of fanciful filigreed and jeweled masks, at least four gem-laden crowns, a ceremonial chalice, and a scepter said to have magical powers as well as displaying three rubies all as large as a man's fist.

Oddly enough, a wizard found dead at a party thrown by a visiting Cormyrean noble in Ravens Bluff six winters ago was wearing a gem-adorned mask that sages agree is probably from the court of Westgate. But they all stress that it might not have been part of the stolen royal regalia, as many nobles of Westgate had their own impressive masks made—and with the changing themes and fashions of the festivals, craftsmen were forever tearing apart masks to make up new ones from the same materials. Still, it is possible that someone has discovered the lost treasury and may be removing its more valuable contents a piece at a time to avoid notice.

Fallentree

This wayside village got its name just how you think it did. Located at the meeting of two trails (Blaern's Trail, linking Calaupt with the North Road at Dead Tree Hollow via Thindilar and Sendrin) and Feldar's Trail (which runs from Fallentree to Mossbridges, via Dark Hollow and Highbank Forest), Fallentree is a place of dark pines and horse farms. Of old, it was a haunt of brigands, who could hide in any of a dozen pine woods among the rolling hills and swoop down on travelers at full gallop—or fell a tall pine across a road, forcing a hurrying caravan to a halt in the grip of a brigand ambush. Many merchants took to avoiding the area altogether, forcing the brigands to ride farther and farther afield. Other traders banded together into large caravans, hiring small armies as guards. Fallentree was the field for several pitched battles, and many brigand cabals died without leaving anyone alive to know where their loot was hidden.

Over the years since the more powerful brigands were all slain (small bands are always forming and dissolving in death or treachery to this day), many small treasure caches—usually a chest or a few rotting sacks crammed with a varied assortment of coins—have been found around Fallentree, usually buried at the base of old pine trees. One larger cache was an entire wagon of silver trade-bars, buried whole with its dead guards (transformed to undead skeletons over the years by their proximity to guardian spells on the treasure).

Rumor has it that once a mid-level wizard and his two apprentices fell in battle with brigands and that their spellbooks, magic rings, and other items lie buried somewhere in or near Fallentree. Local legend also holds that an ancient temple to Garagos the War-God is located in a cavern under one of the cottages in the village—a temple adorned with magical weapons gathered by cultists from all over the Realms. Rumor also has it that the temple still sees worship of the fallen battle-god and that spells in the sanctuary can be called on at need by the devout to animate the collected weapons in a whirling defense of the holy place.

Fire River

This large, generally placid watercourse descends from the grassy plains of the High Country (where it may well feature in legends and treasure finds not covered here) cutting across the Vast to reach the Sea of Fallen Stars at Ravens Bluff. Many springs rise in the southern Vast to join it, and their sources are cloaked in thick stands of trees which have hidden many an outlaw, treasure, and reclusive mage over the years. It is said that more new and terrible spells have lashed down the Fire River valley than anywhere else in the Realms since the fall of Netheril. Some of these wizards' secrets have died with them—including where their magical items and spellbooks are hidden. The oldest and most powerful mages have extra-dimensional residences, with helmed horrors and other guardians, magical traps, and *gates* linking them to other places in the Realms and to other planes; most of the wizards have simpler hiding-places.

There's also a smugglers' tale from the early days of Ravens Bluff. Barges of goods were often brought into the city by night from ships standing well out in the Reach. On one occasion there was treachery and open spell-battle on the docks. The barges hastily sculled away, up the river. In the darkness and confusion, at least one barge sank and presumably still lies somewhere in the mud of the river bottom with its cargo of thousands of crated, newly minted gold pieces.

Glorming Pass

This wild mountain pass into the southern Vast is less used than Elvenblood Pass further to the west. Named for a local orc chieftain—a hero to his kind—who fell fighting in the pass, it is still a dangerous place today. Still, it sees a good deal of traffic, as it carries the North Road through the broken land between Dragon Falls and Seveecho.

Glorming Pass is haunted by "The Phantom Knights"—ghostly horsemen in full plate armor who gallop spectral mounts the length of the pass, lances lowered. They sound solid and look real, turning their closed helms to face nearby living beings as they pass. They ride right through any that bar their way or simply fail to get out of the path in time but do no harm to those they pass through, except to confer a momentary chill and a longer (1 turn) period in which the touched being glows with a pale blue *faerie fire* radiance. No one knows who the Knights are or were, and they ignore all magic and attempts to influence or control undeath. Their touch causes all magical dweomers to glow a flickering ruby-red (revealing hidden or disguised magical items), and this has on occasion drawn attention to magic fallen by the roadside—usually on the corpse of someone orcs have slain.

Orcs are numerous in the mountains around the pass; merchants are advised not to attempt passage without numbers sufficient to give battle if need be. Sites for ambushes and deliberate rockfalls may be far fewer than in Elvenblood Pass, but the orc patrols are heavy and monsters of all sorts are frequent. At least one authority (Riliyyn Scantsnar of Seveecho) believes some evil power, perhaps a wizard, lich, or even an al-hoon (illithilich) dwells in the peaks near the pass and has placed a deepspawn in the area to generate monsters and discourage intruders. This hidden lair, if it exists, may have powerful magic among its treasures. Other sages believe the deepspawn guards a fortress built around a *gate* leading to the demiplane of Ravenloft or another world entirely.

Whatever the truth about Glorming Pass, the orcs who swarm in the mountains around it have taken a considerable amount of treasure from unfortunate travelers over the years. Some at least must remain in the orc cavern-lairs in the vicinity.

Highbank Forest

A wooded village located where Feldar's Trail meets the Tantras Trail, Highbank Forest is a sleepy place today. It is best known for its skilled who make furniture and toys of the finest quality and intricacy. The carvings of Highbank Forest are justly famous and quickly bought up by enterprising merchants for sale to the nobility and the wealthy all over the Realms.

Highbank Forest gets its name from a steep-sided wooded hill just to the north of the village proper; its flanks shelter the cottages of the village from the worst winter winds. Of old, a keep stood atop the hill. Now only ruins among the trees remain, with a central shaft leading down to the disused dungeon levels below. The villagers throw their garbage and carrion into it (including dead strangers), and children playing nearby know well enough to avoid the pit, as none who have gone down it have ever sent anything back up other than their screams.

Unbeknownst to all, a huge gibbering moulder lurks at the bottom of the shaft, waiting eagerly for anything that falls in. The moulder is trapped in a large central room (empty save for a well); all three of the doors leading out of the room are guarded by *walls of force* that must be dispelled before anyone can touch (much less open) them. The areas beyond contain the spellbooks, half-finished magical items, wealth, spell components, and personal belongings of eleven apprentice wizards. They were all slain years ago by brigands using poisoned arrows and trained monsters, who tricked their way into the keen and slew the wizards of the school one by one. The last dying wizard released the moulder (kept as a trapped guardian) and used her spells to bring the keep crashing down atop them all.

The villagers know nothing of this lost school of wizardry. As far as they know, the keep belonged to a brigand who set himself up as a local ruler. Under the title "Lord Wolf," he and his band preyed upon caravans for many years, until the nearby cities of Ravens Bluff and Tantras hired an army to eliminate him. In fact Lord Wolf did exist, but he dwelt in hiding in an outlying cottage of the village, using the ruined keep only as a rallying place for his men before mounting a bid.



High Haspur

This mountain village stands south of Elvenblood Pass, where Helve's Trail (from Maerstar) meets the High Trail (from Ravens Bluff to Procampur). High Haspur is reputed to be a place of riches: the ruling Morninglight gnomes are said to be the only miners and gold-smelters currently operating in the Vast. This clan work underground, digging tunnels down from their gold-cellars and the caverns where they assemble and test their many inventions. Among the Morninglight innovations are multiple-bolt crossbows, various nasty traps, mobile corridor-blocking armored shields, and other devices that would enable a few gnomes to defend a subterranean area against more numerous human or orc raiders.

A shaft leading down from a fireplace in *The Elf in Armor*, the excellent inn run by the Morninglights, is said to be the main way into the underground family holdings. Certain elderly dwarves who hold grudges against the gnome clan can be persuaded (by gold and drink) to tell something of the traps in the shaft and the locations of the various caverns and other entrances. There's a local dwarven legend about a natural cavern in the mountains somewhere northwest of High Haspur: a cave entirely lined with flashing and glittering beljurils. These seawater-green, fist-sized, and very hard gems periodically blaze with light, briefly giving off enough radiance to read by. Much prized all over Faerûn, they are worth 5,000 gold each—and the cavern, if it still exists, must hold many thousand beljurils. The legend is vague about how the cavern is reached (or guarded) but says darkly that all who try to find the cavern either disappear or are soon found dead, each with a single beljuril crammed into his or her mouth.

Hlinter

This small crossroads town, ruled by a Master Merchant who heads up a council of eight local merchants, is known for its finely trained horses (bred locally). It is also home to several large and muddy pig-farms famous for their top-notch bacon.

Almost a hundred winters ago, a greedy and ambitious Master Merchant of Hlinter, one Marakus Beindold, sought to enrich his coffers and expand Hlinter's farms into the hills east of the town—land traditionally claimed by the dwarves. Inviting the dwarves to Hornmoot, Marakus sent hired mercenaries to forcibly occupy the village before the guests arrived. He welcomed the dwarves and feasted them, plying them with drugged wine, then had them butchered in their bedchambers during the night. Only a few escaped—enough to elude the Master's guards and break all his joints with their hammers in his bedchamber ten nights after the battle. He was found horribly crushed, helpless in his blood, in the morning and was rescued only through the heroic (and expensive) efforts of several local clerics.

That was the last Hlinter has seen of dwarves from that day to this. No dwarf of the Vast will knowingly or willingly set foot in Hlinter, nor trade dwarven-work with a merchant known to trade there. Yet this crossroads town is always jingling with the money in the pockets, purses, and saddlebags of the busy merchants passing through it. Despite being shunned by the Stout Folk, Hlinter is a place of much intrigue and wealth. A traveler can hear tales in every bar of double-crossing merchants who didn't live to reclaim their hidden savings. Folk in Hlinter were so rich, the tales go, that they ran out of places to hide their loot, and too many thieves were growing fat just pulling at loose stones in the street and in every chimney. So Hlinter's enterprising local merchants undertook a banking service of sorts.

Now that the local shrine to Waukeen has been abandoned, Hlinter's temple to Chauntea has reluctantly taken over the "silent vault" service. Valuables and sensitive goods of all sorts (from stolen statues of recognizable monarchs to the bodies of prematurely and conveniently deceased relatives) are stored out of sight in monster- and spell-guarded vaults under the temple, for a fee of 1 gold per chest per month. Few thieves try to pry into these holdings: the guards include many "battle horror" shadowguards (the most powerful form of the animated suits of armor commonly known as helmed horrors) and at least one watchghost.

Rumor has it that Hlinter is still stuffed with caches of coins and gems: thieves tell each other to test every panel and pillar. Many floors in private homes, under the worn carpets, are paved with brick—gold brick, slathered with clay to look like normal building materials. One old Hlinter habit—fallen out of favor since ghouls became a problem—was to hide wealth in ancestral crypts. The less wealthy resorted to hollow cavities in the head-

the graveyard day and night, waiting to relieve the bereaved of any wealth they might happen to be carrying. There were pitched battles between rival gangs, and between thieves and bodyguards hired by bereaved Hlinterans, till the habit of hiding gold in graves lost popularity. It is quite possible that some caches of treasure remain in Hlinter's knolltop graveyard—thanks to the thieves and some ghouls that have arisen from graves since, some bereaved folk may not have lived long enough to recover their hidden savings.

King's Reach

King's Reach is a wealthy, fortified town that has always served as a center for trade between those bringing ore from the mines to smelt (or worked metals smelted elsewhere) and those bringing goods by barge upriver from the Reach to trade with the miners. Originally the miners were dwarves: now they are mostly human, with only a few dwarves remaining.

The Reach marks the highest navigable upriver point on the Vesper; above the town, the Vesper's chill, clear waters are broken by a long series of rocky cascades. The town's name comes not for the reach of any human king into the dwarven lands but for the fact that Tuir Stonebeard, king of the dwarves, decreed long ago that this far into the mountains—and no further—would men be permitted to reach. Other origins for the name have been given, but most sages agree that this is the oldest, and possibly even true.

Today, King's Reach is the largest smelting center in the Vast, the source of many trade-bars of iron and silver and palm-ingots of nickel and copper. Zinc and gold are also found in lesser amounts. The trade-metal all winds up in well-guarded fortress stronghouses guarded by men whose crossbows let loose at the first hint of trouble. Orcs and brigands try their luck fairly often but are more successful attacking mule-trains of ore in the mountains than in overwhelming the defenses of King's Reach. Adventurers and mercenary warriors do a brisk business as hiring-guards seeing ore-trains safely to the smelters—and at one time or another, just about everyone in King's Reach goes out alone or with a trusted friend or two (trusted at the outset, at least!) seeking that rich vein of gold that will make them rich for life.

There are small but very pure gold deposits in the Giantspike Mountains east and north of King's Reach (the Troll Mountains to the northwest have been thoroughly worked out, and the resulting disused mine-passages that honeycomb them have become infested with monsters). The dwarves of old knew of this gold, but their attempts to reach it attracted much orc attention. Orcs still lurk in the peaks and mountain-valleys, as well as bugbears, human brigands, and other predators—but gold still turns up often enough to keep hopeful prospectors going up into the mountains. Many leave King's Reach on the road south, circling up through the High Country to cross the River Vesper and sneak into the peaks by their own secret route. And if a prospector ever finds gold, finding a way to get it out and reach King's Reach unnoticed becomes the paramount challenge of survival!

Lone "gold-crazed" dwarven and human prospectors are said to live like beasts high in the mountains, attacking those who venture too near their claims. There are tales of caverns stacked high with dwarven gold, each guarded by a "lone wolf" prospector who managed to slay the dragon or wyvern who gathered the hoard. Some of these tales have proven to be true over the years; Lashan of Scardale is said to have founded the treasury that drove his dreams of empire by leading a loyal band of followers in a successful attempt to find and empty one of these "gold caves."

Kurth

This walled town at the northern mouth of Three Trees Pass is a grim, watchful place—like its founder, Kurth "Bandit-Slayer" (an awe-wielding adventurer friendly to the dwarves, whose nickname, all agree, was well-earned). Kurth serves as a caravan-stop, gathering place, and farm-market town. It boasts a brewery, two mills, large stockyards, and a wheelwright whose skill is equal to her reputation (she keeps a stock of wheels and snow-runners on hand for quick repairs). The town also has recurring water shortages, so the locals magically filter and recirculate its water—which probably accounts for the thick, rough, licorice-like "ropy" taste of the dark, foamy local beer.

Kurth has always had a reputation as a place where many riches are hidden (in cellars, old cisterns, secret attics, and walled into chimneys). In Calaunt, Ylraphon, and Tantras, Kurth is sometimes called "Pirates' Rest," owing to the fact that many pirates come here to retire and naturally hide their treasure nearby. So strong is the belief in Kurth's hidden prosperity that merchants just starting into trade sometimes come here in search of



sponsors. Quite often, those who are lucky and discreet find all they need, and more (the unlucky get their travel itineraries handed to still-active shipmates of the retired buccaneers). Much shady business goes on in backrooms all over town, especially in *The Gauntlet and Girdle* tavern.

On the western edge of town is "Tweenwalls," a district of shanties, ramshackle stables, and tumbledown warehouses outside the current city walls. Kurth was once larger, its walls encompassing a larger area—but orc raids proved to the locals just how long a wall they could muster swords and spells enough to defend. Much of Tweenwalls, the area between the old city walls and the new, is in ruins. At its heart rises the blackened, overgrown mound that was once Feljack's Hall. This mansion suddenly burned down one night a decade ago, and the adventurer who built it has been missing and presumed dead ever since. Locals who searched the still-smoking ruins for riches were slain horribly by a giant-sized skeleton that arose from the ashes wielding a black magical blade called a *shadow blade* by one wizard. Few cared to investigate farther, and those who did were usually found dismembered on the street leading up to the ruins the next morning. Recently, many human skeletons bearing swords have been seen on moonlit nights roaming the burned ruins. Their source is unknown—but guardians usually mean treasure, and Feljack's treasure, if any still exists, hasn't yet been recovered by anyone in Kurth.

Maerstar

This farm and quarrying town stands at the meeting of Helve's Trail (from High Haspur) and the North Road (that links Procampur with the northern Vast by way of Seve-necho and the Glorming Pass). Maerstar is known as a horsebreeding center; the large, sleek black horses bred here are highly prized throughout the Inner Sea lands. It's not known as a place of overmuch wealth but rather hardworking prosperity.

Its well-trampled paddocks have been used to hide treasure, however. During the Time of Troubles (when the gods walked the Realms), many merchants of Turlagol and Procampur fled to their country houses in Maerstar—only to find themselves beset by looting mobs of wandering, displaced men from the destruction in Tantras and the strife in Calaut and Mulmaster. Many of the wealthy had hidden their riches by burying them under the dung and churned earth of the paddocks—but not all of the wealthy survived to dig up their riches again when the Troubles were over. Local rumor has it that at least two holdings—the moonstone and pearls collection of the merchant Uligker Oloskar of Procampur and a huge hoard of coins and trade-bars belonging to the locksmith and purveyor of trained dancers Shondarl Stonegiant—still lie beneath the earth somewhere in Maerstar.

This town is also the home of the Moonlit Tower. This strange apparition can only be seen when the moon is full and its rays fall upon a crag north-west of the town. At such times, a small, slender tower appears there. The tower glows blue-gray, as if fashioned of solid moonlight, and can be entered: its interior consists of seven rooms and a rooftop level, all joined by a spiral stair of floating stone treads (without rail or visible means of support). Witnesses report that spells have unusual effects when cast inside the Tower.

Sages believe the Moonlit Tower travels about several planes or other worlds. Those inside when it fades away are seldom seen in the Realms again; when it reappears, it may be empty or may hold rare and awesome monsters (some tales mention steel shadows; others talk of watchghosts, beholders, the many-mouthed creature known as the argos, and stranger creatures with no names). Sometimes these beasts guard treasure, but on other

occasions they bring disease, plague, and eggs that hatch into other harmful monsters—or statuettes that revert to living, hostile monsters—when taken out of the Tower.

The Mage's Tower

Due west of Kurth, on the fringes of the Flooded Forest, stands a lone stone tower. Built of massive stones, it has no visible door but does have windows at its spired top (seventy feet in the air) which are sometimes lit. Adventurers in the Vast sum it up in one oft-repeated phrase: "A good place to avoid." Its base is guarded by a stone golem which attacks anyone touching the tower or trying to climb, levitate, or fly within 40 feet of it. It continues to strike at such targets until they cease to move or else flee more than 200 feet from the tower, never passing beyond this range.

The tower is avoided by locals, who refuse to speak of it (those who do always turn up dead within a short time). Sages interested in the Vast have offered up several possible identities for the isolated tower's mysterious occupant. Some say that it is the abode of a powerful mage—possibly Maskyr himself, who they believe moved here as men settled in his vale, leaving his former tower as a trap. Others hold that an exiled mind flayer dwells here, or that even stranger creatures (wind walkers, a penanggalan, slithering trackers, or even weredragons) lair in the tower. Others yet claim clever dwarves live here, having hired mages to guard it for them with illusions of guardian monsters. Whoever is master in the tower, rumor has it that Lashan (the former Lord of Scardale who briefly held much of the Dalelands in a shaky empire and vanished when beset on all sides by aroused foes) fled here when his empire collapsed and has hidden within ever since.

Any or all of these things may be true. The minstrel Lieshann of Ordulin believes that the tower is merely the entrance to the lair of a gold dragon (or perhaps even a wyrm of greater power) who enters in shapechanged form ere descending to vast kingdoms below. Lieshann admits, however, that she has only seen the tower from afar when she mistook the track leading to it from Tavilar for

the trail to Kurth; still, she often sings of the mysterious tower when performing at inns or taverns.

Those who have actually entered the tower and returned to tell about it maintain that Lieshann's tale is "bardish moonshine." These brave souls report that anyone flying or otherwise winning past the golem to approach the tower's three large, arched windows will meet three huge gargoyles flying out to attack and drive intruders away. These creatures, or their smaller brethren, also silently fly through the tower's passages and rooms to attack anyone gaining entrance to the tower by digging or magic.

Within the tower's walls are nothing but empty, dusty rooms and corridors—including steps and sections of flooring that flip over to deposit the unwary in pit traps and the like. Yet *something* that employs magic is lurking in the tower. Most adventurers agree that the tower's master is in hiding, along with all belongings and treasure, in the tower walls. A majority of them seem to think that they're facing a nameless lich or demilich, but others say the resident of the tower could just as well be a living wizard, perhaps employing magic to take the shape of a lurker above or similar creature that resembles the stone walls of the tower. Some have pointed out that the wizard could merely be hiding in chambers whose entrance is concealed by an intelligent, loyal mimic or other creature that looks like stone. Elminster once made a





passing reference to “the Mage Who Never Dies” who claimed the southern edge of the Flooded Forest, including the tower, as his own demesne. The old wizard warned his listeners that the tower’s master has prepared spelltraps that divert intruders into dangerous locales on other planes.

Mossbridges

This town serves Ravens Bluff as a caravan staging area, stockyards, warehouse district, and horse-trading and stabling center. Merchants who don’t want to stay in Ravens Bluff often use Mossbridges as a base, including a few who dare not enter the Living City because of enemies they’ve made; their clients or creditors meet them here by arrangement.

The great multi-span bridge that gives the town its name carries the Coast Road linking Ravens Bluff and Tantras over the Fire River. A corps of engineers and stonemasons dwell in Mossbridges, paid by both cities to keep the bridge in good repair. While nothing could ever induce them to endanger “The Bridge” (as they invariably refer to it), in other matters their morality is more flexible and they have in the past been known to hide bodies, treasure, and certain small but recognizable items in the bridge-pilings, in exchange for sizable bribes. Those with inconvenient items in need of long-term stashing can contact foreman Klonalogh Umesker, whose office is three doors north of *The Blushing Gynosphinx* inn, on the east side of the road (the two doors between are rooming houses).

A lot of money flows through Mossbridges, but there is surprisingly little crime, due to the expert policing by the paladin Rulisqer of Tyr (LG hm Pal 10). Rulisqer and his fourteen followers put into practice his belief that lawful behavior and local safety allow happiness and prosperity for all. Rulisqer keeps brawls off the streets and thieves’ guilds out of town. As a result, his town is used as a “no-swords” neutral meeting place by traditional antagonists wishing to trade or old foes wishing to negotiate agreements. This in turn encourages investment and even a thriving fledgling banking industry. Would-be thieves be warned: the gargoyles adorning the roof of Gladragon’s Gold & Gems Exchange aren’t just carved adornments. And adventurers beware: swords had better be kept in their sheaths if their owners don’t wish to be expertly subdued, stripped of weapons, and frogmarched out of town.

Treasure is everywhere in Mossbridges, but all of it has owners—and the place comes equipped with the most diligent law officers in the Vast, who always seems to know just where trouble’s about to break out before it actually does. The only exception, if one believes the tales, is the rumor that one of the retired smugglers in town is actually an amphibious shapechanger of some sort who can take on a giant octopus shape and still swims out to do business with pirates who signal from offshore, keeping her loot underwater, hidden not far offshore. One tavern drinker says it’s all inside giant clams that clamp shut to trap anyone but the rightful person—but he was hardly sober when delivering himself of this information, and it may be pure fancy.

Orlimmin

This village lies at the meeting-place of the Tantras Trail and the Long Reach, which runs from here to King’s Reach (via Bambryn and Sendrin). It’s a rather sleepy farming center, except when cattle are auctioned and the city is temporarily crammed with buyers and drovers.

A rough plateau rises south of Orlimmin, standing like a rugged, rolling wall to the south; it’s the reason the Long Reach trail doesn’t go on to Mossbridges. This highland is studded with gravel pits, where diggers from Orlimmin have always mined what they need, selling any surplus for use in the nearby cities. These pits are said to hide several treasures—as well as the bodies of thieves from Tantras and Ravens Bluff who double-crossed colleagues once too often. The pits are also rumored to conceal the remains of an early high priest of Waukeen—buried upright as was the custom in those days, standing on a pile of gold bars and wearing cloth-of-gold vestments and a ring on each finger, each displaying a different gem. The total value of this burial would be 60,000 gold or more—and since the collapse of Waukeen’s worship, more than one local has become seriously interested in looking for the remains of the departed clergyman. With Waukeen’s recent return, all such grave-robbing plans have officially been dropped, but several locals continue to slip quietly out onto the plateau, shovel in hand, when no curious eyes are about to note their departures. Unfortunately, any marker that may once have identified the grave is long gone—probably because the graveposts of such exalted clergy of Waukeen were adorned with gold inlay and gems in those early days.

Six winters ago, an adventuring band (The Cabal of the Crown, based in Procampur) came to Orlimmin to investigate the gravel pits. A few nights later, *fireballs*, *lightning bolts*, and similar spells illuminated the night sky, apparently erupting from one of the pits. The locals came out of the local tavern (*The Pickled Priest*) to watch, drinks in hand, but prudently did not investigate until the next morning. They found most of the adventurers slain in and around one of the pits; the few survivors, it later transpired, did not stop running until they reached Tantras.

Those survivors refused either to return to Orlimmin or to describe what they saw. In the hands of local gossips, credulous adventurers, and imaginative bards the story soon spread that they’d disturbed an elder vampire’s eternal slumber and paid the price. But no undead were seen, and vampires seldom use spells outdoors at night that flash and explode noisily so they can be seen from afar. Nor do they behead their victims, or fail to drain their blood or life essence. Locals claim to know nothing, but any visitor who reveals that they’re interested in the gravel pits or the bejeweled grave will be asked to pay for their rooms in advance “just in case.”

Procampur

This rich and independent city-state is another of Raven Bluff’s “sister cities.” Of all the other cities in the Vast, Procampur is the only one that Ravenians look up to: her “elder sister,” if you will. Procampur is an old city, ruled over by a hereditary overlord known as the Thultyrl: the present Thultyrl is the young, vigorous, and popular Rendath of the Royal Blood (NG hm F12). Protected by a strong army and stronger navy, the city has decisively defeated pirate raids as well as attacks from Mulmaster and Sembia; it currently has a mutual defense pact with Tsurlogol that has been to both cities’ benefit.

Visitors used to the happy chaos of the Bluff often find themselves nuzzled by all the rules that dominate this thriving city-state. The whole city is divided into eight regions, each separated from the other by fifteen-foot-high walls. By royal decree, each district has a distinct color to its roofs. The High Court and Palace have gold roofs, the Nobles District silver roofs, and the Temple District shining black roofs. The Merchant District is demarcated by sea-green roofs and the Services District by yellow roofs; the Sea District has blue roofs, the Adventurers District red roofs, and the District of the Poor gray roofs. The only exceptions are guard posts, armories, and army barracks, all scattered at strategic positions throughout the city but having white-washed roofs to distinguish them from the surrounding buildings.

Adventurers who achieve high levels of experience often leave Ravens Bluff and move to Procampur; for some this marks a milestone in a successful career. After all, a city that has stood unconquered for two thousand years must have a *few* lessons to teach those willing to learn them.

River Vesper

This large and generally placid river runs down out of the High Country to reach the sea at Calaut. Its broad, gently sloping river valley is verdant farmland. Unfortunately, this floodplain offers an off-road route through the Vast for thieves, orc bands, disreputable adventurers, and others who don’t want to be seen on the roads but don’t want to get lost, either. From time to time, dwarven gold washes down the Vesper from some flooded tomb-cavern or other, but this is rare enough that the river does not have a reputation for danger or treasure.

There is one intriguing mobile treasure associated with the Vesper, however. It’s only been seen in the last two decades, and its cause is unknown. From time to time there’s a sighting of a circle of dancing, slowly rotating *ioun stones* moving here and there above the waves. These encounters can occur anywhere up or down the river valley. The circle contains about a dozen stones and moves slowly along the river, floating about six feet above the water, glowing and twinkling like a ring of moving fireflies.

The ring seems to avoid attempts to grab stones from it, but so far no adventurer with a net, the ability to fly, or other suitable magical means of snaring a stone has met with the magical ring. A tale going around the riverside taverns says that anyone who takes a stone from the ring gets to keep it but gets a *geas* along with it, forcing the new owner to accomplish a dangerous task—and that a different quest is linked to each stone.



Sarbreennar

In olden days, the city of Sarbreen stood where Ravens Bluff now flourishes; Sarbreenar was its guardian outpost, protecting access to Elvenblood Pass to the south so that Sarbreen could never be attacked by surprise through the mountains or isolated from Procampur when winter ice and storms made sailing treacherous.

In those days, Sarbreenar was little more than a keep attached to a terraced garden and high pastures. Today, it is a small village, all trace of the keep swept away. It was tom apart from aloft by a huge dragon, remembered as “the Sarbreenar Wyrm,” which decided to roost there, the better to prey on the road traffic whenever it was hungry. The Wyrm was a green dragon of the largest size; its tail hung down the shattered tower to the ground below as it slept, and men dared not approach. Eventually the road fell into disuse and this lack of food proved the Wyrm’s undoing in the end. When it grew hungry, it flew south to raid Procampur, tearing the roofs from houses and devouring all it found inside. After the second such raid, the angry and fearful folk of Procampur hired a wizard—whose spells awaited the Wyrm on its third raid. The wizard brought the dragon crashing down into the harbor of Procampur in a rain of bones and blood, cut apart in midair by exploding “swordballs” that flung the rusty fragments of old weapons violently out in all directions in exactly the same manner as a *fireball* hurls forth flames. So the Wyrm perished, and men crept slowly back to Sarbreenar to rebuild.

They found orcs had come down to strip the place in their absence and had no intention of leaving their new home. After a bloody, week-long fight through the mountains, Sarbreenar and the pass it guarded returned to human hands, but without any of the goods it had once housed. The orcs had taken or despoiled everything—including the meager treasure accumulated by the Wyrm, which is still presumably hidden up in the mountains somewhere nearby.

Today, Sarbreenar is a hamlet on the High Trail, just south of Elvenblood Pass, the site of the death of the great elven hero Beluar. Beluar’s Tomb stands in the center of Sarbreenar, marked by an intricately carved stone obelisk carved by King Tuir Stonebeard’s grateful folk in honor of their fallen ally. The obelisk has offered generations of pigeons a palatial home; folk often pause to survey it as they water their horses at the horsepond which lies directly across the road from the grassy mound that holds Beluar and his slain riders.

All around Sarbreenar, the land rises abruptly in cliffs prone to avalanches. Nestled among the rocky ridges and pinnacles are a dozen or so wet, narrow valleys carved by mountain streams. In each of them are farms where arthritic folk rear sheep and goats among the moss and the constant mists. Sarbreenar is their market town, their smithy, and their wagonworks. Wheelwright Torstan Holbrar crafts wheels as good as any to be had around the Sea of Fallen Stars and keeps a large stock on hand to sell—for exorbitant prices—to merchants whose wagons fall afoul of the hard roads. There’s also an inn, *The Merry Mage*, whose carved signpost is a winking, leering old bearded wizard.

SENDRIN

This crossroads village stands where the Long Reach trail (linking Orlimmin and King’s Reach) crosses Blaern’s Trail (which links Calaut on the coast with the North Road at Dead Tree Hollow). Known today primarily as a place of basketweavers, cattle-ranchers, and furniture-makers, Sendrin boasts a surprising number of large and important-looking stone houses and shops, all built when Sendrin was a town of magic, long ago.

Of old, when human rule had just come to the Vast, a temple to Savras the All-Seeing was established at Sendrin. In those days, Savras was seen more as an all-wise user of magic than as a seer, and wizards came to remote Sendrin to acquire new spells, practice spells far from heavily populated areas, and meet with other mages to discuss their Craft. It became a place of pilgrimage, where mages could play in a manner their importance at home could never let them do, carousing through the night and using magic to do rude and sometimes destructive things.

When Savras fell to the spells of Azuth, all this ended. Sendrin dwindled to just a farming village as the wizards left one by one, followed by all the healers, scribes, wizards’ tailors, professional escorts, and spell-component-sellers until none were left. In fact, the traveling Magefair held annually in various remote locales around the Realms is a remnant of the old carousing that used to occur here, displaced since the decline of Sendrin to become a moveable feast. All that is left behind besides the inevitable rumors of

spellbooks and magic items buried or hidden in the vicinity (a dead wizard was even found walled up in a sealed secret passage in the walls of one Sendrin house, entombed with his staff, rings, and spellbooks) is one surviving relic of the destroyed temple of Savras (sacked long ago by the triumphant followers of Azuth).

Nothing remains of the temple except a crater of fused and blackened stone rubble, its edges overgrown with saplings, in the backyard of the largest inn in Sendrin, *The Blasted Wizard* (one must know the history of the place to truly understand the name). In this hollow sits a stone idol of Savras in the shape of a disembodied human male head that is as tall as a man. The head rises into the air whenever a living being enters the crater and floats about four feet off the ground by means of magical *levitation*, flying about at will (MV fly 12, maneuverability class D). It speaks with a very deep, booming voice when addressed, answering magical queries—but sages have noted that its cryptic wise pronouncements seem to be a large and sophisticated set of stock phrases. It does have the ability to cast certain spells when touched by beings brought into the crater, and it does so automatically, sensing and correcting conditions regardless of the wishes of beings who encounter it. The head can do the following things once each per day: *neutralize poison* (renders all poison present truly inert and harmless, not just curing a poisoned being), *cure disease* (including lycanthropy if it is not too far advanced), and *dispel magic* (on all spells or magical conditions governing a being, including protective spells, *geas* magics, *quest* spells, *feeble-mindedness*, and many spell-like psionic attacks, controls, and conditions).

The Mouth of Savras (as the head is called) can’t be removed from the crater or magically controlled or indeed harmed in any way. It avoids combat; attempts to destroy or move it simply cause it to return to the bottom of the crater, where it sighs wearily, closes its eyes, and waits until the intruders go away. It will never again heal or aid any who have once attacked it, no matter what their disguise or how much time has passed since the incident.

Sevenecho

This hamlet of about seventy people stands where the North Road from Procampur meets the Stormcrest Trail from Tsurlagol. A rainy, damp place often shrouded in mists of mornings, it is named for its most prominent family. This tiny village centers, both figuratively and literally, around *The Worried Wyvern* inn, which rises on the western side of the junction of the two roads. The roads meet at Sevenecho because of its ponds and deep wells (allowing travelers to water their beasts). A settlement persists here largely because of *The Worried Wyvern*, a fine establishment (as good an inn as can be found anywhere in Faerûn). Founded nineteen winters ago by Belioth Sevenecho (LN hm F5), the *Wyvern* is a large, many-dormered place that rambles up and down a small knoll, sprouting many wings, side-chambers, jutting stone chimneys, and small towers. Its cellars house its own deep well, and the inn offers over a hundred and twenty beds in some fifty guest rooms, some of which are icy in winter because whose wings of the inn aren’t heated or lit unless the rest of the place is full. Guests here can sleep, get good filling meals (the soups and stews are justly famous), and take scentwater baths in huge copper tubs. One can also buy fine smoked meats, homebrewed beer, and the strong-flavored local Obaeth cheese.

Belioth runs the inn, and prepares his own meats with the aid of a small smokehouse behind the inn, dug into the hill next to the stables. The brewing of beer is something of a family obsession; each of his relatives makes his own brew, and each insists his is the best. All provide the inn with potables (the better to test their excellence on unsuspecting guests); travelers had best be circumspect when praising or criticizing their latest mug, as the innkeeper’s large and quick-tempered sons and cousins might feel inclined to contest their opinions. Travelers are also warned not to try to out-drink (or out-eat, for that matter) the rotund Sevenechos, some of whom have been known to empty as large a keg as a strong man can carry at one meal.

Belioth is jovial but capable in a fight, aided by two silver-plated *daggers* +3 (anyone struck by them who fails a saving throw vs. paralyzation is held for 3d4 rounds). He’s a good listener and an easy-going man who makes friends easily; just about every traveling merchant in the Vast counts Belioth as a true friend. The innkeeper is thus very well informed about current events and politics in the Vast.

Belioth has eleven sons and more than a dozen cousins, but his second wife died a dozen summers ago. He’s declined to marry again since then and is on intimate terms with no less than four of his chambermaids: Noelin Tlestlin, Lauryn Shavvyrstar, Mreeiel Klintar, and Chyndrie Stormwind (all F1s with Dexterities of 18 and Armor Classes to match). The women



get along easily with each other and are fond of referring to Belioast as “the chief adventurer in our band.” This title that has puzzled many a traveler, as the maids often refer to Belioast as “Chief Adventurer” rather than the more common formal terms “Hostler,” “Innkeeper,” or “the master of the house.”

In a pinch, Belioast can call in favors from his neighbor, the elderly Riliyyn Scantshar (CG hf W7), to obtain magical aid and will be enthusiastically supported by the untrained but eager efforts of his fourteen chambermaids, seven lads, and two water-boys (all F1s). Another 3d10 locals (F1s to F3s) are typically only a shout away, in their nearby shops, houses, and farms. Orc bands dwelling in the hills nearby know better than to raid Seveecho: the folk here can mobilize with frightening speed at need.

As far as interesting folks go, there’s not much here beyond Belioast and Riliyyn. Someone in Seveecho—probably one of the chambermaids—is an agent for the Red Wizards of Thay, responsible for watching who and what passes on the roads and then passing on this information and other messages to passing Thayan agents. Whoever this spy is, he or she aren’t a field agent and never lifts blade or hand to betray the secret allegiance by murder, robbery, or other active deed.

Seveecho has few local legends of monsters or magic, beyond everpresent news of death and destruction befalling travelers in the dangerous mountains to the north (and the aforementioned mistrust of the Scantshar family). Locals often see “the ghost of the drowned lady” (a beautiful phantom, said to be Belioast’s great-grandmother) by Ghost Pond, a large shallow pool by the roadside just north of Seveecho. There’s also a tale from the last days of dwarven rule in the Vast: nine dwarves each buried a chest of gems somewhere near the meeting of the roads in Seveecho before the orcs that were pursuing them caught up to them and slaughtered them all. Rumor has it that a certain dark naga found the treasure and now lairs with it, somewhere very near Seveecho. Those who have never visited the hamlet whisper that the naga has gained control over the whole village, but those who have experienced the local hospitality dismiss the thought as absurd.

Swords Pool

Located in a wooded dell on the North Road between King’s Reach and Dead Tree Hollow, this waystop village is notable mainly for the excellence of its inn. *The Nine Swords* stands on the west side of the road, between it and the deep, dark pool for which the village is named. The inn’s

name comes from the only local treasure tale—a local wizard, in the early days of the Vast, cast a spell to preserve and protect the magical swords accumulated by his adventuring companions. The spell outlasted both its caster and the swords’ owners, confounding greedy adventurers to this day.

If the right words are spoken (Elminster claims they aren’t recorded anywhere but must be seven words or less and in the Common Tongue), nine magical blades will rise in unison from the pool, dripping, and hang vertically in a ring a dozen feet above the water, hilts uppermost. The pool at that point is more than fifty feet deep and a good forty feet from shore, but if a living being can somehow reach the ring and touch a blade, that sword will be released from the magic and fall back into the pond, from which it can be fished (if not retrieved, it simply lies in the water until it slowly rusts away). The other blades remain hanging until touched in their turn or until ten minutes have passed, at which point the spell returns them to concealment.

While under the enchantment, these blades can’t be found by dragging the pool or casting *dispel magics*; they “aren’t there” until the words are spoken. For a *wish* to release them, Elminster says, the spell incantation must contain at least four of the seven or less correct words (a *limited wish* would need to include all of the words). Speaking the words a second time makes the remaining blades sink down again into concealment. What sorts of magical blades are included in the nine is not recorded.

Swords Pool has been stocked with trout and the tiny, sharp-tasting fish known as “manyfins” by the owners of the inn (three sisters named Mellicent, Meliors, and Melusine Mellicot); illicit fishing is not encouraged but does occur on dark nights.

Tantras

Yet another of the Vast’s “sister cities,” Tantras is the Ravens Bluff’s dark twin—at least to hear the Ravenians tell the story; the Tantrans tell it somewhat differently. This walled city suffered greatly during the Time of Troubles, when its patron god, Torm, actually manifested himself in gigantic avatar form and fell in battle defending the city from the evil god Bane (destroying a good portion of it in his fall). The resultant dead magic zone was initially viewed as a disaster but has since come to be considered an unusual resource from which the city can benefit. Those who have something to fear from wizards find it a place of refuge, and many who have angered the Zhen-tarim or the Red Wizards of Thay flee here and use the Zone (as it’s called) as a bolt-hole. It’s also a useful meeting place for those who want to make sure that neither side seeks to gain some sort of magical advantage.

Given Torm’s spectacular defense of Tantras, it’s not surprising that the Tormite faith still dominates the rebuilt city. The Temple of Torm’s Coming is overseen by High Priest Barrilart Bhandraddon (LG hm P19), with the assistance of no less than forty-nine underpriests and -priestesses. Torm’s influence is so great that Bhandraddon holds a seat on the High Council of local merchant families that govern the city. The Tantran government is less restrictive than the one in Ravens Bluff, concerned mostly in setting tariffs and regulating trade; how people act outside of business hours is largely their own concern. An effective Thieves Guild, the Grayclaws, brings together thieves and smugglers to prey upon incautious newcomers and native Tantrans alike who have gotten too smug, rich, or unscrupulous (in fact, it’s very like the Four Ravens Thieves Guild that once operated in Ravens Bluff decades ago). The Grayclaws make sure their members do not draw too much attention or make too many enemies. Like many a Thieves Guild, they are loyal to their city, having defended Tantras at one time or another from the Red Wizards, Zhen-tarim, slavers, the Harpers, and the Cult of the Dragon.

In addition to the dominate Tormite church, there are also major temples to Tempus Lord of Battles, Lathander Morninglord, Gond the Wonderbringer, Selune the Moonmaiden, Milil Lord of Song, and Tymora the Luckbringer, all served by priests or priestesses of at least 13th level. Smaller shrines to evil deities like Loviatar, Umberlee, and Cyric also thrive here, if somewhat less openly.

Like Ravens Bluff, Tantras was recently threatened by a humanoid army led by Warlord Myrkyssa Jelán. Unlike its sister city, however, Tantras came to some agreement with Myrkyssa and so avoided a brutal battle such as the Bluff suffered. Exactly how the High Council, or its representatives, managed to convince the Warlord to depart without attacking is unknown, though the powers that be in Ravens Bluff would certainly like to find out—it might be useful, if Myrkyssa someday returns to resume her campaign against their fair city . . .



Tavilar

This village stands in the shadows of the duskwoods that mark the southern edge of the Flooded Forest and the lands said to be claimed by the Mage Who Never Dies (see the entry on “The Mage’s Tower” on page 154). Tavilar was once home to a merry adventuring band of pranksome, always-jesting female thieves and bards known as the Turning Key. The ladies of the Key met with disaster while adventuring on a far plane, and the few who survived retired to Waterdeep, Neverwinter, and Berdusk (respectively), never returning to Tavilar to the rambling old house where they’d been so happy together. The House of the Key, old and in need of constant repair even when they’d inhabited it, soon collapsed. Adventurers have picked through its wreckage many times but found only ruined finery and furniture, never treasure. Local lore insists that the Turning Key were a rich band indeed, and that a *lot* of treasure must lie somewhere nearby. None of the ladies is still alive today, but the last survivor, the elderly bard Satcheera “Silvereyes” Moonfist, once said, “Still haven’t found our jewels? They must be looking in far too dry a place!” This has generally been interpreted to mean that the treasure of the Key lies somewhere underwater in the bogs of the Flooded Forest—but just where, in all those miles of dangerous desolation, none can say. “Near Tavilar” is a term that covers a lot of swamp!

Thindilar

This market town stands at the meeting of the Cross Road and Blaern’s Trail. It’s a bustling, busy center of artisans and crafters, without much time for such fancies as tales of adventure and treasure. In fact, there is only one local treasure tale of note: in the early days of the Vast, before humans ruled, a “cloud castle” or aerial fortress-home inhabited by cloud giants crashed to earth here, its flying magics overcome in some aerial spell-battle.

The castle struck the earth and shattered, shaking the ground and leaving a trail of destruction as it rumbled along to disintegration. Huge soft-gold goblets and other treasures were scattered over the countryside (amid pieces of cloud giant!). Many of the fallen treasures were soon carried off by dwarves and reworked into many fine gold items, but a few (so the tale goes) were buried deep or flung high into the air, held aloft by a shred of the magic that had once lifted the castle.

Most dwarves think tales of missed giant treasure around Thindilar are pure fancy, and Elminster is inclined to agree—but he points out that a shard of pure gold as large as a cottage door was found only three winters ago by a merchant digging out a larger storage-cellar. It’s a truism that skeptics in the Realms are often surprised.

Three Trees Pass

The long and dangerous cleft between the Troll Mountains and the Giantspikes would probably be avoided by men altogether if it wasn’t for the rich ore deposits brought down into this valley by the dwarves. The North Road was put through this once-desolate pass (it’s called “Three Trees Pass” because its height was once marked by three huge old pines—the only trees in sight amid a rocky desolation) to link Kurth with King’s Reach and provide a means for getting at least some of that gold safely to market. It cost many human lives but served its purpose, incidentally saving the last few dwarves from extinction at the hands of the ever-plentiful orcs. Vicious battles for control of the mountain heights and mine-passages go on to this day, as human prospectors move into territory recently held by orcs. The dwarves grudgingly aid the humans, knowing they’d be swept away without them.

Thousands of gems, rough-hewn gold nuggets, and bags of “gold gravel” are said to be hidden up and down the pass, making it one of the richest areas in all Faerûn. Folk trying to dig or explore the pass, however, will be watched by many wary eyes and are in grave danger of stopping some arrows the minute they turn up something interesting. Survivors of this initial assault will then find themselves the center of a concerted attack from watchful orc bands, dwarven parties, and human guards all converging on them at once—as well as facing the effects of whatever traps the rightful owners of any uncovered cache have left behind! Many carry-chests used in the Vast open from the bottom only, the top being a series of elaborate traps. Among the favorites are scything blades that snap across the tops of opened chests, chopping off the hands of the inquisitive. Another popular safeguard is the two-step poisoned dart-trap. Opening the lid fires the first dart, while the second is triggered by a treadle inside the chest upon which a heavy item is placed. This bulky item blocks the way to the rest of the contents, and any-

one lifting it out gets the second dart right in the face! Poisonous gas traps are also popular, since if they don’t get the looter when he or she opens the chest their residue on the coins within may still poison a thief who doesn’t carefully wash his or her hands after handling the treasure.

There are no permanent habitations in the pass—no one has enough money to hire the sell-swords needed to turn away the persistent orc attacks brought on by any attempt to build here. Still, many traders set out in the summer months from Kurth or King’s Reach to establish armed camps for a few days at the summit of the pass—and they typically sell trapped chests, mules, mining gear, food, and other supplies in exchange for ore or nuggets from the miners. A priest of Waukeen used to pass through the area about once a month, taking in 1,000 gold-worth of nuggets in exchange for each badly needed healing spell. No priest stepped in to offer the same service during the time Waukeen was imprisoned, but with her recent restoration to power it cannot be long before this dangerous but extremely lucrative service is restored.

Tsurlagol

Known as “The Gateway to the Unapproachable East,” this prosperous port city is the last and smallest of Ravens Bluff’s sister cities. Located in the southernmost point of the Vast, just outside the Dragon Reach, it is a crossroads for traders from the Vast, Impiltur, the Old Empires, and the Vilhon Reach; many dwarves also pass through on errands to their scattered kin.

Tsurlagol has long been allied with Procampur in a mutually beneficial association. While just as old as its partner, Tsurlagol’s exposed position has resulted in its being burned down repeatedly by pirates, invaders, orcs, hordes, and other interlopers. The current city stands on a hill comprised entirely of the foundations of the twenty or so previous cities built on the site. The people here are patient and take the long view: if some attacker burns the city down today, they know they will outlast the invader and rebuild it again tomorrow. Had Myrkysa Jelan attacked Tsurlagol instead of Ravens Bluff she probably would have met with only a token resistance, but she also would probably have found the city impossible to hold in the long term; the Tsurlagoli would have simply waited until her humanoid alliance fell apart before moving in to reclaim their city.

The highest official here is known as the Ven. He or she is chosen from among the leading nobles and merchant lords by secret ballot. The Ven’s actual identity is kept secret for the whole of his or her ten-year term—a curious arrangement, but one that seems to work well for this city. The spokesman for this behind-the-scenes leader is known as the Ven’s Voice, chosen from the ruling Council to advise the Ven and deliver his (or her) decrees to the people. The current Voice is one Conoptora Billon (NG hm W13), an adventurous mage who would like to see Tsurlagol escape from the shadow of Procampur and grow to rival Ravens Bluff as an attraction for adventurers, traders, and all who bring wealth in their wake.

Tsurlagol is unusual in one respect: it is an open port, where pirates and smugglers are welcome to come ashore to trade with honest merchants, so long as they behave themselves from the time they sail into harbor. Many of the leading merchants here have put in time in the “Free Trade,” as they call it, before settling down to onshore respectability on the profits of their pirate days.

Another odd feature about Tsurlagol is its relative paucity of temples. There are only three, one of which doubles as a Thieves Guild. The first and wealthiest, The Rising Moon, is devoted to the worship of Selûne; its patriarch, High Priest Orlathon Lunemast (LG hm P13) is assisted by nine subpriests. The second, the Battering Wave, worships Umberlee under the guidance of Thogonia Grim (LE hf P12) and six fanatical servitors. The third and final, the Cult of the Shadows, venerates Shar, Mistress of Night; its high priestess (whose identity is hidden) also serves as head of the Tsurlagol Thieves Guild, the Sharwomen. The city once had two such guilds for thieves, segregated by gender, but the males’ guild was wiped out years ago; today the female thieves dominate, with the few male thieves occupying lesser positions.

Viperstongue Ford

There’s no permanent settlement at this river-crossing, but there is an inn, The Stag and Viper, once the headquarters of a famous adventuring band. The Mistdown Marauders died rather messily when they tried to loot a ghost’s treasure, but local legend says that their graves (in the trees north and east of the ford itself) hide cryptic directions to where the trea-



sure lies hidden. The Marauders are thought to have amassed a fair amount of gems, jewelry, magical armor, and coinage, but none was found on their bodies, so it must have joined their killer's hoard. Some of the Marauders are said to guard the graves as undead—but compelling these unfortunates to reveal where they met their doom (and hence the treasure's resting-place) would be a risky business.

Ylraphon

Renounced "Ee-yil-ra-fon," this small port was once an elven city. Overrun by orcs, it became a ruin where an orc chieftain ruled. Then the dwarves drove the orcs out of the lowlands and dwelt here for a time; as the most northerly port in the Vast, Ylraphon was important to them. When the kingdom of the dwarves fell, orcs rushed in again and laid waste to the rebuilt town—so they found themselves living in ruins once again.

When humans arrived in the Vast in numbers, the docks of Ylraphon caught the eyes of many, and there was bloody battle through the ruins until all the orcs were dead. From that day to this, Ylraphon has been ruled by a loose council of human merchants. In recent years, local prosperity has been hurt by raids directed by Lashan of Scardale, who sought to become King of the Dales; by the Time of Troubles, when the orcs came down out of the mountains to do some raiding of their own and trade all across Faerûn suffered; and by the rise of Calaunt further to the south, whose agents conduct careful murders and intimidation to ensure that Ylraphon never grows to rival Calaunt or harm its trade in any way.

As a result, Ylraphon is struggling today, a town in decline but still popular with independent merchants and with those who want to enter or leave the Vast quietly, avoiding the large cities of the coast. A lot of gold is spirited out of the area from its docks—but wise captains only cross the Dragon Reach to Harrowdale or go up the Lis to Hillsfar to unload the gold for other ships to take on later voyages; pirates wait and watch in the Reach for ships putting out from Ylraphon.

The forest is quickly reclaiming northeastern Ylraphon, and the ruins there offer shelter to vagabonds, pirates, and brigands of all sorts. Among

the overgrown ruins are several tombs, some of them above-ground stone crypts large enough to shelter a dozen people and their horses. Adventurers come here often hoping to find magic and riches, but Elminster says they're wasting their time: the orcs got here first. Unless a desperate brigand has recently stuffed a few coins into a casket while fleeing from treacherous business partners, every tomb has been cleaned out of everything except scattered bones and the occasional undead.

Riches are more likely to lie hidden in the inhabited part of Ylraphon. Local legend whispers that many rich treasures have been buried in Ylraphon over the years by fleeing dwarves, orcs who had to stash booty hurriedly in order to defend themselves, and humans who couldn't see any way to elude waiting pirates or brigands if they tried to leave Ylraphon laden with bags of gold. Elminster reminds us that the elves held Ylraphon first and almost certainly left treasure behind: the local temple of Selûne, the Moonwater, houses several moon-related magic items donated by departing elves in recent years. Elven treasure here is likely to be jewelry with minor magical powers or enchanted weapons hidden by being magically transformed into stone shapes or encased in stone. Typical elven jewelry takes the form of necklaces, ornamental bracers, or rings linked with fine chains.

Many such treasures may sleep within the walls, chimneys, and roofs of buildings near the docks in Ylraphon. Hopeful explorers are cautioned, however, against searching the harbor or coastal shallows for treasure—many searchers have scoured such areas already, and pirates and smugglers take a dim view of strangers poking around their drop points. Persistent local tales speak of ghostly activities at ruined temples of Gruumsh, Moander, and Bane just north of Ylraphon, in the boggy woods leading into the Flooded Forest; some even whisper of their reoccupation by living worshippers. Certainly bands of evil men and orcs often provision in Ylraphon before plunging north into the woods; many locals suspect they use the ruined temples (which tend to be on raised areas in the heart of the swamp) only as places to store treasure. According to this theory, the occasional screams heard from these spots are merely a ruse to dissuade the curious or perhaps the results from thieves' quarrels. Some of these folk are no doubt merely smugglers and others who wish to keep their business private, but rumor has it that others serve the master of the Flooded Forest, whoever and whatever that mysterious being is; around Ylraphon he (or she, or it) is called "the Mage Who Never Dies."

An adventuring band from Turmish, the Six Spiked Rings, recently came to Ylraphon to investigate one such temple: the fallen House of Moander. They were beset by a greater darktentacles that laired in the temple, but two of them escaped, each bearing a large bag of gems—and the power to guard them, too: they also brought out a sack full of magical metal wands of great power and antiquity! More treasure obviously lies in these temples—and there are of course wilder tales of the depths of the Flooded Forest, of half-sunken cities, strange mirages, vampiric pixies, circles of spellcasting giant frogs, and worse . . .

Current Clack

Recent adventurers' reports have brought disquieting news about the Vast. Sinister things have been noticed of late. Someone—or something—has been regularly visiting tombs of many powerful undead and keeping them clean. And someone—or something—has recently supplied various old ruins with a resident deepspawn (a horrific monster that vomits forth other monsters). These two practices continue, despite the vigilance of adventurers and residents. Their cause, and perpetrator(s), remain mysterious.

Moreover, orcs and worse have come down out of the mountains and taken to hunting adventurers! The Vast seems to have become an increasingly dangerous place, particularly since some heroes have discovered entryways to some long-forgotten networks of underground caverns, evidently used by the dwarves of old and the orcs who came after them. Evil mages from certain lands (such as Thay) seem to make pilgrimages to the Vast when young but powerful. Perhaps they seek the Tears or Archveulf's magic (see "The Magic of Ravens Bluff" chapter)—or perhaps they come to meet with some as-yet-unrevealed dark power or deity.

As the old dwarven adventurer Guldaeth Grimshield of Highbank Forest once said dryly, "Come one, come all, here to the Vast. All the killing's happening here, and the next handful of dooms to befall us all are a-hatching here—why wait for them to crawl to you? Come to the Vast, and join the slaughter."





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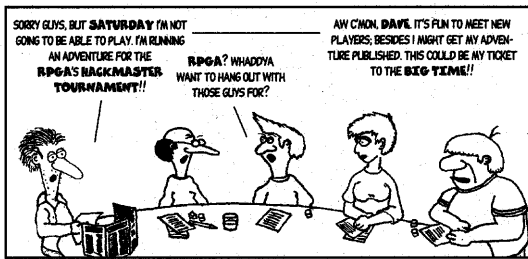


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 Rundelstones Manor (US11)
 Sablegarth House (UT4)
 Safe Harbor Marine Guarantees (HSG3)
 The Sail: see Red Sail Tavern
 The Salty Dog (CS1)
 Samara's Scrimshaw (HSS2)
 The Sanctuary (TS10)
 The Sapient Sorcerer (ST11)
 Scaddles House (UT7)
 Seabreeze Hall (US18)
 The Seaside Salvage Company (HSS10)
 Seekers' Guildhall (US8)
 Seiringlast House (TG7)
 "The Sewer": see Swill & Spill Tavern
 Shadow (HB7)
 Shadowholme (ST10)
 The Shark Fin Tavern (HSS9)
 "The Shed" (TH26a)
 Shining Scales Hall (CA2)
 The Ship's Wheel Tavern (HSS12)
 The Shod Talon (US10)

Shrine of Honest Toil (UTS3)
 The Sign of the Quill and Scribe Shop (SS2)
 Signs Painted (CS6)
 Silvergates (TH6)
 The Silver Halls (TH1)
 Silverhawk School (SS6)
 The Silver Lady (HSG9)
 The Silver Lily: see The Silver Lady
 Simon: see The Watchful Defender
 The Singing Sword Inn (TA21)
 Sir Kyle the Ox (F9)
 Skully's Bar and Bait (HSS11)
 Skymbles Courthouse (UTS1)
 The Sleepy Dwarf (TS19)
 The Small-Temples: see The Hallow-Halls
 Smokeflower House (US7)
 Spath Investigations (UM15)
 Stane Opera House (UT28)
 The Sparkling Edge (US12)
 Spenglear Masts & Spars (CS2)
 Starrynstand (TH23)
 Stars in My Hand Safeholds (HSG11)
 The Stars In Shadow (HL4)
 Starwaters (UT15)
 Sternbound Hall (CA14)
 Stonelion House (TH18)
 Stonepost Hall (UT16)
 Stormcloak House (SS5)
 The Storm Dragon House (UM5)
 Stormgables House (US5)
 The Stout Staff (TH12a)
 Strangestars House (TH27)
 Sundrystairs (TS4)
 Sundaroom's Seatower (HSG1)
 Sunderside (TS13)
 Sureblade House (UT35)
 Swiftfleet Guides (SS11)
 Swill & Spill Tavern (HSS21)
 The Sword Tables Dining Lounge (TA21a)
 Syn (HB5)
 Talin Brewmaster (F7)
 Talking Skull House (TG3)
 Tall Hall: see The Hall of Five Arches
 The Talon: see The Shod Talon
 Talon's Tattoo Parlor (HSS18)
 Talontrumpets (SS10)

Talton's Ivory & Scrimshaw (HSS19)
 Telsark's House (TG20)
 Temple of Gond: see The Turning Wheel
 Temple of Helm: see Citadel of Protection
 Temple of Imater: see The Cradle of Pain and Redemption
 Temple of Lathander: see The Halls of Morning Light
 Temple of Lliira: see The Tower of Holy Revolver
 Temple of Selune: see The Moonflame
 Temple of Sune: see The Palace of Passion
 Temple of Tempus: see House of War
 Temple of Torm: see The House of Loyalty
 Temple of Tymora: see The Hall of Luck
 Temple of Tyr: see The Silver Halls
 The Tower of Holy Revolver (TH13)
 Toysmiths (UM4)
 Traagor's Tours and Souvenir Shop (UTS4)
 Triel (UT32)
 The Turning Wheel (TA23)
 Tym's Supple Leather Shoppe (HB15)
 Umbrel's Hot Tarts (TA15a)
 Ustligator Paper Mill (HL5)
 Ventor Taxis (UT38)
 Vesper's (TG14)
 "The Vigilant Ravenian": see Yarnar Close
 Vlard's Maintenance Yard (CA12)
 Volodar's Stardust Inn (US17)
 Watch, Central Office: see Ravendark Castle
 The Watchful Defender (F15) ["Simon"]
 Waterdeep House (F16)
 Wavetreader Pilot & Rigging School (CS7)
 ways unknown (UT1)
 Weeds of Gold (UTS2)
 "Weeping Lady Balcony"? see Zorden Hall
 Whale's Tail (CA13 and CA15)
 Whitegates (TS8)
 William Warensen (UM3)
 Windstand House (TG17)
 Winn's Ice House (CA3)
 Wintershields Hall (UT24)
 Workshop: see Shrine of Honest Toil
 Wormhoard House (UM9)
 Yarnar Close (TG18)
 Ye Olde Bluff Jeweler (TS31)
 Ye Who Dares (SS7)
 Zorden Hall (TG4)

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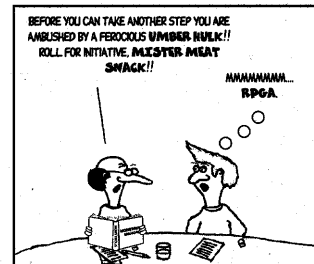
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O'Name Manor

The Spire

Lake Christina

Tentowers Neighborhood

Vesper Way

Bouldergrinder's Way

Vesper Way

Levander Street

Edwarm Way

Turnschim Street

Vesper Way

Warm Street

Lansky's Ride

Warm Street

Stones Lighthouse

Edward

DeValla's Creek

Up



De Villars
Cliffhouse

Uptown District

Hearthston Hill

Mortonbrace
Neighborhood

Alm Street

entowers
neighborhood

Bouldergrinder's Way

Bouldergrinder's Way

Queen Street

Stonkeep Concourse

Stonkeep Concourse

Bomber Street

entowers
neighborhood

Tornet's Ride

Lamorgy's Ride

De Villars Creek

Rayen Way

Squam Street

Dragonbridge

Dragonbridge

Hawk Bridge

Grafton Trail

Whoover Lane

Companes

Spin

Plasman's
Bridge

Colman's Lane



Ravens Bluff Cemetery

Castle Iron Guard

Fire River

The Shutters Neighborhood

The Skymbles Neighborhood

Shadystreets Neighborhood

Bunt Gables Neighborhood

Pumpside Neighborhood

Blurrick Lane

Jannik Lane

Quewer Street

Viretree Lane

White Warm Way

Buntfingerside's Wy

Stonekeep Concourse

Uyprink's Wy

Joast Street

18th Handhigh

Throverby Way

Dunard Lane

Joast Street

Khalahmonge Street

Powerup Road

Fire River

Karen Court

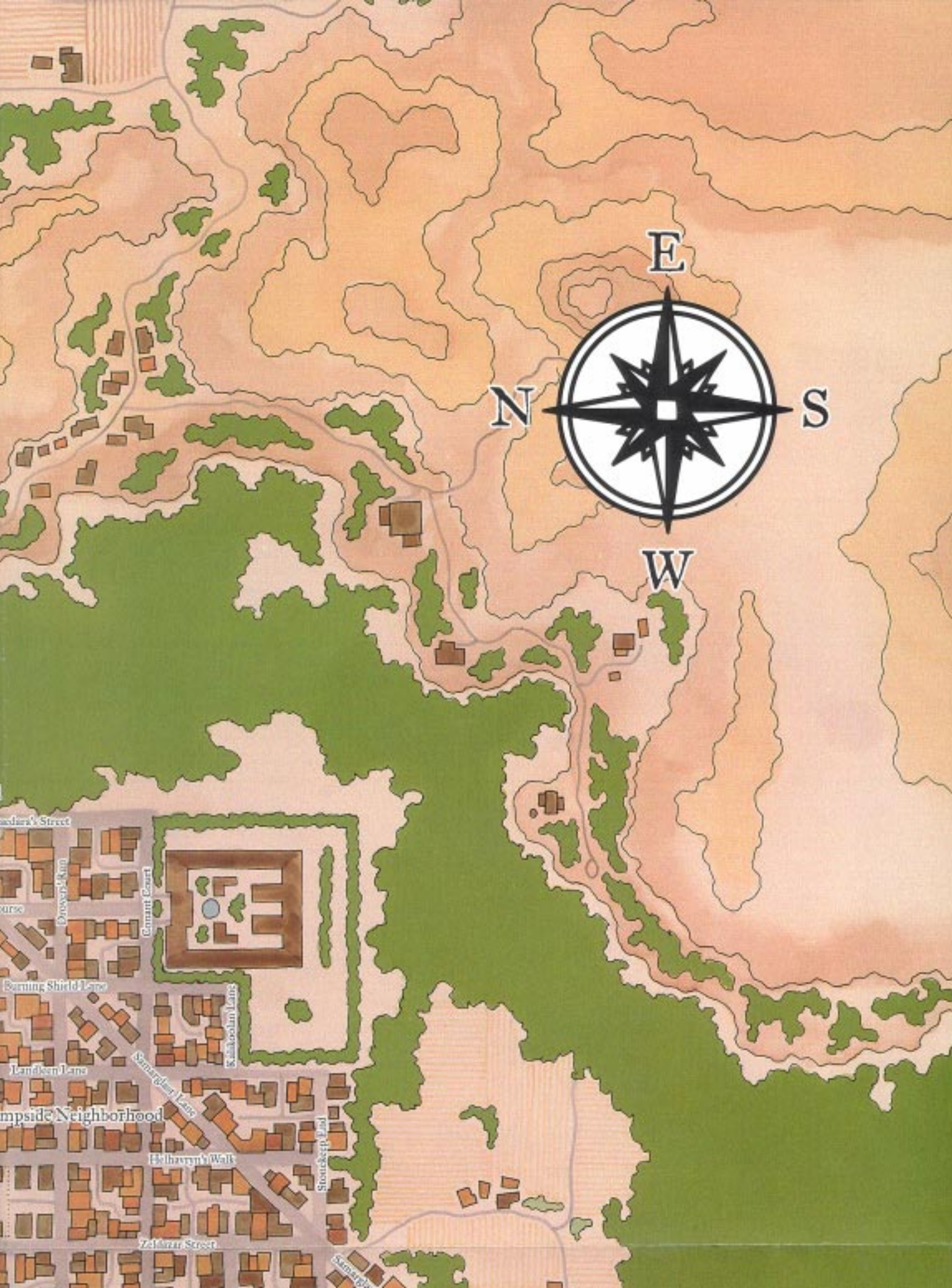
Mirador's Street

Stonekeep Concourse

Burning Shield Lane

Hammerstone Street

Landker Lane







Clearwater Harbor

Crow's End District

Civil Neighborhood

Bitterstone Neighborhood

Ladyrock

Siverscales Neighborhood

Harbor District



Southside
District

Tlasbras Neighborhood

Stormtime Neighborhood

Ill-Water

Castle Way

Grass Court

Cristina Lane

Shorekeep Lane

Summerland Lane

Deeper Way

Drovers Run

Whisper Lane

Whisper Lane

Way of Blake the Bold

Hippocampus Street

Xander's Lane

Grummet Lane

Wyvern Street

Way of Blake the Bold

Drovers Run

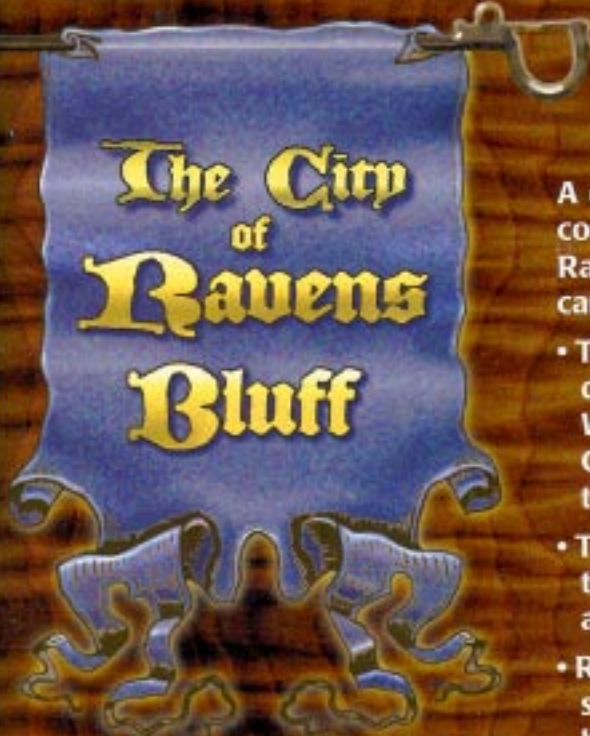
Pepper Street

Shorekeep Lane

Thorton's Pass

Kime Gate

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ISBN 0-7869-1195-8



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U.S. \$24.95

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