

HOUSE HALE

THE HOUSE HALE SUPPLEMENT FOR THE ELDRITCH LIVE ACTION ROLEPLAYING GAME

The ELDRITCH Live Action Roleplaying game is a lovingly crafted work of fiction created by John Kozar, Faye Ferguson, and Spencer McGhin, with additional input from, and content created by Megan Durham, Jessica Sills, Thomas Marshbanks, Galen Hall, and Joe Meyer. Special thanks to Lehanna Allen, Carl Holzbog, and anyone else who ever listened to us prattle on about the project. Thanks to everyone who helped to make this strange dream a reality.

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All art and direction by William Weird, Mel De Carvalho, Spencer McGhin and John Kozar.

HOUSE HALE

WELCOME TO ARNESSE...

Eight great houses vie for control amidst a world in ruin after centuries of conflict and war. Ancient institutions scheme amongst the rulership of the land for their own small piece of the empire. This is the world of Eldritch. With this guide, you hold the key the gates of a world rife with bitter conflict, political turmoil, and mysteries both arcane and unseen. Ancient alliances are broken as quickly as they are forged. Lines are blurred between ally and enemy. Heroes are found in the most unlikely of places. The world is awakening anew. Where will you find your place in this forgotten dream?

USING THIS GUIDE

The player supplements for Eldritch are intended to provide detail information beyond that which is known to the general player population. All information in this guide is to be taken as in-play information, known by you and others in your corresponding faction. You may over the course of Eldritch events discover new information that corresponds to your faction, however you will be able to share this information as you wish.

SUMMARY

CREED

"Vengeance is Ours"

CASTLE

The Wailing Keep, Grimfrost Fortress

PROTECTORATE

The Everfrost

MAJOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND HOUSE FIGURES

Talbot Hale

Lord Paragon Talbot Hale

Age: 36

Lord Talbot Hale and his wife, Lady Emma Hale née Bannon, are the current heads of House Hale and, despite each being as wily and manipulative as a fox in the henhouse, each seems to be devoted to the other. It's whispered that while each of

them may occasionally take other partners, for both enjoyment or to solidify power, they only do so with the encouragement of the other. Lord Hale stands head and shoulders above his lady; a massive bear of a man, tall and broad and with fair hair that hangs in braids to his shoulders. Where his eyes are piercing blue, hers are a bright green, although her brown curls are just as long as his. His great bear, Siv, is brown and shaggy and nearly one thousand pounds. She is quite friendly and playful despite her huge size.

Emma Hale

Lady Emma Hale née Bannon

Age: 28

In the years since Giles II took the throne, Lady Emma has grown more and more distant from him and the throne and has not been seen in the South for over five years now. Considering the rising concerns that the Hales may have begun to turn on their old alliances, some fear that the Lady Emma may either be in danger herself or that she is complicit to what is going on. There is no doubt that she harbored some level of resentment toward the death of her mother, but she has always shown herself to be loyal to the Crown. Lady Emma is wily and smart like her brother and shares his penchant for seeing threats all around her. In the years since the Lady of Grimfrost took the seat with her husband, the Winter Court has become a place rife with political intrigue and suspicion.

Destin Hale

Lord Destin Hale

Age: 10

Heir apparent to House Hale, Destin does not plan to try for any Vinna at all - instead he regularly maligns the old coming of age tradition, along with any other traditions that could be tied to the clans. He prefers instead to ape styles from elsewhere, especially those of Richter, and often comments about how his house needs to be styled more like those of the south - much to the chagrin of his family who are not fond of their neighbors from the Dusklands. As he is barely a decade old, though, it's quite possible he'll change his mind.

Astrid Hale

Lady Astrid Hale

Age: 9

Second eldest of the Hale children, Astrid is a quiet, well-mannered daughter who speaks frequently about doing the expected Vist Vinna.

Sigrid Hale*Lady Sigrid Hale*

Age: 8

Second youngest of the Hale children, Sigrid is a light-haired girl. She insists to everyone that she's going to follow in her father's footsteps and make one of the great bears of the north her own in the Bjorn Vinna.

Callum Hale*Lord Callum Hale*

Age: 5

The youngest of the children of Talbot and Emma, Callum is a young, dark-haired boy who seems to be all eyes and wiry legs and inquisitive questions.

Einar Axeholme*Lord Einar Axeholme, Lord of Axeholme*

Age: 36

Talbot and his children are at least distantly related to most of the High Houses of Hale, with the closest relationship being among the northmost High House, Axeholme, whose Lord Einar is a cousin of Lord Talbot. Einar's wife Hege and two sons Jerrick and Olind spend much of their time in Grimfrost and are close to the family there.

Ynglinga*Advisor to Lord Paragon Talbot Hale*

Age: ?

Partially due to influence from his mother's people among the north, partially due to some bad politicking on behalf of the Fayne, and partially due to Lady Emma distancing herself from her brother, Lord Talbot does not have a cabal of sisters who advise him. Instead, the old woman Ynglinga advises him, and it is rumored that the elaborate designs of ivory and bone in her long white hair mark her as one of the Volkun - a bone priestess. She doesn't bother to hide her disgust at the Sisters of the Fayne, and those cabals that remain in Wintervale find their lives made very difficult.

Eryk Bloodaxe*Master Eryk Bloodaxe*

Age: 31

Lord Talbot's martial master is Eryk Bloodaxe, a mighty warrior who has recently won the post after the death of Harald the War Tooth, during a raid. Eryk is a rare breed

among the Get of Ursin and is said to be both educated and wise, in addition to being deadly on the field of battle. The Get of Ursin are typically considered blunt instruments designed for the sole purpose of battle and war, but under Eryk's leadership they have grown increasingly political and thus, seen their fortunes rise. Some in the North regard this as dangerous and whispers abound that the Death Bear will come for Eryk sooner rather than later.

Reinhold*Master Reinhold, Magister of the Apotheca*

Age: 29

The Apotheca are well respected in Hale and many are housed within the Wailing Keep. Reinhold is the most respected magister in the keep, due in part to the fact that he is from Bannon originally, and came with Lady Emma as part of her entourage. Despite his young age, he is often called in to advise the Lady on matters big and small - and both he and the family pretend to ignore the rumors that his relationship with the Lady might be much closer than is proper.

Herja Axeholme*Ser Herja Axeholme, Knight Master of the Valkyn*

Age: 26

The current leader of the Knights Valkyn is Valkyr Master Herja Axeholme. She is a stern, serious woman of great beauty who comes from the far North of the Everfrost. Herja has the distinction of never being beaten in battle and bearing no scars to tell the tale of her victories. Some whisper she is guarded by the spirits but others say the bone priestess Ynglinga had her drink a potion that would make her invulnerable to the weapons of her enemies.

Erland*Erland The White Owl, Warchief of the Karn*

Age: 58

Each of the Hale High Houses has a representative seat on the Council of Elders that nominally advises Lord Talbot, although in practice, this body is mostly used to settle disagreements between the various houses. The clans that do not have their own High House are represented by a single seat, and unlike the other seats which shift between whatever member of the High House has decided to spend time in Grimfrost, it has been occupied by the same person for a very long time: Erland the White Owl. His hair has been white since he faced down a terrible monster in the Everfrost while preparing for his Skynda Vinna. It is said that he did not fight off the creature, but rather stared it down, driving it back with

his very will - and no one who has looked into his pale blue eyes doubts the rumor. Not with a gaze that gives the impression that he is staring into your very animus. He's whip-thin, but with skin taut with muscles and scars, and he dresses unapologetically in the traditional garb of the Karn. Many have tried to take his seat on the council from him but, even though some of the other High Houses would desperately love to see the stubborn bastard removed, no one else has as many connections to the clans and no one else has been able to best him in combat - either political or physical.

QUOTES

"The worth of a man is measured by his oaths."

"A cowardly man may think he'll live forever if he avoids battle, but old age will give him no peace though spears may spare him."

"What is a northman who has nothing to offer to his clan? What is a northman who cannot feed or protect or support those around him? Such a person isn't a northman at all."

HISTORY

The following section details that common historical information known to the members of the faction. While there is certainly more history to the faction, it will need to be discovered via the proper in-game channels.

BEFORE THE GREAT WAR

Descended from the Great Tyr people, the clans of the Hale were united by Brynhild the Shieldbreaker, the Queen of the North in the time of darkness. It was she who would become the first lady of House Hale, as she claimed descent from Halyn the Just. For her banner she chose the mighty Ursa, the bear, to represent the ferocity and strength of their people. Bears were legendary for their desire for revenge when slighted, a trait that all Northmen seem to share to this day. Her marriage to Lord William Bannon in 14 A.S began a partnership with House Bannon that would only continue to grow and profit both Houses. In the dark times before the Great War, both Hale and Bannon, as well as Richter and Castellan, allied together to survive the great plague and famine that rushed through the realm.

THE GREAT WAR - 441 A.S. - 451 A.S.

House Hale is devastated in 440 when the Magistrat Council, the rulers of Arnesse, is rocked by a massive explosion,

killing most of their number. Among them is Vadik Ironclad, a direct descendent of Brynhild the Shieldbreaker and sworn brother of Prime Consul Edric Bannon. It is said that the only reason Edric Bannon survives the explosion is because Vadik threw his own body down on his beloved friend and protected him at the expense of his own life. It is quickly discovered that this tragedy was perpetrated by radical members of the Eldra faith, worshippers of the Old Gods, who sought to destabilize the government and end the restrictions that had been placed on their dangerous religious practices.

Prime Consul Edric Bannon, the leader of the Magistrat, survived the explosion and moved quickly to declare martial law, as well as passing the Faith Separation Act to forbid the practice of religion of any kind in Arnesse. The nobility of House Hale quickly distances themselves from those of the clans who still follow the Old Ways. They seek out the Volkun and their followers to force them to renounce their faith, although some among the other houses argued that they were more enthusiastic about hunting the faithful of the other houses than they were of their own. By 441, Hale joins Bannon, Castellan, Rourke, and Richter in an alliance dedicated to destroying the Eldra Gods entirely. Using immensely powerful magic, they bind these immortals to physical form and kill them with mighty enchanted weaponry.

Included among them is Hale's own god, Kallea the Lawbringer. She falls in battle to her own people, decrying those who attacked her to the last, saying that their actions are not just or honorable. Before her essence is extinguished, she curses her killers and says she would be avenged. Many of the Hale assume these words had the same feather-weight of all dying men's curses, but others looked upon her form and felt her words settle into their hearts. As such, Kallea's body is given the same honor the Hales would give any ancestor and they grant her a warrior's burial in the Old Ways.

Fundamentally disagreeing with the cause to slay the Gods, House Athan, the ancestors of House Innis, join with House Aragon, and rise to stop the allied army. House Athan is soundly defeated by the forces of House Hale in the Battle of Thornwood, with some assistance from Richter. Shortly after, House Aragon is forced to retreat by a Hale and Castellan army armed with terrible siege weapons that decimate their dragons at the Battle of Redwick. Within a year the Hale and allied forces had destroyed all the Old Gods of the Eldra.

The allied army decides to crown the former Prime Consul as King of Arnesse, and Hale throws their support behind the man that Vadik Ironclad gave his life to protect. During his coronation, Edric's reign is abruptly ended when he is

murdered by assassins from Houses Aragon and Athan. Those of his guard who survive the attack walk willingly into the Everfrost, having failed in their oaths to protect him.

Lord Edric's daughter and heir, Lady Catherine, is coronated Queen Catherine Bannon I after his death. Her retribution against those who killed her father would plunge the land into civil war for the next eight years. Seeking revenge for the death of their King, the forces of Hale, Bannon, Castellan, and Richter attack Thornwood, and during the Second Battle of Thornwood, decimate House Athan. Seeking to liberate House Athan, Houses Rourke and Aragon attack the Midlands and destroy House Castellan, killing the entire family. House Bannon, Richter, and Hale meet the Aragons and the Rourkes at Belburn and crush them in battle. In retribution for the death of her father, Catherine orders four thousand prisoners of war crucified every quarter mile along the Vermillion Road from Belburn to Highcourt. From that day forward, she is known as the Crimson Queen. Both the Aragon and Rourke retreat to their homelands, but Thornwood is occupied by the Great Houses in a period known as the Bitter Harvest.

It is in the last days of the Great War that House Aragon, House Athan, and House Rourke, desperate to win against insurmountable odds, summon incredible magics that bring about the Eldritch Cataclysm. A world powered by magic, who breathed magic, watched it disappear in a moment. Arnesse is plunged into a dark age and the land descends into chaos.

THE AGE OF KINGS - 451 A.S. - 760 A.S.

The world during the Age of Kings is one in crisis. Magic formed a basis of society in Arnesse and in the wake of the Eldritch Cataclysm, without it, the people were lost. Many nobles took this disorder as a chance to betray their oaths and attempt to seize power over the land. The first decade of the Age of Kings was marked by constant strife in the newly formed monarchy. Queen Catherine, with the help of her Hale allies, manages to bring the wild realm to heel. Some nobles come willingly, others come at a price, and still others only come at the point of a sword. Those who would speak ill of House Bannon would come to call Queen Catherine's methods as cruel and even tyrannical, but there are few who challenge the fact that she was one of the greatest monarchs to have ever lived. By the time Queen Catherine's son Edric II takes power in 497, the lands from the Thornwood to the Midlands has been brought under her control.

Although not all is well; unrest and revolt start to brew in the north as the Northmen seek the same power and prestige that has been granted to the Houses of Corveaux and Bannon. To

help assuage the issue, Edric II marries a noblewoman of House Hale, Thyra, and while he passes three years later, he leaves behind one child - Richard I. Thyra reigns as Queen Regent for nearly fifteen years until Richard is old enough to take the throne and helps to bring the Everfrost under the control of the crown. Richard reigns for nearly 60 years until almost 600 and is considered to this day to be one of the finest kings to sit on the throne, thanks to the teachings of his mother. He proves to be equally as capable as his mother as a warrior but also a master at diplomacy and administration. He divides the Kingdom into Protectorates and establishes the position of Lord Paragon. Richard I also makes several sweeping revisions to the law, including the standardization of taxes and better treatment for Commonfolk. He forms the King's Council to advise the monarch and creates the Kingdom's treasury, the Royal Exchequer. He empowers both the Grand Bank and the Cirque to have more control over trade and banking. If there was a monarch who made the Kingdom into what it is today, it was King Richard I.

The reign of Richard I's son, Richard II, is marked by a time of civil war and unrest. The snakes of House Aragon, stirred by a desire for revenge, invade the Sovereignlands. In 610, led by the charismatic Lord Hector Aragon, they manage to find disloyal members of House Corveaux to form an alliance with. At the same time, a new faith rises in the Midlands, driven by a man named Magnus Blayne. When Richard II orders Blayne's execution in 609, his fanatical followers manage to assassinate the King. His brother James is coronated King James I shortly after but reigns for only a year as the armies of Hector Aragon challenge him at Caddock Tor. Few of James' allies manage to reach the king in time to make any difference on the battlefield, including the Hale. If they took their time in reaching him, that was only a testament to what kind of King James I was in that short amount of time.

Hector's son Roland is crowned the first non-Bannon monarch in the history of the Kingdom, King Roland I. He makes several sweeping reformations to Arnesse including reversing the ban on worship. King Roland also restores the remnants of House Athan to good standing; they rename themselves House Innis, now rulers of the newly formed Protectorate of the Northern Reaches. He also raises House Ulster, a rebellious high house of Corveaux, loyal to the teachings of Magnus Blayne and the Aurorym, to a great house under the name House Blayne. Roland does much to ingratiate himself with all of the Houses of Arnesse, and Hale is no exception. He welcomes those of House Hale to his court and the Lords of Grimfrost are happy to offer him their services.

The rule of House Aragon is short as Roland's son, Doran Aragon, is murdered at his wedding shortly after his coronation, supposedly by Rourke brigands. The son of King James I, Richard, is crowned King Richard III and marries Helena Richter. The couple fail to have children initially and King Richard adopts John Bannon of Caer Dorston as his heir. He kept him as heir even when Helena Richter bears a son, Edwin. When Richard III dies to illness, John and Edwin spend the next decade in a conflict known as the Brother's War to determine who will rule. With the aid of House Richter and Rourke, Edwin is able to best his brother and is crowned King Edwin I in 673. King Edwin takes a Bannon bride, Queen Margaery and focuses much of his almost two-decade reign on improving infrastructure in the Kingdom.

King Edwin I's reign comes to an end in 692 under suspicious circumstances. His daughter and heir, Lady Eleanor seeks the throne, but a number of rivals to her claim emerge in the form of at least four bastard children who say that King Edwin was their father as well. This includes Eddard Frost, son of King Edwin and Lady Sia Hale. Eddard Frost is defeated in battle by Lady Eleanor, leaving his wife the Lady Aelfdane Thorby and his son Gulbrand behind. To this day, there are those that believe the Thorby line has a viable claim to the throne.

To resolve the dispute without further bloodshed, Lady Eleanor offers to marry one the strongest of the remaining bastards, Lord Royce Wolf, her half-brother. Despite the controversy behind their union, Queen Eleanor I is crowned in 698 and with the strength of Lord Royce's army, she is able to bring all her rivals to heel by 700, thus ending the Bastard War. Though it is widely rumored that Queen Eleanor and the newly named King Miles detest each other, a child is born from their union, Giles, after they seek the help of the newly minted House Innis. King Miles has a fairly public affair with Lady Lesha Aragon, from which a son, Charles is born. King Miles accepts him as his own son and gives him a Bannon name. This action leads ultimately to a duel with an Aragonese champion that costs the King his life.

Giles comes of age in 727 and takes the crown amid a time of famine and want in the land. During this time he demands much of his Hale allies, relying on them to quell unrest throughout all of Arnesse, without providing much in the way of recompense. He seems content to believe that those of House Hale will do his bidding simply because he is king and should be honored to be asked at all.

Giles takes Lady Rosalind of House Bannon to be his queen and she bears him a son, whom they also name Giles. Giles I also reworks much of the legal system in Arnesse, including

the ability for spouses to annul their marriage. Rumors of malcontent between he and Queen Rosalind become reality when he annuls their marriage - not realizing, perhaps, that this would not remove the fact that she had been crowned queen and her son was a legitimate heir to the throne. Realizing this, Lady Rosalind takes her son and flees North, protected by some of her loyal Hale guards, who have no love for the son of the man and woman who murdered Eddard Frost and who has continued to treat the house of Hale as nothing more than ignoble dogs. Queen Rosalind and Giles II take up residence with House Hale gentry in Grimfrost and are treated as part of the family after Queen Rosalind swears a blood oath of loyalty to Lord Paragon Garth Hale and Lady Aerin.

In 734, King Giles weds Lady Elysande Corveaux and shortly after she bears him a daughter, Lady Emma. But habits are hard to break, and Giles quickly finds himself drawn to Elysande's cousin, Alice Corveaux. Unable to get another annulment he instead spreads vicious rumors about his wife, claiming adultery, and connives to have her tried, found guilty, and killed for that crime. He then marries Lady Alice, only for her to die in childbirth shortly after.

Lady Elysande's allies help the young Emma Bannon to the north to join her half-brother Giles II and his mother Queen Rosalind. Despite what she might feel about Lady Elysande, Queen Rosalind raises Emma with something akin to affection alongside her son.

Struck by grief by the death of Alice, the King's health begins to fade. It is during this time that he takes more serious action against the rise of the Aurorym faith. It is said that King Giles I has a vision that the Aurorym will lead to the ultimate demise of the Kingdom of Arnesse and he tries to place a series of restrictions on religion once again. This causes unrest among much of the populace and when he takes Lady Maeve Innis as his bride in 748, rumors spread that she has bewitched him to turn him against the Aurorym.

When Queen Maeve is announced to be with child in 750, the fear of an Innis heir to the throne fuels the rumors that the King and Queen are both involved in witchcraft.

His son, Giles II, living among the Hale, converts to the Aurorym faith and is disgusted about what he hears of his father. In secret, the younger Giles gathers troops from House Blayne, House Hale, and rebellious factions within House Bannon to march on Giles I's throne. Giles I meets his son on the field of battle at Lanton and is soundly defeated with the help of Giles II's Hale allies. The King and Queen are taken

captive and put on trial for witchcraft. Supposedly during the conflict, Maeve bears the child who comes to be known as the "Witch Prince" Reynard. Maeve tries to have the child secreted away, but he is hunted down and killed by the Hale. King Giles and Queen Maeve are both found guilty of witchcraft and burned alive for their crimes.

His son is crowned King Giles II in 751. Giles II promptly cements his alliance with House Blayne by marrying the beautiful Aline, daughter of Lord Frederick Blayne. The King also grants a portion of the Midlands known as The Troth to House Blayne as the Hearthlands Protectorate. In order to affirm alliances between Bannon and Hale he gives his half-sister, Lady Emma, to Lord Talbot Hale in marriage when she comes of age two years later.

PRESENT

King Giles II has sat on the throne of Arnesse for twelve years. His reign is very different than his father's as his relentless focus on faith and morality threaten much of his relationships with his allies. Despite the fact that House Hale was one of his primary supporters, and the reason he was able to take the throne at all, he has seemed to forget their role in his success and treats them less like allies and more like lowly servants.

Recently, he has passed a series of morality laws that made immoral behaviors punishable under the king's law. This included things like lascivious behavior, bribery, and more, as he has been strongly influenced by House Blayne and the Aurorym faith. Some might even say that he has courted House Blayne's approval over any of his relations with the other Houses and as a result, House Bannon's relations with the other Great Houses have grown more distant even as Hale has started to distance themselves from him.

While King Giles II has stopped short of making the Aurorym faith the official religion of Arnesse, many feel that it is only a matter of time before he does. Some have blamed his wife, Aline, House Blayne, or even the Aurorym itself for his moral paranoia. Such paranoia has caused the economy to suffer and those who behave carelessly are often fined, imprisoned, or even killed. House Hale has started to see more and more Aurorym converts in their lands, but the death of Giles I - where he was burned by his own son simply under suspicion of witchcraft - has made them fear the direction that Arnesse is taking. How soon before the Aurorym and Giles II try to make it illegal to not be a member of the Aurorym? Or how soon before Giles II looks at the men and women of the north and decides they don't meet his standard for morality?

Lady Aline has so far failed to give Giles II an heir, though not from lack of effort on her part. But it is rumored that Giles II has spent too much time worrying about the state of everyone's morals to properly see to his wife in the bedroom.

There are those that whisper that perhaps Hale has spent enough time in Bannon's shadow. They argue that Lady Emma's children are as much in the line of succession as anyone else's, and that perhaps Rangvald Thorby - Eddard Frost's grandson - might have a right to the throne as well.

Ynglinga, Lord Talbot's advisor, is fond of saying that she sees a darkness coming, something that can shake the very foundations of the land and bring the current monarchy to an end, and that Hale should position itself to do what is best for Hale... and Arnesse, should that darkness come to pass.

THE ORDERS OF HALE

THE KNIGHTS VALKYN

Legends tell that the Knights Valkyn were founded by the mighty shieldmaiden and founder of House Hale, Brynhild the Shieldbreaker. The first among them were trained by her personally and then charged to serve as the guardians of House Hale's nobility. The Valkyn receive precise, disciplined, martial training and in battle they are no less deadly than their kinfolk in the Get of Ursin. In addition, they are taught to fight together, as a unit, increasing their combat effectiveness; a trait uncommon among the armies of the Northlands. It is expected that the Valkyn be masters of many fighting styles, both unarmed and armed, so that they can be useful no matter what environment they find themselves in. Valkyn training is exceptionally difficult as the knight aspirants are not only taught to be expert individual fighters but are also expected to be able to lead clansmen and other warriors into battle. As such, they are required to study the art of war itself, learning tactics fit for groups both large and small, and forced to develop the ability to read a battlefield and adapt instantly. The Valkyn are few, three to four hundred in total, scattered about House Hale and its favored High Houses. The Hale nobles will often reward their most loyal vassals with a contingent of Valkyn to serve in their personal retinue. Their heraldry is a pair of silver Valkyr wings spread on a field of blue with a silver sword splitting the wings in twain. Valkyn are entitled to wear one to five silver swords upon their personal heraldry and coat of arms, depending on rank.

The order itself mirrors the dichotomy of House Hale. While on the surface the knights of the Valkyn have eschewed the

Old Ways, the cynical point out that many of the final trials mirror some of the Vinna challenges and that many Valkyn choose to take bear cubs for themselves if given the choice. And while the Valkyn are at least partially trained in the court etiquette of the South, no one who values their skin would call them soft or weak. They swear Oaths of fealty to their liege, vowing to protect them with their lives along with a chivalric code that focuses a surprising amount on the enforcement of justice and punishment for the wicked. It is not uncommon for the Valkyn to be well versed in the law and even serve in their noble's stead at a trial. It is expected that all high houses of House Hale will contribute men, weapons, or supplies to the Valkyn and many of the second or third children of high houses may try for the order, as well as those of the clans who would prefer to leave their heritage, and the poverty and hunger that often comes with it, behind them.

THE GET OF URSIN

Those who practice the Old Ways have revered the great bear spirit, Ursin, for over a thousand years. So powerful and respected was Ursin that House Hale chose the mighty bear for their heraldry when they first arrived in the North and established their rule there. Legends say that Ursin has two children, his daughter Artio, the lifegiver and provider of abundance, and his son, Arcas, the lifetaker, the Death Bear. The Get of Ursin are a savage group of berserkers who walk in the footsteps of the bear spirits, harnessing their might to make them juggernauts in battle. Utterly without fear, the Get often wield great, two handed axes with a strength that could cleave a person in twain and are capable of taking blows that would kill most warriors. The Get of Ursin mark their bodies with ritual scarification to indicate their bravery and toughen their skin. In battle, they are usually preceded by the bellowing of horns that announce their arrival and call the ancient spirits. In that moment, it is said they allow themselves to be taken by the bjornreiði, or the bear's rage. In this state, they can barely distinguish friend from foe and when put upon a task, will see it through until victory or death. The invoking of the spirits is augmented by a draught of veigöl, honey mead mixed with potent drugs that reduce pain and sharpen the warrior's senses for a time. The heraldry of the Get of Ursin is the Hagalaz wyrd rune which symbolizes destruction, chaos, but also renewal. A Get of Ursin do not have heraldry or coats of arms like other knights, so as they grow in renown and rank in the order, they are granted another wyrd rune to wear. These runes, earned through a lifetime of battle, come to be known as their Wyrd Legacy, and when a Get of Ursin passes on, these runes live

on to tell the story of the deeds and valor of their life.

The Get of Ursin are drawn from the fiercest warriors in the North, and at an early age, those who aspire to join them must undergo the Rimewalk. They will set out into the wilderness of the North and are not allowed to return until they have survived battle with Arcas, the Death Bear. Many aspirants do not return, victims of the bitter cold, animals, or worse. Those that do, are said to be blessed by Artio and can now take the spirit of a bear inside them during battle, bending that rage and power to their will. The Get of Ursin have no chivalric code, but all take Oaths to their lords that they must obey until death. For a bear warrior, to die in battle is the greatest honor and to live to old age is a mark of shame. If they live to see their fortieth winter, a Get goes upon the Last Walk, which sets them out in the Everfrost alone to again confront Arcas the Death Bear and there, meet an honorable death in single combat. The current Hersir of the Get of Ursin is Eryk Bloodaxe, a mighty warrior who has recently won the post after the death of Harald the War Tooth, during a raid. Eryk is a rare breed among the Get of Ursin and is said to be both educated and wise in addition to being deadly on the field of battle. The Get of Ursin are typically considered blunt instruments designed for the sole purpose of battle and war, but under Eryk's leadership they have grown increasingly political and thus, seen their fortunes rise. Some in the North regard this as dangerous and whispers abound that the Death Bear will come for Eryk sooner than later.

THE ORDER OF THE WINTER WOLF



An order born from controversy, the Winter Wolves were created by a member of the Wolf Guard, Ser Kellan Innis, who, for the love of a Northwoman, deserted his country and

fled to the lands of Hale to be with her. In leaving, he stole a number of warg pups and there, raised them to be his own. When his wife was killed by the undead, he swore an oath that he would not rest until the cursed lands of the North were cleansed of death and their spirits brought to rest. Knowing he could not do this alone, he gathered his wolves and trained others to use them as instruments of battle. Much to the chagrin of the Innis, they became a powerful fighting force widely respected in the realm of the North. They also used the same method of bonding, the bantir, used by the Wolf Guard of Innis, and whenever the two encountered each other, blood was sure to flow. The Order of the Winter Wolf was dedicated to putting the dead to rest wherever they encountered them and they became extremely efficient at doing so.

Their wolves allowed them to cover great distances and they often served as outriders, most welcome sights at remote villages where they brought news, supplies, and stories of the realm to those who would not have otherwise heard. Their oath was to protect the weak and see the dead to rest, no matter the cost. There was rumored that the darker side to the oath was that it bound them to duty, even beyond the grave. Tales persist to this day of the Vargen, a pack of great undead wolves that prowl the land on the coldest nights, a draugr knight at their lead with glowing eyes of bitter ice. It is said to be Ser Kellan who, bound to his oath, still seeks revenge for the death of his love..

HALE HIGH HOUSES

HOUSE HAMMERFROST

Castle: Castle Brightstone

Ruler: Lord Calder Dane of Hammerfrost

Fief: Wintervale



Ruled over by Lord Calder Dane, Castle Brightstone is aptly named. From a distance, the pale pink stone of its towers seems to glow like the fires of the sun rising at dawn. Some say that the castle can afford to be obstinacious because no one would attack it, so close as it is to support from Grimfrost and the forces of Hale quartered near Giantsfall lake. Others say that it's meant to be as bright as it is, for it reminds everyone exactly who Wintervale belongs to.

Hammerfrost was originally formed by Courveaux knights who came north with Lord William Bannon. This house helps to train the fighters and warriors for Hale's forces, but Hammerfrost in particular is the bread basket of Hale. Located between the Fells, the Hammer and the Anvil, the Wintervale is one of the only temperate regions in all of Hale's Protectorate. And what land in Wintervale that does not belong to Grimfrost and the lords of Hale belongs to Hammerfrost.

With his great bear, Tore, Lord Dane is a study in dichotomies. Lord Dane is one of those nobles of Hale who is close to his Courveaux and southern roots - he keeps a cabal of Fayne to advise him, he is one of the few lords to keep riding horses, and his family regularly travels to Grimfrost or parts even further south. But Lord Dane also acknowledges the worth of gaining strength in any way he can, especially over the disparate and fractious clans of northmen which live in his land. As such, he has undertaken the Bjorn Vinna himself and Tore is the second bear that he has caught and raised. The Lord Dane and his family keep a Bera altar within

their great hall, and Lord Dane is bloodbound to leaders within the Karn and the Angari. His wife, Elin, is closely related to several powerful Northmen, including Erland the White Owl; and is nearly as good with a bow as he is with a sword.

The heraldry of Hammerfrost, and the Danes, is a winged hammer on a field of blue and white.

The city of Eski lies near the Great Lake of Giantsfall, and it is within the plains that stretch around the northeastern edge of the lake that the great armies of the Hale train and are quartered when they are not stationed at Grimfrost. The great barges at Eski Landing serve as transports for the troops, quickly delivering men and goods from their summer quarters to the fortress of Grimfrost or the Rourke city of Seyld.

Anywhere else in Arnesse, Eski would be a picturesque getaway, a beautiful city nestled against the shores of a lake at the foot of the Barrier Mountains. But under the watchful eyes of the Lords of Hale and Hammerfrost, Eski more closely resembles a military outpost than a playspot for the idle rich. Even in the most temperate part of the Everfrost, winter hits hard and quickly and it is of vital importance that the people of Wintervale eke out every bit of food that they can during the few short summer months. Members of the clans come from all across Halelands to work the fields in exchange for coin that they can use to buy supplies from the Cirque in Grimfrost, or in what they can beg the quartermasters of the Eski grain silos to sell to them.

Giantsfall lake is so named for a legend about an ice giant who fled from Kallea's justice. In rushing to climb the Barriers and get away from Kallea, he did not notice the trap she had strung across his path. He tumbled to the ground, flattening the smaller peaks in his fall and driving a huge hole in the earth which quickly filled with water.

Hrosshaf is one of the few places in Hale in which horses are bred and raised, although mostly in the fields to the north of the city which are not as good for growing things. The horses raised in the north are not those of the south; they have shaggy winter coats with thick curly manes and are a hardy breed that can withstand Hale's harsh climate with little problem. The hardest part about raising horses in Hrosshaf is not keeping them alive but rather keeping them from being stolen. Hrosshaf keeps a group of specially trained riders for rounding up any members of the clans who might think that a horse would be a nice addition to a raiding party.

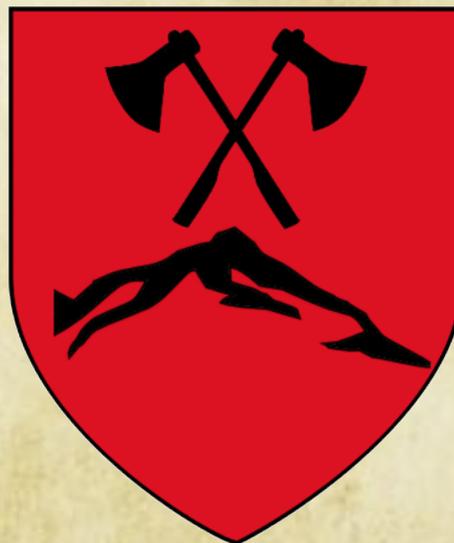
Also found in the fields of Hrosshaf is the Schola Phasma, the Hexen school of House Hale. It is placed where its students can easily access the Everfrost, and its cursed landscape riddled with tales of lost travelers, supernatural blizzards, and places from which men never return. This was the founding schola of the Hexen and the location in which they are trained to carve out the frozen frontier for those that would make a home there. They are called here to rid the landscape of the entities that still haunt the rocky peaks and desolate outposts of the frozen landscape. Among the barren, icy trees, weighed down by the perpetual snow, monsters stalk and are said to consume whole hunting parties or possess the mighty warriors of the northern clans such that they are overcome by an insatiable urge to commit violence, murder, and cannibalism.

HOUSE COLDHILL

Castle: Hagsteeth Keep

Ruler: Lord Colborn Brynjolf, of Coldhill

Fief: Coldhill



To the east of Hammerfrost lies the Hagsteeth Keep, keep of Lord Colborn Brynjolf. Hagsteeth is so named for the ominous shaped mountains that surround it, looking much like the errant teeth of a particularly ugly witch. At the far end of Wintervale, Coldhill guards the pass to the plains of Thorby to the East and is known primarily as the training ground of the Get of Ursin.

Lord Brynjolf and those of House Coldhill have an interesting relationship with the Get of Ursin. While the bear warriors are under their jurisdiction and leadership, none of the gentry of House Coldhill are a part of the Get of Ursin and it is a long-standing practice that any of the family who joins their ranks sever their ties with the family. Lord Brynjolf himself is known for being a calculating and reserved man who would sooner push a man off of the top of Hagsteeth than listen to him challenge his authority. There is an anger that simmers in the blood of the Brynjolfs, but it is as cold and powerful as the wind coming off of the glaciers.

It is rumored that he and Eryk Bloodaxe often butt heads, but no one has ever seen them actually disagree in public- nor did Harald the War Tooth ever publicly argue with Brynjolf. It is said that the Brynjolfs have some sort of magical claim over the bear warriors, something that gives them control over the fierce Get of Ursin, but more likely the Brynjolfs have mastered the art of the Hale lords and keep the peace through a careful mix of blood oaths, familial ties, and good old-fashioned blackmail.

In the mountains around Coldhill there is a particularly large number of Angari and Karn northmen, especially to the Artio Mountains to the north. It is here that a large number of the great and terrifying brown bears of Hale den during the winter and where many of those seeking a Bjorn mark seek out cubs to raise for their own.

The heraldry of Coldhill is two crossed axes over a black mountain peak, positioned on a field of red.

HOUSE RAVNDAL

Castle: Clovershire Castle
Ruler: Lord Arnulf Ravndal
Fief: Raven's Rest

Clovershire castle is one of the first castles built in Halelands after the completion of Grimfrost. Built by the Corveaux knights who came north with Lord William Bannon, house Ravndal is to the west of Hammerfrost in the shadow of the Anvil, one of the Fells. Led by Lord Arnulf, Ravndal lands are not particularly well suited to farming but are an excellent training grounds for the Knights Valkyn, and are used by them to recruit, train, and organize those warriors of the north which are sent as tithes to the Lords of Winter from the other high houses. They use the name of their Fell, the Anvil, as a regular metaphor for the process by which the untested warriors of the north become the wild dogs of the Hale.

The Ravndal lands contain many small villages and Lord Arnulf tries to manage the complex relationships between them and the warriors brought to Raven's Rest by the Valkyn, but often falls short. If it wasn't for the Valkyn, in fact, it is quite possible that Lord Arnulf and his family would have long since been overtaken. Lord Arnulf himself is not especially distinguishable and is often overshadowed by the much more memorable Valkyr Master Herja Axeholme, who spends much of her time with the Valkyn at Raven's Rest.

Pineholr is located to the north of Raven's Rest, and it is here that the the majority of the caribou that pull the great sledges across the ice are raised.

While Ravnda used to have its own heraldry, they know exclusively use that as the Valkyn.

HOUSE THORBY

Castle: Harelton Manor
Ruler: Lord Rangvald Thorby
Fief: Thorby
Motto: "Death before failure."



The House closest to Coldhill, far in the plains near the Everfrost, is Thorby. Thorby was originally a Corveaux house and was originally much larger than it was. But after a particularly violent uprising the Lords of Hale decided to reward some of the clans who had supported them and punish the high house that had so failed to manage its clans, and the Aesir and the Elfhild were each given part of Thorby's lands to manage as their own high house. The Lords and Ladies of Thorby are still insulted by this decision on behalf of their forefathers and do not have particularly close relationships with either the Aesir or the Elfhild.

For the House of Thorby it is hard to avoid saying that its best days lie behind it. A house descended from Corveaux knights

that lost much of their lands and wealth, those of Thorby- including Lord Rangvald- tend to have the idea that they are a house living on borrowed time.

But rather than let that bother them, those of House Thorby are determined to live what life they can before the Everfrost claims their line- and it seems determined to do so. No heir of House Thorby has lived past the age of 40 in the last seven generations, and neither have most of their surviving relatives. Some of this might be the result of the mythical Thorby curse, but more practical people argue that it is simply a result of their family motto: *Death before failure*. When one isn't willing to admit that they have failed, and in fact would rather die than do so, they do not tend to live the longest.

Some say that Lord Rangvald Thorby may have a viable claim to the throne, due to his grandfather Eddard Frost. He certainly believes that he does and spends much of his time when he is throwing parties at Harelton trying to convince the other Lords of Wintervale to throw their support behind him, without much success.

Between Harelton Manor and Coldhill lies the small village of Holehollow, so named because how the great hero Dag Goldenthrout was trapped there. A bandit troop had managed to trap him within a hole in the ground after much time and were gleefully plotting his demise and the reward that the monsters of the Everfrost would give them when they turned Dag over to him. But Dag recognized one of the men as being oathbond to his brother's son, and smoothly convinced him that the oath they had made to his brother's son meant that they could not let him die without breaking their oath. He escaped, but the hole in the ground remained and gave its name and story to the town.

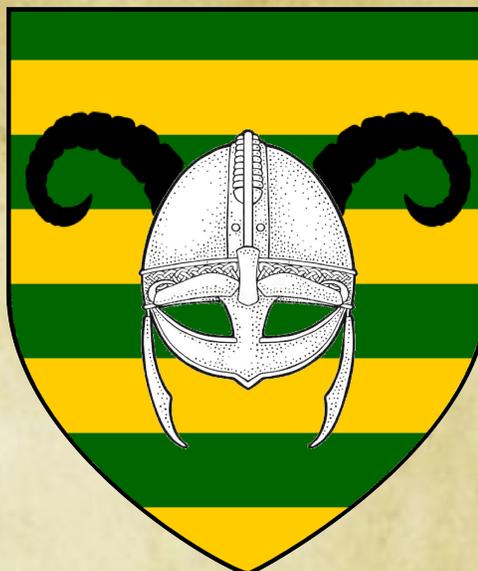
The heraldry of House Thorby is three gold martlets on a blue shield.

HOUSE AESIR

Castle: Coftrey Hold

Ruler: Lord Fiske Aesir

Fief: Coftrey



Once part of Thorby's lands, House Aesir was given its lands after they supported House Hale against a violent uprising of northmen trying to retake Wintervale. Located between two peaks north of Wintervale, the Aesir lands are generally bare and arid, making it difficult for them to grow food.

Instead, those commonfolk of House Aesir are generally herders- mostly of the mountain sheep that clamber around Coftrey Hold. The Aesir are proud of their heritage and many of the northmen within their lands take the Veida Vinna as they claim to be able to feed themselves on what they can gather and raise even in the depth of winter.

The Lords and Ladies of Coftrey Hold are closer to the Lords of Hale than some of the other high houses that were descended from the clans of the north, mostly due to their close proximity to Wintervale. They, of course, are not particularly close to House Thorby, who believes that their lands should still belong to them. But Lord Fiske Aesir and his family do not seem to mind, and have good relationships with the other lords of Hale.

While not all Aesir clan folk live within the Aesir high houses, they certainly do claim to speak for all of their clan- much to the anger of those of their clans that decided to remain aloof from the control of the Lords of Winter. Other clansfolk, especially those among the Angari and the Karn, are not friendly with the Aesir and consider it an insult that they turned against their fellow northmen to side with the Lords of Winter.

Viksund is a small village on the border of Aesir lands and is typically used as way station for travelers and goods coming

from Batavi lands on the ice, usually atop great sledges pulled by caribou.

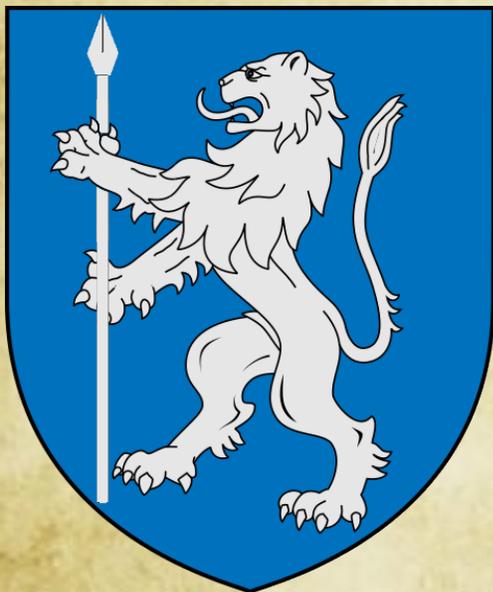
The heraldry of House Aesir is a helmet with the curved horns of the mountain sheep atop a field of green and gold.

HOUSE ELFHID

Castle: Cardell Fortress

Ruler: Lady Ragnhild Catclaw

Fief: Caher



Like House Aesir, House Elfhid received its vassalage after they fought against the other clans on behalf of a beleaguered House Thorby. Unlike the Aesir, however, the Elfhild do not care to spend too much time with the other Lords and Ladies of Winter. They seem content to stay to their lands and Cardell Fortress, and while not all Elfhild clan folk live within House Elfhild the vast majority of them do.

Unlike the other houses of Hale, House Elfhid is also lead by a woman- Lady Ragnhild Catclaw. In fact, the Elfhid are often led by women since their ancestor Eydis Catclaw held off an invading force for hours by utilizing the narrow hallways of Catclaw keep and the long reach of her spear. That spear, beautifully carved and decorated with whorled and worked metal is kept atop the hearth in the great hall of Catclaw, beneath the House Elfhid heraldry of a great mountain cat rampant next to a standing spear.

The city of Icegarden is part of House Elfhid's lands, and is supposedly on the lands that the great witch Frigg Icestrom used to host her magical ice sculptures. In addition to being

beautiful creations that danced in the wind they were said to never melt, no matter how warm the weather got. These days Icegarden is made up of woodworkers and other artisans who carve the ancient trees from Friggsvald into pieces of art that are worn by much of gentry in Wintervale. In the winter they remember the legend of the great witch and have contests over who can carve the greatest creations out of the ice of the Everfrost.

HOUSE AXELHOLME

Castle: Ulmhelm Castle

Ruler: Lord Einar Axeholme

Fief: Wolfskil



So far north many from Grimfrost consider it nothing more than a frozen wasteland, Axeholme is surprisingly pleasant. Yes, it is exceptionally cold and in the winter there are months where the sun is nothing more than a speck of light on the horizon for an hour a day, but in the summer light shines for weeks even in the middle of the night.

To the northwest of Potbelly Lake and the South of the Arcas mountain range lies Ulmhelm Castle. The castle itself looks like a bit like a helm, as it is a rounded keep with an overbuilt center ridge that overlooks the Wolfskil fief and the lake below.

Potbelly Lake, so named for its shape- reminiscent of a pot with a long handle- is rich with fish despite the fact that is no river that feeds its deep waters and the nearest sea is several days journey away. Some say that the Corveaux seeded it with fish from their lands when they first came north, others say that the deep waters of the lake hide miles of underground

caverns that stretch into lakes deeper in the Wolfskil forest or north to the Arcas mountains. Still others look at the strange dark iridescent horns of the fish pulled from the depths of the lake and refuse to eat them, no matter how good the locals say that they taste.

On the other side of Potbelly lake is Fairlund, and it is the site of the great festival of Nanna. Here, in the dead of winter when it seems like light will never return northmen from all over the Everfrost gather to add their own light to the ice. The great fires are kept lit for two weeks on either side of the Moon of the Owl and if the merriment seems sometimes forced it is only because of how hungry the wind seems coming off the glacier. Many say that the only reason most northmen make it through the dark months is because they have the great feast to look forward to, and after they have enough gossip to last them through to summer.

Perhaps because of the annual extended festival, the Lords of Axeholme are exceptionally close to their neighboring clans—even though they are not a clan high house themselves. Here in the north the strictures of the monarchy can seem very far away indeed, especially when one is faced with attacks by the undead in the Wolfskil forest or the rumors of a great horned serpent that live in Potbelly lake. It makes sense, then, that it is rumored that the Wolfskils are filled with practitioners of the old faith—although if anyone has actually seen these bone priests and priestesses they certainly aren't talking about them. However, there is a large number of Volsung clan members in the Wolfskils, and they do not

Lord Talbot Hale's mother Aerin, was the sister to Lord Holger Axeholme, the father of the current Lord Einar Axeholme. As a boy Lord Talbot often spent the winter in the north, as his father believed it was important for the heir of the Hale's to make his way among the Northmen as well as those of Grimfrost. He grew up with Einar Axeholme and his mother's people and it is rumored that it is here that he got to know Ynglinga, the advisor who had replaced the Fayne in Grimfrost. It is also from Axeholme that the Valkyr Master Herja, the leader of the Knights Valkyn, hails from.

Einar's wife Hege and two sons Jerrick and Olind have continued the tradition and spend much of the summer in Grimfrost and are close to Lord Talbot's family there.

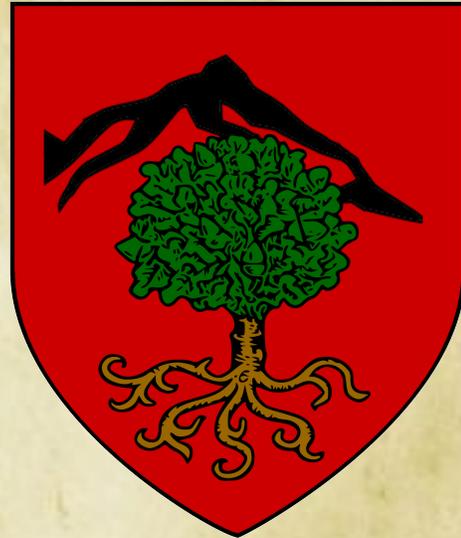
The heraldry of House Axeholme is an axe driven into a stump of wood on a field of black with a single golden star high above.

HOUSE BATAVI

Castle: Ulmhelm Castle

Ruler: Lord Einar Axeholme

Fief: Wolfskil



The Batavi are an old clan that were given lands and status as vassals by House Hale in the wake of the Laws of Vassalage late in the Eldritch age. While some of the tribes that did not bend a knee brand the Batavi as traitors, they do not seem to draw the ire of the Angari, the Volsung, and the Karn as much as the other clan high houses. When pressed for an answer about why, the northmen mutter something about the Batavi performing their required duty with the land they were given and change the subject.

Certainly, the lands under them are nothing to brag about. While the City of Marya has a lovely name, it is really nothing more than a logging outpost surrounded by ice and is populated entirely by woodcutters in the Knaerwood fortress and those poor souls who drive the great sledges across the ice to Viksund in House Aesir.

Meanwhile Husklif is just as far to the north as Axeholme but with no great festival to make it worthwhile. On the shores of Lake Braka, it is a surprisingly drab stone city simply bristling with Batavi warriors. In fact, there are so many martial sorts in Husklif that members of the smaller clans nearby will send their young adults there to celebrate and test for the Gungnir, Bjorn, and Thrud moons. Some of those gentry in Grimfrost whisper that perhaps the Batavi are training their warriors there for a takeover of Hale lands, but no one in the Hale line of succession seem to be worried about the rumors. Certainly, the warriors in the north seem

bored enough that they do not have anything better to do than hassle travelers who try to get too close to the Hanging Mountain, citing the legend of the Dead Oak on the shores of Lake Braka.

The Wolf's Den itself is ruled by Lord Rodger Badgerkin and fits perfectly into a small valley within the Knaerwood Plains. The castle stretches almost as far underground as it does upwards and is known to have its own sources of water deep within its roots, making it almost impregnable. Lord Rodger himself is a blustery drunk, always ready with a jest or a moment of wit, who spends much of his time in Wintervale, leaving the management of his castle and his lands to the Batavi clan elders.

The heraldry of the Batavi is that of an oak tree in front of a black mountain, all on a field of red.

HOUSE BATAVI

Members of the remaining clans, the Angari, the Volsung, and the Karn, can be found in all of the north, but they are not particularly represented within Hale society. They are, however, rather proud of this fact and think themselves the better for it. Many make their homes in the far north, beyond the lands of the high houses, preferring to live by the old ways as much as they can.

THE TRADITIONS OF HALE

HOUSE LEGENDS

OGMANA'S GAZE

Far to the north, beyond the clans and the high houses, there is a mountain that rises from the thickest remains of the Everfrost. Larger even than the Fells this huge mountain can sometimes be seen on the clearest of days in the distance, or when the lights of the host of the dead are the brightest. Those clear days and nights always seem to come with a deathly cold, frozen wind from the north, and those who dare to speak of it call the wind Ogmanna's Gaze. No one dares to approach the mountain except fools, and those are turned back by the clansmen who guard its foothills to the best of their ability.

ROLAND THE WIDE

It was known that Roland the Wide hated Cedric Gullteeth with every inch of his expansive belly, so when he invited Gullteeth and all his men to his hall, they feared the worst. They came bristling with weapons, every man alert for betrayal. But Roland met each of them with a fine cup of ale and the traditional words, "May you drink as I drink." And so, they put it out of their mind, he must have finally relented in his foolish feud, and his ale was very fine indeed.

All ate and drank well into the night, and it was generally agreed that Roland - although he held himself apart a bit from the festivities - was not as bad as everyone thought he was. But no one in the hall saw the sun rise the next morning. Each and every person, Gullteeth's men and Roland's, even Roland himself and his family, lay dead upon the floor, their bodies cooling from the effect of the poison Roland had added to all of the drinks he served.

May you drink as I drink.

THE DEAD OAK

Husklif, deep in Batari lands, has on the shores of Lake Braka the great Dead Oak, a tree that seems to have been petrified in a burst of volcanic ash. Its leaves and branches are still upon its dead trunk, but made of stone and ash rather than wood and green leaf.

Odder still is the face that some say they see in the trunk of its outstretched branches, a face that looks much like man asleep in the bough of the dead tree.

High above the great Dead Oak is the dark crags of the Hanging Mountain, so called because its cliff faces appear to loom crazily over Husklif, as if needs only a push to topple down upon the Oak and into the lake. According to legend, if any of the boulders precariously placed on the cliffs of the Hanging Mountain were to be pushed and fall over the edge, the man at the center of the Dead Oak would awaken.

What would happen when he does, no one can say.

HOUSE TRADITIONS

THE OLD WAYS

In the early days of the Great War, the nobility of House Hale quickly distanced themselves from those of the clans who still followed the Old Ways and supposedly rounded up all of the Volkun and their followers in their land. The official story is

that those who did not renounce their faith were sent into the frozen wastes - nude - to perish.

The less official story is that those who went out into the frozen wastes often found assistance from family and friends, or from the network of oath-bound that ties all of the Hale together. Even as the lords of Grimfrost followed the whims of their Bannon masters it was often a matter of their survival to turn a blind eye to some of the more... crude traditions of the clans. There are the twelve spirits of the Vinna, the Vinna ceremonies themselves, the Bera, as well as the various oathbonding ceremonies that tie the society of the north together.

But these are more folk traditions than actual celebrations of the old ways, and those who claim to conquer the spirits and take their power into themselves are often labeled as insane rather than inspired. To the far north, near the edge of the wild Everfrost, it is rumored that the Volkun still practice the old ways, but they do not dare do so among anyone they do not trust completely.

THE VINNA

There are twelve spirits that the clans remember. Their forms and personalities have been lost to eternity, but the ceremony by which a young person claims their name and station is still remembered. This ceremony is called a Vinna ceremony and is the way by which a child becomes an adult.

These days not every child will undertake a Vinna, as the tradition has fallen to the wayside as House Hale has become more intertwined with the rest of the realm and the ways of the south have begun to take precedence. But those children who claim their adulthood by the old ways are looked on with a sense of awe.

Each of the twelve full moons of the year has a spirit dedicated to it, a name, and a Vinna. Traditionally the clans hold a feast on the night of each full moon, and any child who wishes to claim that spirit as their own and become an adult through a Vinna must supply the necessary components for the feast. Those who successfully complete a Vinna are feted and honored at their full moon feast. Among the Hale it is considered the height of narcissism to celebrate the day of your birth and they look down upon all others who do so.

NANNA (DECEMBER)

The Diplomat Moon, represented by the owl. This moon happens near the darkest, longest nights of the year. To claim this Vinna a child must entertain those gathered for the feast with word and story and deed, providing entertainment and hope as the hungry wind screams at the doors and keeping peace, as the darkness in the hearts of men starts to seep into the world. Those who pass this Vinna often carry a light fixed atop a staff to show that they are bringers of light and laughter.

GNA (JANUARY)

The Furrier's Moon, represented by the lynx. At the feast of Gna a child undergoing a Vinna has to present furs and pelts of at least twelve different animals, each of which they've prepared themselves, one for each of the twelve moons of the year, as well as dishes made from each of the animals they have used the pelt of. They typically will make a belt out of the pelts of those animals they have chosen and wear it as an adult to show that they are adults of Gna.

BJORN (FEBRUARY)

The Bear Moon, represented by the brown bear of the north. To claim the spirit of Bjorn, a child must brave the dens of the great bears and take from a mother bear one of her newborn cubs. He must do so without assistance, and at the feast he must get his cub to take food from his bare hands. Those who chose Bjorn will typically have bear companions to show who they are.

GULLINTANI (MARCH)

The Merchant's Moon, represented by the raven. To claim this spirit, a child must gather enough food and supplies to feast their entire village, or as large a part of it as is possible, despite it being near the end of winter. It is rumored that the more successful a Gullintani Vinna, the more success a merchant will have in their life. As such it is typical of those who pass this Vinna to wear a gold ring on their finger for every dozen people they were able to feed at the Vinna.

GUNGNIRE (APRIL)

The Warrior's Moon, represented by the mountain. To undergo a Gungnir Vinna, a child must brave one of the Fells in the middle of the stormy season and climb to the very top of one of these crags unaided by others and bring back enough of the cloudberry that grow at their summits to grace a dish at the feast. Those who pass this Vinna will often tattoo a symbol on their shoulder to show that they have beaten the Fells:



VIST (MAY)

The Hearth Moon, represented by the moon. Considered by most to be the feast of the womanly arts, the Vist moon feast is often a riot of elegantly prepared dishes, woven cloth, and household crafts prepared by the young women of the clan, each competing with the next to be declared the Queen of the Hearth. The feast of Vid is widely celebrated, even in Wintervale, and young women who have completed this Vinna often wear their hair in elaborate braids woven with iridescent stones atop their head to signify that they are now adult women and able to be married.

SUNDFÆRR (JUNE)

The Fisher's Moon, represented by the otter. Those who wish to pass this Vinna must gather enough of the bounty of the seas and rivers to be judged an adult, and it is the other Sundfærr who judge that they have done enough to be worthy of the mark that they all wear or get tattooed upon them:



HILDIS (JULY)

The Artisan's Moon, represented by the sun. The feast of Hildis is one of beauty. This Vinna is meant for all those who create pieces of art, whether that be a gorgeous piece of jewelry or a perfectly shaped sword. Those who wish to wear the sash of Hildis, a red band bordered by a golden sunburst, have to present a masterpiece item of their own making at the feast.

VEIDA (AUGUST)

The Gatherer's Moon, represented by the mountain sheep. The feast of Veida is one of gathered plants, wild berries and vegetables, as well as anything that those who wish to claim Veida's spirit can manage to grow in the frozen wasteland. It is common for those who claim the Gatherer's Moon to wear clothing dyed as green as spring's new shoots.

SKYNDÁ (SEPTEMBER)

The Explorer's Moon, represented by the fox. Few of Hale take the spirit of Skynda as part of their Vinna, but those who do leave their clan with only the supplies that they can carry and seek out the treasures of the past that lay buried in the ice of the Everfrost. Those who force the ice to give up her bounty wear a compass rune upon their skin.

VOLKUN (OCTOBER)

Few clans celebrate the Volkun moon any longer, as the Volkun are assumed to have died out, burned for their crimes and the use of bone magic. There are whispers that far to the north there are those who still know how to claim this spirit, but few truly believe these rumors.

THRUD (NOVEMBER)

The Hunter's Moon, represented by the wolf. It is customary for those who wish to take this Vinna to kill one of the great predators of the north and serve it as part of the feast, whether it is one of the of the glacier wolves, one of the great white bears, or a mountain cat. Those who pass this Vienna and claim the spirit of Thrud wear a necklace made of the teeth or claws of their greatest trophies.

THE HOST OF THE DEAD

There are times of the year, especially as the nights grow longer, that blue and green lights dance across the northern sky. It is then that the people of the Hale close up their doors and draw their shutters so that light does not leak into the outside, for it is said that those lights are the torches of the dead and any who are abroad as the host of the dead ride through the north are fated to join them.

THE FOREST FEAST

The feast that used to take place in Volkun's moon has changed as the wise people of the Old Ways have been driven underground. In its place is the Forest Feast, where the people of Hale dress up as the mythological guardians of the Everwood and pretend to be invading. It is expected that they will challenge everyone they come in contact with, especially others who are dressed in costume, and the day is famous for the fights and challenges that take place. So much so, in fact, that those people who do not wish to have to prove their strength walking down the street often remain indoors.

The celebration comes with heavy drinking, thanks to the generosity of the Lords of Grimfrost who see this as a chance for the clansfolk to burn off some of their "savage energy" and keep another uprising from taking place. Although it is rumored that some of the deaths that have happened during

the Forest Feast are not from challenges and fights that have gone wrong, but rather the work of the Lords of Hale who use it as an excuse to murder people they dislike.

THE BERA

Inside almost every home in Hale there is a small altar upon which are placed statues elegantly carved out of stone, wood, or bone. Sometimes the altars also bear a container of spirits, dried bread or meat, or other offerings. If asked, any member of the household can usually tell the story of each statue, as each one represents the honored dead of the household. Warriors slain in battle, heroes, wise men and women who fell in its defense. It is common for visitors to the house to pay their respects to the Bera, and for members of the house to greet their ancestors upon returning home or upon waking.

On the longest day of the year it is customary to remove the statues and clean and refinish the altar and many families take this chance to reintroduce to the spirits to each member of the house and tell their stories. Some families will even take their statues outside to show them how things have changed, with some going as far as to cart them around in richly decorated boxes. Of course, this also allows those families to brag about just how many honored dead they have- and how influential they must be because of it.

OATHBONDING

Northmen treat a promise made to another as a matter beyond honor. When a Northman makes his oath, he will stand by it and to cross him in an oath is to earn his undying hatred and eternal revenge, as well as that of all of those bound by oaths to him. That said, not all oaths have the same weight or are expected to last forever.

A beer oath is one of the weakest of oaths and is customarily assumed to be offered to another by offering them a drink, although some may choose to make the oathbonding more explicit by saying "may you drink as I drink." A beer oath typically lasts for the night and is a promise of basic hospitality. Those you share a beer oath with are understood to be promising to not work harm upon you and to treat you as they wish to be treated. If one enters a northman's house and is not offered a drink this is typically seen to be a very bad sign.

A fire oath is sworn between two people embarking on a journey together, typically by passing their bound hands through a fire. The oath lasts for the length of the journey and is used for metaphorical ones as well as physical ones, often

times, for example, a master and apprentice will swear a fire oath, or two friends starting a business venture. Each participant agrees to work to help the other one succeed in their joint venture and to work together for the greater good. In the north some couples will swear a fire oath as part of their marriage ceremony.

A flower oath is for a season and is sworn by exchanging offerings of flowers. It is typically seen as a promise of fidelity and is used primarily by couples who have begun their courting, although it is occasionally used between close friends as well. At the beginning of each season it is typical for flower oaths to be renewed, and those who are long-term relationships will usually offer their beloved flowers on the first of the season in light of this tradition.

The silver oath is the least emotionally fraught of all oaths and is typically used between merchants or business partners who are not particularly close, or between tribes. In a silver oath each party grants the other something of value, which must be returned on the occasion that they would like to exit the oath. The exact promise of the oath varies depending on the situation, but the silver oath is typically used to come to an agreement about legal matters. If the original collateral (or something of equal value) cannot be returned, then the oath is considered still in force.

A blood oath is sworn by those who have spilled blood together or are planning to do so and lasts for the life of the those so forsworn. Blood oaths are serious matters and cannot be broken without significant consequences. In the event that two people would like to swear a blood oath but have not spilled blood each would make a cut across their palms and press the two wounds together, mingling their blood and letting it drip down upon the ice.

The Bera Oath is the most serious of all oaths and is sworn on the family Bera altar. It is a promise to the spirits that something will be done, and it is understood that such an oath should not be taken lightly- as those who deny the spirits their due will join them.

Oathbreakers in Northmen society are considered less than human, cursed by the worst of luck, and many in the north will murder someone who has broken his oaths rather than let his curse fall upon them.

SPIRIT BURIAL

In the north when you die it is believed that your spirit returns you to Arcas. Typically, the bodies are cleaned and anointed by their families and then brought out to the Everfrost in a

bright procession of waving flags and fiery torches to be taken by their spirits into death. These bodies are brought to a place where their body can lie in state before their chosen spirit and be consumed by the creatures of the icy north. If their chosen spirit is a meat eater they are brought to a place where those animals can consume them, although those of Hildis, Veida, Gungnir, and Vist are instead brought to high places where the vultures feed upon their bodies. The bones that remain of a spirit burial are typically collected and placed in the base of the Bera altar or used to carve statues for the altar.

Northmen sometimes joke that those in the southlands who bury their dead are consigning them to be taken to Arcas by worms, and call those doomed to this ignoble fate as worm-men as an insult.

INDUSTRY AND ECONOMY

The great houses of Arnesse have remained in power throughout history due in no small part to the leverage granted them by their industrial and economic influence. This section details the current state of their affairs in these realms.

INDUSTRY

The North produces very little save the savage warriors that come from it. The wasted land there yields little of value save rock and iron hewn in abundance from the mountains. There are several extremely rare metals that have been discovered in the North that make weapons and armor which are extremely strong and almost unbreakable, along with strange items that turn up in the remains of the frozen Everwood. The North is largely self-sufficient, asking little of others and giving little in return.

THE EVERFROST PROTECTORATE

The Protectorate of the Everfrost lies far to the north, past the Barrier Mountains and the Northern Marches. Bordered by Richter and Innis lands, it is a land of ice and cold, of struggle and hardship.

Between the Fells, the Hammer and the Anvil, lies a single temperate valley where the majority of the food that feeds Hale is grown and raised. It is in the old high houses of Coldhill, Hammerfrost, and Ravndal here in Wintervale that the armies of Hale are trained and quartered, especially on the shores of Giantsfall lake.

In all other directions the Everfrost stretches, cold and hungry for whatever warmth it can steal. It is here that the northmen

survive, bound to their guardian spirits by their test of adulthood.

The Winter River is the primary trade route through the protectorate, although the castles of Hagsteeth Keep and the Cardell Fortress keep watch over passes through the Barrier Mountains to the Everfrost and the Rourke city of Scyld respectively. Most traffic over the Everfrost is done via giant sledges pulled by Caribou or on foot.

Far, far to the north, it is rumored that darkness sleeps. There, some say, the Volken still practice their magics, strange and old, and take the spirits of the land into themselves. There, some say, frozen wraiths haunt coal-black spires that wait just beyond the howling winter winds and frost-blasted tundra. There, some say, an ancient and hungry evil slumbers beyond the Veil of the Dead Wood, locked away behind the black and petrified wooden doors of a glacial and mountainous prison.

GRIMFROST

Entering through the great roofed gate of the south and passing through the circular rampart nearly five horses thick, one can't help but notice how completely the dark granite walls absorb sound. The passage is marked by no torches and the cold dim silence feels like the judgement of the earth. The view on the other side could not be more different. Visitors emerge from the gate blinking at the riot of color and noise that is market ring of North Market, every inch of its cold dark stone seemingly covered in brightly woven cloth and paint and fur. Here the Cirque ply their trade to painted clan members and be-ribboned House Hale noble alike, their wagons thick with spices and goods from the south and parked so close together they seem to blend into each other. Farther from the gate are the offices of the Grand Bank and the merchant houses of Hale, selling furs, handicrafts, weapons and services to visitors from the south. The roads leading to the center spire are winding and narrow, easily defensible by the arches that stretch overhead. Then, as you pass into the inner ring the noise of the market changes to that of weapons practice, as the great barracks and practice fields on either side sing out in the song of steel on steel. And to the front- tall and imperious- stands the Wailing Keep, named for the winds that constantly whip around its heights and who sound like the wails of the unhappy dead. In the great hall, hung with the tapestries of all of the clans and the high houses of Hale, sits Lord Talbot Hale and his wife, Lady Emma Hale née Bannon on thrones of marble as white as the

driven snow.

HOUSE & GUILD RELATIONSHIPS

The Age of Kings has marked a new era for Arnesse. Each great house struggles to maintain its power and legitimacy through navigating the mazes of power. This process has led many to form unlikely alliances with old enemies and make new and bitter enemies where before there were none. The following details the current state of each relationship as they correspond to this faction. This information is to be taken as in-play by you and other members of this faction.

HOUSE INNIS

Hale and Innis are separated by the North Marches and are heavily patrolled by the Innis to try to keep the northmen out of their woods, with raids from the Hale lands being very common. But while their means of dealing with the spirits may be different, Innis acknowledges that the clans of the Hale have kept to the Old Ways. On the other side, the Hale grudgingly respect the warriors of the woods, and acknowledge them as worthy rivals.

HOUSE ROURKE

The Hale and the Rourke are indifferent to each other. Each is a martial, raiding culture, and the two houses acknowledge and feel a kinship with them as fellow raiders who know how to take what they wish from those who are weak, but they don't have many relations between them except the little they interact with the city of Scyld.

HOUSE CORVEAUX

Despite having several high houses that were originally formed by Corveaux knights, these two houses do not have much kinship. The Corveaux see the Hale as dishonorable and barbaric, while the Hale see the Corveaux as southern weaklings, soft and political rather than effective.

HOUSE BLAYNE

The Blayne make no secret of the fact that they see the Hale clansfolk as immoral barbarians, and the Hale do their best to ignore Blayne entirely. However, several of the recent machinations in the north appear to be able to be laid squarely at Blayne's feet- most importantly the fact that the Fayne have been all but exiled from Hale. Those who pass along these whispers say that Blayne is also working to drive a wedge between Bannon and their old allies, although there's no proof that any of this is true. Lord Paragon Frederick Blayne at least seems to want to unite the two houses and often visits

Grimfrost with his ten-year-old grandson Maceo in order to possibly secure a marriage with one of Lord Talbot's daughters when they are of age.

HOUSE RICHTER

Relationships between Hale and the Dusklands of Richter to the southwest are terrible and have been for generations. The Hale clansfolk see the Richter lands as a prime raiding ground and Richter sees the Hale as inefficient savages. The Richter's have sent more than one emissary to Grimfrost to confront the Hale gentry about the clans folk raiding the Dusklands and have even managed to extract some monetary payment out of Lord Talbot- after which he promptly put a bounty on the men involved. But in general, the area is a powder keg, needing only the merest spark of a conflict to explode into war.

HOUSE BANNON

Bannon is Hale's closest ally, but over the last generation the relationship has gotten strained. While Hale depends on Bannon and the resources they bring in they are sick of living in their shadow and tired of being called their dogs. They want to become a House in their own right and for the other Houses to acknowledge them as a House of Power. It doesn't help that Bannon doesn't particularly acknowledge what Hale has done for them and continues to claim their military victories as their own, something that might end up getting Bannon in trouble one of these days.

HOUSE ARAGON

The Hale and clans regard most other Houses as beneath their notice and weak, and the Aragon are no exceptions. However, while Hale sees the Aragon as effeminate and frail they also acknowledge that, when push comes to shove, every Aragon has the heart of a dragon and is can be truly fierce. In fact, if you were to ask a Northman which member of the great houses would be best able to fight them to a standstill he would mostly like call out the Aragon. The Aragon, meanwhile, find the Hale to be interesting and worthy of study and would be more than happy to make as many friends with them as they can.

THE APOTHECA

The Apotheca are well respected in Hale and many are housed within the Wailing Keep. Under the guidance of Reinhold relationships between the clans and the Apotheca have only gotten better, as the Apotheca study the clans traditions and help to take care of the warriors who fight for Hale. Many

young clansfolk who find themselves educationally inclined find their way to the Apotheca.

THE FAYNE

The most recent Lord of Hale does not have good relationships with the Fayne and has instead chosen a bone priestess to advise him: the old woman Ynglinga. She doesn't bother to hide her disgust at the Sisters, and those cabals that remain in Grimfrost find their lives made very difficult.

THE HEXEN

There is a tradition in the north of the Everfrost as a hungry place. A place of supernatural blizzards, of wailing spirits, of creatures which possess the mighty warriors of the northern clans such that they are overcome by an insatiable urge to commit violence, murder, and cannibalism. Thus, it makes sense that the founding schola of the Hexen is located here: the Schola Phasma in the fields of Hrosshaf. The Hale appreciate the presence of the Hexen and treat them as an entity distinct from the Aurorym, a set of warriors with unique and special skills who are brave enough to tread in places where no one else goes.

THE CIRQUE

While the Cirque have a near permanent trading post in Grimfrost they are limited by the Barrier Mountains and don't go much of anywhere else in Hale lands. Tribes and members of the northern high houses come down to Grimfrost to trade for food and spices and salt, paying in coin earned from mercenary expeditions or in furs and other archaic items.

THE AURORYM

When Giles II converted and became a part of the Aurorym some of his confidants and companions in House Hale did as well, including his half-sister Lady Emma. While those who converted mostly headed south and became part of Giles II court the Aurorym have taken the foothold they made in Hale and are trying their best to make the most of it. There is a not-insignificant population of Aurons in Grimfrost and with the Fayne on the outs with House Hale they are clearly angling to become a larger part of the land to the north.

PLAYING A HALE

"All I can say is that I am thankful for the Barrier Mountains. For they keep the northmen away from us."

Llewelyn Braoin, House Innis

Those of the north are seen as a hard people, tough and dangerous, but they also aren't seen as being in control of their own destiny. The other nobles of Arnesse give them a wide berth and, if they do have to deal with them, go to Bannon or Corveaux rather than talk with them directly. The örlendr, the Winter Lords, have taken nominal control over the clans but do not place many strictures on how the clans act. The Winter Lords let them do as they wished so long as they heeded the call to war. In that way, the clans retained much of their independence and were allowed to keep most of their ways, so long as they did so in private and paid their taxes. They raid who they wish and are among some of the most savage warriors in Arnesse. Even the Knights of the Five Towers have been known to fear when the warriors of Hale are on the field of battle.

It is not easy to survive in the Everfrost and those who make it their home pride themselves on their toughness and adaptability. Everyone has a role and is expected to both excel at it and be self-sufficient. It is a point of pride among those of Hale that they do not ask for assistance unless they absolutely need it. After all, what is a northman who has nothing to offer to his clan, who cannot feed or protect or support those around him? Such a person would barely be considered a northman at all.

Such an environment breeds strong individuals, and since time immemorial the North has always had the strongest fighters. But what it doesn't make is a cohesive society. Before Brynhild the Shieldbreaker united them and brought the Bannons and their Corveaux knights to the north the clans governed themselves through a complex network of oaths, familial relations, and open warfare.

Heroism and even death in battle are highly regarded and almost universally the strong rule and dominate the weak. Clansmen are not bound not by honor, but by their Oaths. It is these Oaths and assurances of loyalty that have kept House Hale in power long past a time when they should have been overthrown. When a Northman makes his oath, he will stand by it and to cross him is to earn his undying hatred and eternal revenge.

The clans, in war and peace, still seek to embrace the spirits they long held in esteem - the bear, the wolf, the raven, the

owl, the falcon, and the spirits of the wind, earth, water, and air. Unlike their Innis counterparts to the South who sought to work with the spirits, the Northmen sought to embrace the spirits, take them into themselves to partake of the strength, sight, and wisdom. Drug use is common in the North among the clans and those who are possessed by the spirits are known to perform supernatural feats beyond the capability of a normal human.

In sharp contrast to this, the Winter Lords of Grimfrost are more akin to the lords of the South. However, the North has changed them as well. They are harder, less refined, and more brutal than perhaps even the Bannons. The Bannons and Corveaux will make no secrets that the Lords of Winter are the hammer they threaten others with. In private, they are often called their dogs of war. Rarely unleashed, but when it happens, stunningly effective.

Despite often blood relations, there is always a level of friction between the Lords of Grimfrost and the clans that only a level of complicated Oaths and promises keeps from unravelling. Late in the Eldritch Age, House Hale was forced in the wake of the Laws of Vassalage to give some of the key clans land and status as high houses. Thus, a whole structure of houses arose that had no lineage to the South but were purely based on tribal values. Still, as they interacted more with the Court at Grimfrost, they were slowly forced to comply. Even to the modern day, those tribal high houses that have survived have managed to keep their values intact, despite being branded as traitor by many of their kin for bending a knee.

The Hale are feared for their martial might, but often find it difficult to engage in the more social sorts of politicking, as they are seen as outsiders at best and rabid savages at worst. However, those who have had extended dealings with them know that there is no one you would rather have at your side than a member of House Hale who has given their word to protect you. Loyal and devoted to those they consider their family, many know from experience that you could do a lot worse than have a friend among the Hale.

KALLEA'S VENGEANCE

“Dogs. That’s what they called the men behind their backs, although always loud enough that they knew that the band of warriors from House Hale could hear them. Ingolf tried hard to ignore the jibes, knowing that he was being tested. The nobles here wanted to send him into a rage- to have him and his men turn on one of these perfumed fools and try to teach them a lesson- so that they would have an excuse to petition

House Bannon to have them removed. And then who knows what trouble would beset the group they were protecting? A lot of damage could be done when one didn’t have warriors at the ready in the shadows.

No. He would not let them rile him. He had climbed the fells and faced down a glacier wolf in the dead of winter. He had spilled the heart’s blood of more men than these weak-willed puppets had lied to in order to get their way. He would ignore their comments on his dress, his manners, and do the thing he was paid to do.

And hopefully one of them would be foolish enough that he would get to kill them.”

It’s whispered that among the Hale there’s a malady which affects them whether they are clan or ruling lord. No matter how successful a member of the Hale is, they lack peace. Some even say that this gnawing restlessness is the result of the final curse of Kallea. They are cursed, cursed to never know peace in their heart, cursed to always be hungry for something they can never attain. They are doomed to never know what can ease that restlessness, that wild hunger that makes them like the dogs they are so called, only that they can not satiate it. This restlessness often explodes in paranoia and rage.