

THE PROTECTORATE OF THE HEARTHLANDS

A 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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WELCOME TO THE HEARTHLANDS...

The Hearthlands is the cradle of faith in Arnesse and a land of incredible bounty. Where the rivers meet plain and forest, its lush, rolling plains are some of the most beautiful in the Kingdom. Here, live a proud and just people descended from the knights of old. They have stood up to tyrants in the name of virtue and justice for centuries and paid a terrible price for their beliefs. With sheer will, they have carved out a place for themselves in the world and held it against impossible odds. But darkness grows in this land like a cancer. Even while its people revere the dawn, the shadows grow long where the light does not shine and corruption festers among those who are sworn to protect the innocent. It is a place of incredible potential which has never been realized. A proud legacy, that has been squandered by incompetence and vice done in the name of virtue. Others may look down upon the Hearthfolk, but few can deny that something that is unknowable brought them to where they are and that they may indeed be a people chosen by a higher power to accomplish some greater destiny.

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.

MAJOR FIGURES OF THE HEARTHLANDS

Giles Bannon II

His Majesty, Giles Bannon II, King of the Ardan, Lord Sovereign of the Seven Protectorates and Defender of the Vale

Nowhere save the Sovereignlands is King Giles II held in higher esteem than the Hearthlands. Some have whispered he is more popular Lord Paragon Frederick and has visited the Hearthlands more than any other protectorate during his reign. Each time he is greeted by massive and adoring crowds who view him as the future of the Aurorym faith and the best hope to make their faith legitimate throughout the Kingdom. That a

Bannon has become so popular within a land that would have seen him hung from a rope is a testament to the power of the Aurorym faith and many use it as a sign that the religion is the best way to finally unify a fractitious Kingdom. Rumors of the king's cruelty have been spread, few believe a man of such dedication to his faith would ever be capable of such a thing. The fact that King Giles' wife is Aline, the daughter of Frederick Blayne, aids his cause as the Queen is loved even more than her husband. That the king and queen have not yet had an heir is a source of great sadness in Hearthlands, and it is a common prayer that they will soon be gifted with a child.

Aline Bannon Bannon née Blayne

Her Majesty, Aline Bannon, Queen of the Ardan, Queen of Flowers

Aline Bannon is the daughter of the Lord Paragon Frederick Blayne. Queen Aline is loved few places in Arnesse more than she is in the Hearthlands. Due to her great affection for flowers, Aline is known to many as the Queen of Flowers. Floral patterns are commonly part of any garb she wears and she frequently demands flower petals be scattered about during royal processions. The Queen also insists on flowers being prominent decor both in the palace and any places she stays or visits. Queen Aline is known to be a very moral person and even a bit naive in the ways of the world. The Queen's faith in the Aurorym is unwavering, exemplifying it through her charity. Aline is frequently seen giving charity to the less fortunate and needy of Arnesse. In Court, she is often a champion of the downtrodden and those she feels do not have a voice. This has led to no end of conflicts between the Queen other nobles, including the King himself. Despite her innocence and lack of political experience, the Queen has proven a quick study, become saavy during her ten years in Highcourt and many a proud noble in the Grand Court has discovered, much to their dismay, that Aline is not easy prey when it comes to fighting for things which she believes in.

Frederick Blayne

His Grace, Lord Paragon of the Hearthlands, Chosen Steward of Magnus Blayne, Destined of the Dawn

A stern and focused man, Frederick has spent his twenty years in power striving to better House Blayne's position. To date, his crowning achievement has been arranging the marriage of his daughter, Aline, to Giles II. But Lord Blayne has not sat idle on this victory and continue to exert pressure on the neighboring protectorates through a variety of methods, primarily the vast influence of the Aurorym faith. Lord Frederick enjoys a good relationship with his local Cirque and a retains a virtual stranglehold on trade within Scrow and the Hearthlands. This alliance has allowed him to manipulate

trade in his favor and fill the coffers of the Revenant Keep with the many gold dragons he has collected in tariffs. There are persistent rumors of Lord Frederick's less than savory character and some whisper that he is involved in many underhanded and illegal activities. To date, these remain nothing but scurrilous and unfounded rumors, as the Lord Paragon has never been connected with anything untoward.

Paloma Blayne

Paloma Blayne, Lady of the Dawn, The Seamstress

Before her marriage to the Lord Paragon, Paloma Blayne was a woman of common birth, an artificer of the Cirque in the employ of her father, the former Cirque Ringmaster of Scrow. Even though she is a noble now, she still sews each and every one of her outfits herself. If asked, she will say that it helps her to relax. For someone that went from being an artisan to nobility, Paloma is exceedingly humble. She knows each and every servant by name and many of their families. It is this kindness that makes her beloved by the people of Scrow and excuses some of the more oppressive actions of her husband.

Tadeo Blayne

Knight Commander of the Vellatora

Tadeo is the first-born son of Frederick and Paloma Blayne and heir to the house. He has a single son, Maceo Blayne, from his deceased wife, Ursula Blayne, formally Ursula Botley. Lady Ursula died tragically during childbirth, causing a point of contention between the two houses. Tadeo, unlike his father, is well loved by the people and known to be the very picture of a Vellatora knight: virtuous, honorable, and faithful, even if the young man is known for being just a bit headstrong, he is exceptionally brave. Sir Tadeo was last reported being seen in the Rourke city of Scyld while on an expedition. Unfortunately, the heir to House Blayne has been missing for months and many now presume him to be dead.

Pheadra

Curate of the Aurorym

Phaedra is the second eldest of child of Frederick and Paloma Blayne. She spurned the family by disavowing her titles and name to train as an Auron. She is now a Curate in the city of Exeter. Pheadra is fiercely independent, known to be very capable, and respected among the faithful of the Aurorym.

Magnus Blayne

Knight of the Vellatora and Justicar of the Dawnbringer

Magnus is the third eldest child of of Frederick and Paloma Blayne. He travels and serves as a Vellatora and is one of Saint Casilda's elite Justicars. Magnus is an accomplished duelist and while not undefeated, he has racked up an impressive number of victories against Botley sellswords. Many suspect that he will be hallowed himself one day but his career in the Vellatora may be cut short if his brother Tadeo is not found, for Magnus will become the heir to House Blayne.

Talia Blayne

The youngest child of Frederick and Paloma Blayne, Talia is being tutored by Jameson Harker of House Harker in the ways of the Hexen. On her first trip into the Howling Bog, she suffered an injury that left her face scared with claw marks and her left ear nearly torn off. But this injury has done little to hamper her rather joyful personality or her skill in combat.

Maceo Blayne

Orphaned son of Ser Tadeo and Ursula Blayne née Botley. Maceo is a quiet boy, often seen in the company of his grandfather, the Lord Paragon. Frederick takes the boy with him and the feeling is that he is grooming him for greatness.

Owen

Patriarch of Scrow

Patriarch Owen is spiritual advisor to Lord Paragon Frederick and head of the Dawnbreaker Rectorix in Scrow. Most people regard him as the de facto head of the Aurorym faith, if such a thing was to exist. As the Patriarch of Scrow, Owen has political power that almost rivals that of a noble and has used it to do all that he can to assist in spreading the Aurorym faith.

Carmilla, the "Bloody Bitch"

Ringmaster of Scrow

Little is known about the enigmatic sister of Paloma Blayne other than she is the head of a Cirque troupe known as the Ten Knives, she has a quick temper, little patience for fools, and is reported to be the deadliest dagger fighter in Arnesse.

HISTORY

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

A LEGACY OF UNREST

For as long as anyone can remember and history has recorded, the Troth, or the northern lands of the Midlands protectorate, were ruled by House Ulster. While history records the Ulsters as both noble and just, the Troth has long had a fair justified reputation as a land full of malcontent and unrest, often with a bloody end. The seeds of this unhappiness have long since been lost to time, but they seem to have a root in displeasure with the monarchy of Arnesse. While House Corveaux has long been a champion of the commonfolk, the less fortunate, and the downtrodden, the House Ulster often refused to work through more civil channels or remain silent. While the House stopped short of ever inciting open insurrection, there was always a restless, rebellious undercurrent among their people.

Interestingly, much of House Ulster's ire was not directed at the throne itself, but at House Corveaux, who were often accused by their cousins of having the King's ear but doing little to improve things. This friction ranged anywhere from squabbling to open conflict, and not a few martial clashes in the northern Midlands. This led to a situation where many Midlanders looked upon their raucous, unruly kinsman with distaste and over the years, there developed a sort of divide between the Midlands and the Troth that prompted many to feel like it was only a matter of time before House Ulster made efforts to break free from its vassalage to the Corveaux family. Still others were surprised that the nobles of House Corveaux didn't unseat the Ulsters and replace them with a more compliant family. In reality, the Corveaux were never known for particularly heavy-handed rulership and many felt that perhaps the nobles of the Midlands felt pangs of guilt that they were not as passionate about the people as their kin in the Troth. Even darker rumor speculate the Corveaux were happy to have the Ulster family agitate the monarchy on their behalf.

THE COMING OF THE DAWN

Throughout history, the people of the Troth had been known for their unruliness, but also their faith. For many in the Troth, the destruction of the Old Gods by the monarchy was a blow from which they would not recover. In the years following the Great War, the Troth was a hotbed of resistance to the Bannon rule. This placed even further friction on the strained relations between the Ulsters and their cousins. Most felt that the Troth was headed for open rebellion against the Corveaux and the throne. But it was one man who would prevent that conflict and give rise to a new great house. During the first century of the Age of Kings, Magnus Blayne, an unassuming man from a minor Midland noble family rose from obscurity and brought a great host to his side in the name of a faith that came to be known as the Aurorym. The religion did not revere Gods, but instead focused on the power of the Dawn and spoke of the

power of self improvement, empowerment, and ascension through great deeds of valor. For a people who had long been deprived of religion and trod upon by the iron boot of House Bannon for decades, the Aurorym faith was like food to those who were starving. The Aurorym burned like a fire in the Troth and garnered tens of thousands of believers a few years.

Years before, Queen Catherine I, in the wake of the Great War and the death of the Old Gods, had passed a decree that religion of any type was forbidden in Arnesse. It was left to her great grandson, Richard II, to deal with the rising of this new faith and starting in 606, hundreds of faithful Aurorym were arrested, tried, and executed in the name of their faith in the next three years. In 609, Magnus Blayne was captured and publicly executed, and parts of the Kingdom erupts into open rebellion against the King. House Ulster is the first to join the cause in what is to become known as the Righteous Rebellion. Many faithful refer to this as the Dawn Crusade For the next two years, the Ulsters, joined by thousands of their faithful commonfolk, battle against the forces of the King and House Corveaux, sustaining terrible losses to their lands and family. By 611, the rebellion is on the verge of defeat and Scrow is under siege. Many Ulster family members have died during the conflict, but Lord Haldric Ulster, the leader of the house refuses to back down. When King Richard II is killed by an assassin's blade in late 611, the attempt to quell the Dawn Rebellion wavers. The Aurorym faith sees the king's death as a sign of their great destiny and fight on with renewed vigor.

King James I ascended the throne in 611, denying Richard II's rightful heir Anne the throne, and the Kingdom is set into civil war. House Aragon, led by their God King Hector invades the north from Tarkath and, joined by the forces of Corveaux, brings war to the Sovereignlands. The army sieging Scrow is withdrawn to fight in the conflict and the Ulsters send what is left of their armies to fight with those who would overthrow the usurper, James. When the dust settles in 612, James is executed and Hector Aragon's son, Roland, ascends the throne with Anne Corveaux as Queen. When King Roland Aragon abolished Queen Catherine's prohibition on religion the Dawn Crusade came to an end.

It is King Roland who wisely observed that the long conflict between the Corveaux and the Ulsters could not continue. So, he decrees that House Ulster will now become a vassal of the King and a great house of the Kingdom. This was, naturally, ry unpopular with many in the Kingdom, but King Roland stopped short of granting the Ulsters a full protectorate. They kept their lands and vassals, with Haldric Ulster becoming the first Lord Paragon of the Dawn. The Ulsters, seeking to forget

the past, embraced a new name, Blayne, to honor their fallen martyr. Thus, it came to pass that House Blayne became the eighth and last of the great houses of the Kingdom of Arnesse.

THE AGE OF KINGS

Some feel that the tumultuous beginnings of House Blayne were a precursor of its future struggles. In the years following its rise to power as a great house, the Blaynes struggled to establish a great deal of influence and respect amongst the other noble houses. It was held back by two primary factors. The first, was that many Ulster nobles had been killed in the years leading up to its ascension and they took their political clout and experience to the grave with them. The second was the actual people of the Troth, who remained as fractitious and rebellious as ever, often turning against their own rulers as much as they did against the Corveaux lieges in years past.

Theodric Blayne, the grandson of Lord Haldric ascended to Lord Paragon in 645. Following the death of Roland Aragon's heir, Doran, and the return of House Bannon to the throne he institutes a policy of known as the *Regnum*, in order to gain a better hand on the people of the Troth. The *Regnum* was near total tyranny and encouraged the vassals of House Blayne to commit some of the worst crimes and atrocities in the name of order. Taxes were raised, people's rights to legal justice were denied, and disloyalty in any form was punished by death for the accused and often their families. The *Regnum* lasted for twenty years and caused a lasting impact. To this day, many Hearthfolk claim the *Regnum* laid the seeds of corruption and vice in their land, seeds which continue to flourish to this day.

The *Regnum* came to an end, not through rebellion but by the wise leadership of Emalia Blayne, cousin of Theodric, who ascends to Lady Paragon when he dies in an early battle of the Brother's War between the would-be kings Edwin and John. To stave off an uprising amid the ongoing war, Lady Emalia offers the people a compromise that comes to be known as the Dawn Charter. The Dawn Charter provided the people of the Troth with a document that guaranteed four basic rights: the right to a trial overseen by peers, the right to be consulted on taxation increases, the right to hold beliefs without persecution, and the right to inherit property. The Dawn Charter quickly became the most progressive measure for government in Arnesse, surpassing even the freedoms granted to the commonfolk of the neighboring Midlands.

While on paper, it seemed the Dawn Charter seemed to solve many of the issues that the commonfolk faced, there were some caveats that the nobility continued to exploit over the

years. Firstly, it only applied to freemen, and nobles remained the sole arbiters of when a person was released from serfdom. Thus, nobles would often employ large numbers of serfs and make becoming a freeman exceptionally difficult. To this day, House Blayne has more serfs in its employ than any other protectorate. House Blayne also made it difficult for the freefolk to enjoy many of the rights provided in the charter as they often put them behind complicated hurdles that one had to clear. For example, freemen had to be consulted on taxes. In response, the nobles created a position from among the commonfolk that was designated to speak for the people. But this post was often populated by those kindly disposed to the nobility and they often enjoyed substantial kickbacks from any taxation such that they rarely disagreed with their liege.

In the years that followed, two wars ravaged the Troth and left its people in a dire state. In 727, Giles I was crowned king and began an aggressive reformation of the Kingdom. King Giles I is remembered for his many civil and governmental changes that brought great prosperity to the Kingdom. Tales that are told are that Giles I was not a man of faith and resented House Blayne and the people of the Troth for their religion. This is only half of the story, as Giles recognized that the Troth was both a fertile land and a place that a great deal of trade must flow through on the road north and south. Thus, the throne sent coin, supplies, and advisors to House Blayne to assist in their rebuilding efforts. The king secretly hoped that he could turn the nobles from their faith, but when it was clear he could not turn them, the resources and aid dried up. But this had given Lord Paragon Clovis Blayne, the father of the current Lord Paragon, Frederick, enough help to establish a working infrastructure. Not only was the Troth able to stabilize itself, it began to enjoy increased prosperity through both farming and trade. Lord Paragon Clovis took much of that coin and devoted it to the rapid expansion of Blayne's military forces.

King Giles I's reign may have begun with prosperity, but in a few years devolved into a mire of controversy. His first wife, Lady Rosalind Bannon bore him a son and heir, Giles the Younger. But after only four years of marriage, the King tired of Rosalind and reinsituted the annulment of marriage. He annulled his marriage to Queen Rosalind and, for fear of her life and that of her son, she fled to the north. It is known that Rosalind spent three years in Scrow, and it was there that she and her son found the Aurorym faith. The king soon married again, this time to Elysande of Corveaux. Elysande bore him a daughter, Emma. The king's marriage to Elysande lasts seven years before rumors surface of the Queen infidelity. She is arrested, tried, and executed for oathbreaking. King Giles is comforted by Elysande's cousin, Alice, also of Corveaux and

the two are wed a few months after his wife's execution. The new Queen dies less than a year later in childbirth with a son.

During the period of King Giles I's reign, the Aurorym faith saw a massive resurgence in the Troth and began to stretch its influence beyond even those borders. Missionaries travelled to the Dusklands, the Everfrost, the Sovereignlands, and the Midlands. Some even made attempts to visit the forbidden depths of the Thornwood. While in many of these travelers met with resistance and even hostility, the Aurorym managed to establish a number of enclaves beyond the borders of the Troth. The armies of House Blayne continued to grow as Lord Paragon Clovis Blayne worked with the Living Saints of the Vellatora to turn towns like Exeter into training grounds and forge cities. Their goal was to create more knights of the faith from the orphans and poor who sought a better life and in less than twenty years, even if their army remained small, House Blayne had trained more knights than almost any great house.

In 747, King Giles begins courting Lady Maeve, the sister of Lady Paragon Bodhmall Innis. Rumors begin to spread of the new Queen being a witch and soon catch fire, particularly in the Troth. When the king marries Lady Maeve in a secret ceremony in 748, people begin to openly speak against him and when in 749, she is found to be with child, calls begin for rebellion. In the Everfrost, the king's son, Giles the Younger, massed a force of Northmen and joined the armies of House Blayne in marching on the Sovereignlands to remove Giles I from power. For the first time in modern history the Vellatora took the field as a fighting force and, led by the Living Saints, they proved to be unstoppable. Despite being outnumbered, the forces of Giles I are decimated at the Battle of Lanton. The king is captured and shortly after, put on trial with the Queen for witchcraft. Both are found to be guilty of the crime and are burned at the stake in late 750. The Queen was said to have given birth to a son, a witch-child named Reynard. Giles the Younger was said to have had the child hunted down and killed, so that the seed of the witch could not spread further.

Giles the Younger ascends the throne and is crowned King Giles II in 751. He marries the daughter of the Lord Paragon Frederick Blayne, son of Clovis, and Aline becomes Queen of Arnesse. House Blayne's star is ascendant and as a reward for its loyal service, it is granted the Troth and a portion of the northern Midlands that belong to a vassal of Corveaux, House Botley. The borders of the Troth were also expanded at the expense of the Richters and the Innis, but the king stopped short of Frederick Blayne's desire to also acquire the Vale of Shadow from House Bannon. This new protectorate is named the Hearthlands and its people known as Hearthfolk.

THE PRESENT

In the last decade, House Blayne has seen more prosperity and power than ever. Being in the confidence of the king and one of his primary allies has allowed the Blayne family to be involved with the Kingdom of Arnesse in a way that would have been unheard of twenty or thirty years ago. But this rags to riches story has been a double-edged sword, for the nobles of Blayne are often ill-equipped to handle this influence and wealth. So, even as crops flourish and trade at an all-time high, the people of the Hearthlands still struggle and often live in poor conditions. Little of the success that the wealthy and powerful have seen has trickled down to the commoners. It is not uncommon to see noble families of the Hearthlands living lavish, excessive lifestyles while commoners wallow in abject poverty with little hope of improving their lots in life.

Much of the wealth generated in the Hearthlands that is not routed to noble coffers is spent on the military or the Aurorym faith. This is by design and opportunity and growth among the lower castes generally lies along one of those two routes. The path of a soldier or knight through the military or in service to the Aurorym as a priest. This has led to a culture with very strict divisions, known as the three estates: those who toil, the **serf**, those who pray, the **priest**, and those who rule, the **noble**. These are generally seen as one's lot in life and many have accepted their position gratefully. Moving among those positions is possible, but looked down on by some as ladder climbing, even if a promotion is often looked upon with envy.

Still, despite this acceptance of one's lot, House Blayne and its vassals are considered by many people in the Kingdom to be the most liberal when it comes to being upjumped. More commonfolk are promoted within House Blayne to both knights and nobles than in any other house save the Corveaux. This practice has not improved their political acumen of the Hearthlands as many of those of common birth come ill equipped to manage lands or negotiate the halls of a noble court. Due to the sheer number of knights that are promoted from the ranks of the commoners among the Vellatora, it is well known that behind their backs, they are often called *dross knights*, or knights that are worthless and garbage. In battle, they have proven anything but useless or incompetent.

Because of their culture, the Hearthfolk have been forced to become adept at survival. This has led to the belief among some that they must do whatever it takes to survive and led many to undertake tasks or jobs that are dangerous or often less than legal. So, despite the prevalence of a faith that seeks

to redeem and improve an individual through virtue, the land they live in is often rife with corruption, vice, and crime. It is well known that the Hearthlands can be extremely dangerous for travelers and the unwary. Robbers and highwaymen are common both in the countryside and towns, graft and bribes are commonplace and almost required to operate successfully, and gangs or other criminal bands are regular fixtures in more civilized areas. The strong take from the weak and the weak suffer. This culture flourishes because the nobles themselves often selectively decide who they will prosecute and many times they are as complicit to the crimes as those they arrest.

The one shining hope of the Hearthlands remains their faith. The Aurorym, in principal, promotes ascension through acts of heroism and virtue. The Aurorym faith is certainly a pillar of life within the Hearthlands and while many have adopted the religion, others have not. In general, the Aurorym have a very positive impact in the places they are most prevalent, but they are less concerned with enforcing law than they are with spiritual matters, conversion, and expansion. Thus, comes the saying popular within the Hearthlands, *'Do what you must in the light, do what you need to in the night.'* It is common for nobles of the Hearthlands to retain separate non-Vellatora and men-at-arms to carry out their will, to avoid any entanglements with the Aurorym. Not that the Aurorym are without a whiff of corruption as rumors are that even the Patriarch of Scrow, Owen, takes kickbacks and bribes to fund his lavish lifestyle.

The biggest challenge that the modern Hearthlands faces is the increasing conflict and friction between religion and the state. As the Aurorym faith grows, expands, and gains more power, it subsumes more land, more nobles, and more wealth. Increasingly, the nobles of Blayne have felt pressure to bend to the will of the Aurorym or face increasing unrest from its devotees. Some high-ranking aurons wield as much power as nobility, and as more nobles convert to the faith, the religion's influence only grows. There is a fear among those who are not converted that, in time, the state of House Blayne as a secular institution may cease to be, and it will become a ward of the religion, ruled either directly by aurons or by nobles who are converted to the faith and do its bidding. There are some who fear that King Giles II making the Aurorym religion the faith of Arnesse would be just the catalyst required for this process to begin and a transformation to take place in the Hearthlands.

The irony of all this is that the Aurorym's expansion within its own homeland is as terrifying to some as it is to those who see missionaries doing conversions in foreign protectorates. This has led many to speculate on the future of this newly formed protectorate. There are some who say that it is like a

fast-burning fire that will consume itself and be extinguished. Others feel that House Blayne's meteoric rise may herald the arrival of a new power, one that will rival or dominate the nobility, forever changing the Kingdom and the monarchy.

BLAYNE HIGH HOUSES

HOUSE HARKER

Castle: Harker Manor

Ruler: Lady Hesa Harker, Protector of the Hearth

House Harker has been to House Blayne since they became a great house in 612. Their fief is largely useless swamp and forest that is patrolled by the family and a local detachment of Vellatora based out of Beggar's Keep. Legend says that two centuries ago Simon and Rosia Harker defeated and liberated the manor from an unhallowed creature of great power that had subjugated the village. The Harker name has since been associated with producing skilled hunters. It is said that no member of the house ever retires or dies due to illness, instead meeting their end during the hunt of somekind. Unlike most noble families, House Harker has not focused on expanding their power over the generations. They care little for the politics of Arnesse and are rarely seen in any of the official courts of the land. They are happy to serve as defenders of the commonfolk of their lands and are constantly vigilant of the dangers lurking in the Howling Bog or the nearby Bonewood.

HOUSE BOTLEY

Castle: The Broken Retreat

Ruler: Lord Lucus Botley, Ship Master of the Unbroken

During the great war, the Kraken's Maw fleet having taken the city of River's End, sailed up the Living River. They then laid anchor at the Dread Reservoir and began a siege upon the Dread Keep. The Botley's took refuge within their castle and over the course of three days and two nights, the Rourke cannons tore apart the keep's many defenses and set ruin to the surrounding township. On the third night of the siege, the Serpentine Knights of Botley forwent any of their knightly armor and braved the frigid waters to board the Rourke ships. Throughout the night, numerous ships were consumed in flame as the brave knights sacrificed their lives to scuttle the Rourke vessels. The vicious fighting lasted until daybreak. With most of their fleet sunk to the bottom of the reservoir, the cowardly Rourke fled back up the river and out into the open sea. In the aftermath of the siege, little remained of the Dread Keep. After the war, the Botley's chose not to rebuild the broken sections of the keep for it had ultimately failed in holding up to cannonfire. Thus, the remnants of the castle

eventually became known as the Broken Retreat. To this day, House Botley holds a grudge against any pirate and actively hunts them with their own fleet of ships named the Unbroken.

Until twelve years ago, Botley was a knight house sworn to House Corveaux. When King Giles II gifted the Hearthlands Protectorate to House Blayne it came with House Botley. Upon receiving the vows of fealty from the Botleys, the Lord Paragon stripped them of their status as a knight house and relegated them into a high house. This included disbanding their knight order, the Serpentine Knights. Frederick offered each knight the chance to re-swear their fealty as a member of the Vellatora or a knight in service of Blayne. Few took the offer and rumors abound of the ill fates of those knights that chose not to take the generous offer. Ironically, the Corveaux were rumored to be glad to be rid of House Botley given their tendency to make trouble and reputation for holding grudges.

HOUSE BLAYNE OF BEGGAR'S KEEP

Castle: Beggar's Keep

Ruler: Lord William Blayne, Warden of the Northpass

A cadet house of the great house of Blayne, the Blaynes of Beggar's Keep are notoriously ineffective rulers. Many blame them for the poor reputation that House Blayne has for being poor rulers. In fact, they are considered so poor that even the most destitute or desperate of retainers often refuse to take a retainer post with them. How this happened is unclear, but the tales speak of some ancient guilt that has instilled within the house, a deep seeded despair; a despair that has led to a cynical neglect. Of their people. Their lands. Some say where now stagnates the Howling Bog, there was once verdant farmland. After a century of poor harvests and little in the way of income, their once mighty Castellan-built fortress is little more than rubble. Only the main hall and a paltry five bedrooms remain of their once impressive home. The main hall itself is exposed to the elements as the entire western wall has crumbled. As one walks in, they can do little to ignore the smell of mold that has set into nearly every wall and beam.

Even with the new zeal of the Aurorym faith, they have been slow to awaken from their stupor. It was only after Lady Elsa Blayne took her own life fifteen years ago that any change for the better has begun to manifest. The house's current ruler, Lord William Blayne, has tried his best to make something of nothing from the fetid swampland surrounding his fief. He has had little success however, finally concluding that his land is unfit for little more than being a breeding ground for despair.

TRADITIONS OF THE HEARTHLANDS

CRADLE OF THE FAITH

For as long as anyone can remember or the tales record, the people of the Troth have been unwavering in their faith to a higher power. Before the Great War, the Troth was the center of the Eldra faith and the home to more temples to the Old Gods than any other region. Their strong faith has created a people that are devout in their beliefs and often unafraid to die in the name of a cause. In the years following the Godsfall, the entire region was devastated and many faithful lost their way, turning their beliefs to bitterness, bitterness to anger and anger to rebellion. The arrival of the Aurorym faith provided a direction and a purpose to many and the religion was widely and eagerly adopted by many. Today the Aurorym religion is widespread in the Hearthlands and has the largest adoption of any protectorate. It is extremely rare to come across someone in the Hearthlands who is not an Aurorym faithful. Those that are not are often shunned or not trusted by their communities.

There have been extensive inquiries as to why the Troth has such a powerful connection with the Old Gods and some have speculated that it is cultural, but others have proposed more wild theories that the Hearthfolk were bound to the Gods in somewhat and still bear a shred of their essence in them. Rumors continue to persist in the Hearthlands of a cult who still worship the Old Gods and are seeking a way to return them from the dead. These rumors also indicate that the Old Gods can only be brought back by the sacrifice of thousands of Hearthfolk, so that their essence might allow the deities to reconstitute themselves. While these rumors have been all but discounted by anyone credible, the 'death' of the gods has been a source of interest for many, particularly the Apotheca.

Of particular interest is the fact that despite the Aurorym faith itself not revering any diety, the veneration of Saints seems to have taken its place. It is very common to see one or more shrines in a village to various local or well-known Saints and almost all Hearthfolk take a patron Saint upon their kindling into the faith. The Saints become the living personification of the faith and while the Aurorym often seek their strength from within, they also pray to these hallowed beings for guidance and invention on their behalf when facing difficult situations. The process of becoming hallowed by the Aurorym faith has been a source of great speculation among many in Arnesse and while there are quite a few who deny that such a thing is possible, the Living Saints of the Vellatora have proven that such beings can and do exist. They serve as living, breathing

embodiments of all that the Aurorym aspire to be and give confirmation that their faith and devotion are not for naught.

SAINTS OF THE AURORYM

SAINT AUSTRALIA THE SANCTIFIED

Austra was one of the original Witnesses to Magnus Blayne. It was she who penned the Litany of Shelter and died for her faith, becoming the Sixth Martyr of the Dawn. Austra came from humble beginnings as a serf in the service of a noble. When her husband and three children were killed in an attack by the Lord's knights, she was badly beaten and left for dead. Perhaps it was providence she was found by Magnus Blayne as he passed through the area. He took her into his care and nursed her back to health. When she was strong enough, she joined his mission as a Witness. She was taught to read and write and became known among his flock for her mercy and desire to aid others. Rumors were persistent at the time that Austra and Blayne were more than simply teacher and student but evidence to support this alleged affair never came to light.

When Magnus Blayne died, Austra was devastated, but she carried on his mission. She would go on to become an auron, serving the faith not only as a Witness but as a priest of the faith. Originally a native of the Dusklands, she returned there and established one of the first Aurorym missions outside of the Troth. Though she was constantly harried by nobles and locals, Austra's charity and good works made her popular. She died in 640 and was the last Martyr of the Dawn. The circumstances of her death have been written about but are subject to a good deal of speculation but the most credible account seems to say that the town she lived in came under attack by a horde of remnants, undead from a local graveyard that was unhallowed by some dark force. Witnesses say that she manifested a great hallowed ward to keep the creatures at bay until the townsfolk could flee. Once all were safe, she could no longer hold back the tide and the undead took her life. Another interesting note about her story is that her body was never recovered and while the locals made a tomb for her near the village, her body does not rest there. While she was Hallowed for her incredible life and sacrifice, there are some who worry that she may have been taken and transformed into that which the Aurorym fear the most, an anti-Saint or Dark Apostle. Her symbol is a fortification set upon the Dawn Sun.

SAINT CUTHBERT THE FEARLESS (THE LION)

Cuthbert was once Ser Cyril Valewood, a knight of House Corveaux. He was sent by his lord to find and kill Magnus

Blayne but instead saw the truth of the Aurorym faith and joined his ministry as a Witness. Renamed Cuthbert, he would serve by Magnus' side as a warrior over the course of the next two years. During that time, he penned the work that would later become the Litany of Courage and was instrumental in helping train many of the earliest Aurorym in martial combat.

Shortly after Magnus' death, Cuthbert travelled to Exeter, where he joined the Vellatora in helping defend against the invasion ordered by King Richard II. There, he would lay down his life to defend innocents who were attacked on order of the Bannon commander. His body was taken and a tomb built within Exeter to honor the sacrifice he made. In doing so, he would become the Second Martyr of the Dawn and forever honored by the soldiers of the faith for his courage. Some have called him the Lion of Dawn and the Knights of the Vellatora have an elite unit named the Lionguard in his honor. Cuthbert's symbol is a lion's head on the Dawn Sun.

SAINT ORIONE THE PURE

Saint Orione was once a whore who came to Magnus Blayne and pleaded with him to cure her illness. She swore she would turn her life around and would join his faith, but wise Magnus Blayne saw through her lie and refused. He bade her go and instead, confess her sins to those she had harmed and seek their forgiveness. Orione returned and said she had done this, begging him again for his aid. She offered him her body in exchange, but Magnus refused again and bade her go and aid a group of poor farmers who lived in a nearby village. She did this and returned, a third time begging him for help. Magnus Blayne said to her, "Now you are ready. To cleanse the body, one must first cleanse the spirit." He then took her down to the river and there, immersed her body in the wash and cast the Light of the Dawn upon her. And so was her body purged of every impurity and wickedness. The Son of Dawn then said, "Behold and rejoice for you are born once again. I send you into the world as an innocent. Go now and let all the world bear witness to the healing power of redemption."

Orione never saw Magnus Blayne again but she left him and travelled Arnesse spreading the good word of what she had experienced. Indeed, she was born again as a pure spirit, purged of all the wickedness of her former life. In her second incarnation, Orione exemplified the virtue and righteousness which has become the very definition of what is expected of an Aurorym. She took no lover, drank no wine, and never spoke a lie. After the death of Magnus Blayne, she would travel far and wide for five years to spread the word of the Aurorym. Orione may have been reborn but she could not

escape her past. One day she was stabbed during a sermon by a man working for the brothel she'd run away from. She would dictate the Litany of Virtue upon her deathbed and when Orione passed she was Hallowed as the Fifth Martyr of Dawn. Orion's symbol is a white river upon the Dawn Sun.

SAINT SYMEON THE ILLUMINATED

Symeon started life as a farmer who attended one of Magnus Blayne's sermons and challenged him as to his worthiness to be the savior of prophecy. The answer that Magnus Blayne gave him made the man lay down his tools and join the Dawson's ministry. Symeon was known as a burly man with a good heart and a spirit full of light. Everywhere he went, others felt inspired by his presence and had hope for the future. Much of his time in the service of the faith was spent doing outreach and missionary work to the needy, bringing hope to places which had long forgotten what the word meant. He helped many villages in the Troth during hard times by bringing farming knowledge so that they could prosper and grow. To this day, Symeon is well regarded in rural villages of the Hearthlands and shrines to him are often erected there.

It is Symeon who wrote the Litany of Hope while he travelled and it is one of the most widely read of the Litanies for its inspirational message and jovial writing style. He would meet his end in the Corveaux town of Holbeach, where he was accused of witchcraft by a local mob then stoned to death in the town square. Loyal followers secreted his body away to a nearby tomb they had prepared and there laid him to rest. Upon his death, he was Glorified as Saint Symeon, the Third Martyr. To this day, the tomb of Symeon remains hidden and its true location is only known by a few faithful. It is often sought by pilgrims of the faith as it is said that if one prays there they will receive wisdom to guide them through dark times. Symeon's symbol is a wheat sheaf upon the Dawn Sun.

SAINT SABINE THE SACRED FLAME

The hexen order predates the Aurorym faith. But with magic disappearing, the creatures that once needed magic to survive vanished as well. With fewer and fewer creatures to hunt, the hexen slowly became relics of a long-forgotten age. The story goes that Sabine was on the trail of a particularly powerful creature that had been plaguing a local village. She tracked it for days and when she found the beast, it was locked in combat with a small band of men and women who looked no better armed than a band of peasants. Sabine was about to leap to their aid when she saw a man in the group raise his hand and with a mighty retort, banished the creature in a blast

of pure light. Shocked by what she saw, the hexen woman approached the man and bade him tell her what he had done and how one could acquire such power. He said his name was Magnus Blayne and if she followed him he could show her how. Sabine joined him and became one of his Witnesses.

From that time forward, word spread among the hexen of the gifts that Magnus Blayne possessed and many came from far and wide to see them. Sabine also took notice that the few creatures of the dark that remained in the world often sought out the Aurorym and thus, the hexen could perform their duties. Sabine also learned that she could enhance her already formidable abilities with the Light of the Dawn and be a better fighter. But she was not a Witness who came to walk beside the Dawson, but instead travelled and brought what she learned to her order, teaching them new ways. Some hexen chose to convert and others to remain on the path of the ancient scholas. Sabine would come to write the Litany of Flame on her travels and it largely speaks of the terrors of the dark and how to combat them. How she met her end is deeply shrouded in mystery. Some say that the Hexen know more, but it was whispered that this mighty warrior died in battle against a creature of great evil and power. After her death, she was named Saint Sabine of the Sacred Flame, Fourth Martyr of the Dawn. Sabine's symbol is a flame upon the Dawn Sun.

SAINT PHILIP THE SERVITOR

Saint Philip was the first Witness of Magnus Blayne and his most devout disciple. He was originally a noble of House Bannon who had been sent to encourage Magnus Blayne to submit to the will of the King. Magnus refused and after a long talk, Philip laid down his mantle of nobility and became one of his Witnesses. When word came that Magnus had been imprisoned and was to face trial, Philip sent word to the lords of the Sovereignlands in the hopes that his allies could set him free. These efforts did not work and after the Living Saints of the Vellatora failed to rescue him, Magnus was put to death. While the Bannon army marched on Exeter, it was Philip who rode to the capital of the Troth, Scrow and convinced Lord Haldric Ulster to allow sanctuary for the persecuted faithful.

After the famous Battle of Exeter, Philip took leadership of the faith and Hallowed the heroic sisters as the Living Saints of the Vellatora. As the first Auron, he would go on to spend the rest of his life trying to establish the foundations of the formal Aurorym faith that persist to this day. He organized the aurons, hexen, and Vellatora knights into a cohesive organization. After forty-seven years of dedication to the faith, he was Glorified as Saint Philip the Servitor upon his

death, for his utter devotion to the faith. Those that aspire to serve the church as an auron often follow the path of Saint Philip. Philip's symbol is a stack of books on the Dawn Sun.

SAINT JAMIE THE REDEEMED

Saint Jamie was once Ser Jamie Blayne, Oathbreaker. There are few greater shames or betrayals than to break an oath in Arnesse. For the crime of abandoning his patrol in the middle of an ambush in the Howling Bog, Ser Jamie was labeled an oathbreaker, stripped of his rank, and cast out from the Blayne family. Jamie spent the next five years going village to village and tavern to tavern as a little more than a homeless drunkard.

It was in one such village that Jamie settled in for the night. He was not three drinks in when the village's bell began to ring. Jamie followed the villagers outside. And a sight it was, for a band of brigands had set upon the village and set it to the torch. The brigands were too busy murdering defenseless villagers to notice Jamie as he dispatched the first of them. After killing five or six of the attackers, Jamie's valor inspired some of the townsfolk to join him in defending their village.

As the ringing of the bell ceased, the villagers discovered Jamie dying from his many wounds. The count of how many he killed has often been exaggerated by history, but it was at least twenty and some tales have it at more than fifty. With his dying breath, he begged that his sword and ashes be given to his mother. When word reached Scrow of his deeds, Lady Paragon Agnes Blayne pardoned her wayward son of his oath breaking. Shortly thereafter, Sir Jamie Blayne was Glorified as Saint Jamie the Redeemed for his incredible act of heroism. The symbol for Jamie is a knight helmet upon the Dawn Sun.

SAINT MARY THE DEFIANT

Little is known of the young child prior to her Glorification. What is known is that around a hundred years ago, a little girl of about eight to ten summers lived in a forest near a village with her parents. One night, the girl stumbled into the village covered in bloody rags with a completely smashed left arm. She rambled warnings of bad men attacking and tearing apart her parents and brothers. The girl succumbed to her injuries shortly thereafter, but the warning saved the village. After defending themselves, the commonfolk Glorified the child Saint Mary the Defiant and spread her story across the Hearthlands. For in the Aurorym faith, even the youngest member of the faith can be a hero if they are brave enough. The symbol for Mary is a single flower upon the Dawn Sun.

SAINT FELICIA THE DEPARTED

Ser Felicia was a knight of the Vellatora stationed at Beggar's Keep. During a patrol in the Howling Bog, her troop came upon a ferocious werewolf. Knowing they stood no chance against the terrible beast, Ser Felicia gave the order for the rest of her patrol to sprint to Harker Manor to seek their aid while she lured the beast away from the nearby village. Hours later the patrol returned with a Hexen in tow and followed the tracks of the battle between Ser Felicia and the beast. The tracks led on for twenty minutes before ending at the lifeless corpse of the knight at the entrance of a small cave. Adjacent to the corpse was the beast, pinned to a wall, furiously trying to free itself from Ser Felicia's greatsword protruding from its chest. For her heroism, Ser Felicia was soon Glorified as Saint Felicia the Departed. The symbol for Saint Felicia is a wolf's skull with a sword piercing it upon a field of the Dawn Sun.

SAINT CELESTINE THE ETERNAL

The greatest living hero of the Age of Kings, Saint Celestine has commanded the Fervent Order of the Vellatora since its founding. It is said that she so impressed Magnus Blayne with her dedication to the faith, that he imparted to her the secret of immortality. So long as she continued to follow the tenets of the Aurorym faith. This gift has allowed her to allegedly lead the knight order for almost two centuries. Celestine is best known for her brilliant military mind and strategies she has perfected over her long life. It is considered vain by many to choose Saint Celestine as a patron saint. To do so is to claim that you embody the Eternal Saint's perfection. Celestine's symbol is a staff and sword crossed set upon the Dawn Sun.

SAINT DECIMA THE IMMACULATE AEGIS

Rarely is Saint Decima not seen at Celestine's side. Decima is a mighty, towering warrior has never been seen outside their armor and never speaks a word, leading to much speculation as to who exists under the metal. As explained by Celestine, Decima is her protector and a shield of the faith. Decima wields an intricate and massive shield that bears a sigil that none can identify. On the field of battle Decima is a sight to behold as they defeat foe after foe, all the while maintaining a perfect harmony with Celestine. Those that aspire to be true guardians of others generally venerate the deeds of the Aegis. Many who revere Saint Decima also take a vow of silence as it is viewed as the utmost dedication to serve their charge without objective. The symbol for Decima is the Dawn Sun with a great shield generally placed in front of or below it.

SAINT CASILDA THE DAWNBREAKER

It is said that in combat, none are a match for the Casilda, the Dawnbreaker. For to meet Casilda on the battlefield is to be on your way to see the Lady of Death. Casilda has never been defeated in combat and stands as the champion for House Blayne. Much of Casilda's time is spent traveling around the Hearthlands serving as a protector of the people wherever they go. There are countless stories of the deeds of heroism performed by Casilda over the years in every city, town, village and settlement across the whole of Arnesse. Saint Casilda does not travel alone, for she brings a cohort of elite swordmasters, men and women known as the Justicars. Those that aspire to become martial champions and defenders of the downtrodden choose to follow Casilda. The symbol of the Dawnbreaker is a shattered tower in front of the Dawn Sun.

SAINT LUCIANA THE HALLOWED HERO

Saint Luciana is known to be an archer and hunter of great renown. She is known to also have many terrible burn scars covering her body. There are many rumors and speculation concerning the origins of these scars. Some of the more outlandish tales say she single handedly fought and slew a mighty behemoth to protect a village at great cost to herself. Saint Luciana travels Arnesse in search of creatures to hunt and kill. Luciana traditionally travels with a single Saint Aspirant and no one else. However, she is sometimes seen in the company of the hexen order, with whom she shares many common goals. Those that aspire to become great hunters of the unknown and are willing to live a life of relative isolation choose to follow the path of Luciana. The symbol of Saint Luciana is a bow and clutch of three arrows on the Dawn Sun.

SAINT GENEVIEVE THE DIVINE PRECEPTA

Saint Celestine may be the greatest strategist in Arnesse but the Fervent Order of the Vellatora would not be the force it is today if not for Saint Genevieve. Ever humble, Genevieve does many of the tasks that typically fall to a Knight Master. She oversees the training of most Vellatora knights from her office in Exeter, where she also serves as the castellan of the town. Genevieve is said to also be a great architect. It is said that the town of Exeter was built according to her exacting specifications and beneath her watchful eye. Those faithful that aspire to become administrators, builders, and teachers often choose to follow the path of Genevieve. The symbol for Saint Genevieve is a compass and a sword on the Dawn Sun.

SAINT SACHI THE PURE PROPHET

Saint Sachi is known for travelling the lands and evangelizing the Aurorym faith. Stories about her include saving a faltering hamlet which had fallen to despair, and deposing a tyrannical lord from power that had been corrupted by the Unhallowed. Saint Sachi travels the lands preaching the good word of the Aurorym to anyone that will listen, be that in the dirty fields of a farming community or the extravagant halls of noble courts. Many seek her council as it is said that speaking with her will relieve you of troubled thoughts. Those that aspire to spread the good word of the faith and demonstrate the rewards of the Aurorym follow the path of Saint Sachi. The symbol for Sachi is a scroll and fine quill crossed upon the Dawn Sun.

ESTATES OF THE REALM

While the concept of social castes is omnipresent throughout Arnesse, it has a special impact in the Hearthlands due to the strong presence of priests. Estates of the Realm originated from the ancient times when holy men and women were a part of the social structure. The outward goal of the estates was to create an earthly expression of that the god's plans. The basic concept was that everything had a place in the divine plan and thus each person had a place within society. A person's estate became their lot in life; their proper place in the mortal world. Estates also served a secondary role in that they defined the place of a clergyman as not that of a ruler. Thus, it kept the Troth from descending into a Theocracy where the religion ruled the government and they do so to this day. Estates also told the commoner of their place in the order of things and defined their role as not that of a priest or a noble. While the Estates did not specifically prohibit people from moving from one to another, it did say that one could not occupy the roles of more than one Estate. However, in the modern day, this has not resolved what is an evolving argument in the Hearthlands. There are those who wish to see all the Estates of the Realm dismantled and the Aurorym take a more active role in the governing of the Hearthlands. While this has met very stiff resistance among many nobles, it the sentiment to abandon this ancient practice continues to grow among the faithful.

THE FIRST ESTATE

"Those who rule."

Consisting of the nobility and other wealthy or powerful individuals in society, this group is a small fraction of the population of the Hearthlands. It is not only landed nobility, but includes gentry, and anyone who has the right to bear a surname or is of noble blood. It is also possible for powerful members of guilds, knights, and merchants to buy or earn their way into this estate and be counted among the good and great.

THE SECOND ESTATE

“Those who pray.”

In earlier days, this consisted of priests of many long dead deities, but in modern times, the Second Estate now is only the aurons of the Aurorym faith. There has developed a split in this estate between born from great wealth and privilege who choose to join the priesthood and those who are of low birth. While the Aurorym faith tends to attract more priests from lower castes, as the religion has matured and become more popular, it is becoming increasingly common for noble children who do not stand to inherit land, to become aurons. With their noble families at their back, these noble-born aurons can become quite powerful and influential and it is these priests who risk the very foundations of the Estates.

THE THIRD ESTATE

“Those who toil.”

This estate makes up most of the Hearthland’s population and consists of both freemen and serfs. By far the least influential group, they have a hard life of hard physical labour and food shortages. Most born within this group and die as a part of it, too. Even in the Hearthlands it is extremely rare for people of this ascribed status to make it out into another estate. Those who did so managed as a result of either being recognized for their extraordinary bravery in a battle, entering religious life, or joining the Vellatora knighthood. Over the years, some of the commonfolk have managed to marry into the first estate and become nobles themselves, but this is a rare occurrence.

PILGRIMAGE

A pilgrimage is the act of traveling to sacred places of the Aurorym faith and are quite common among the Hearthfolk. These pilgrimages can be to sacred shrines, many of which are dedicated to saints of the Aurorym or other significant hallowed sites throughout Arnesse. Most Heathfolk go on at least one pilgrimage in their lives and some go on many more. It is common when a young Hearthfolk comes of age for them to do pilgrimage as a sign of their submission to the Aurorym faith as an adult. Many also travel to these sites so that they may have prayers answered, troubles resolved, and illnesses cured. Not a few have used pilgrimage to escape troubles with the law or personal issues at home. Some sacred sites are close journeys of only a few days, but some can take months of overland travel and entail a significant amount of cost and personal risk. Because of the risks involved during travel, pilgrims often band together for protection and even employ men-at-arms or knights to escort them to their destinations.

When on pilgrimage, many faithful dress in a simple fashion in order to reflect their piety, often choosing to carry banners or other markings that denote them as followers of the faith. This serves to show others of their dedication to the faith but also that they are folk on a religious mission, in the hopes to dissuade attack from bandits or highwaymen. In some cases, this encourages attacks as some bandits see faithful as easy targets and the Aurorym are not well regarded among some factions in Arnesse. While on pilgrimage, many take sacred vows and vows of silence, celibacy, and non-violence are commonly taken. Most of these vows are held for the duration of the journey to the shrine with the intent of purifying the animus of the pilgrim before they reach their final destination.

When the pilgrims arrived at the sacred site, they often have to pay coin to be allowed access to the area or the relics. In some cases, pilgrims were even allowed to touch and kiss them. The keeper of the sacred site typically gives the pilgrim a metal badge that had been stamped with the symbol of the shrine. These badges are then fixed to the pilgrim's hat so that others know they had visited that location. The hats of those who go on frequent pilgrimage are often covered in medals. In addition, sacred sites often have several merchants selling religious paraphernalia and even what they claim are sacred relics and artifacts. While almost all of these are fakes, during the high season, these merchants can do a lucrative business.

For many in the Hearthlands, pilgrimage is a sign of one’s faith but it the distance one has travelled and times one has gone on pilgrimage can confer some social status. While people often go on pilgrimage themselves, the wealthy and nobility sometime pay others to go to pilgrimage on their behalf. Common sites of pilgrimage are Highcourt to visit the site of Magnus Blayne’s death, the sacred city of Exeter, the shrine of Saint Symeon near Holbeach in the Midlands, and the Nare River, north of Beggar’s Keep, where Saint Orione was said to have been purged of her sins. Other sites include shrines to various local saints in Hearthland villages and even battlefields that were the site of a significant victory by the faith, such as Lanton. The Dawnbringer Rectorix in Scrow is said to house a collect of sacred relics that has no rival and is a frequent destination for many travelling Aurorym faithful.

RELICS & SACRED ITEMS

Carrying or having sacred items or images close at hand is an important feature of Hearthfolk society. Most followers of the Aurorym wear the sacred symbol of the Solyx, the Dawn’s Sun, somewhere on their person at all times, be it a ring, a necklace, or sewn into their clothing. When taking on an

action that is particularly important, difficult, or dangerous, Hearthfolk faithful will seek out an auron to bless them or an item they will be using in the task. This is particularly true of battles, where whole armies often seek a priest's blessings and the warriors ask to have their armor or weapons consecrated. Though no one has been able to prove these blessings or prayers actually do anything, they do provide a morale boost to the individuals and in a fight, this can give them an edge.

Even more significant among Hearthfolk is the acquisition and possession of relics or other sacred artefacts. Relics are typically a piece of a saint's body or something formerly in their possession. They can include items such as weapons, clothing, blood, bones, and even items tied to their actual deaths. Possession of a relic is said to bring special blessings upon a faithful and grant them unique gifts to heal the sick, ward against evil, or great battle prowess. Many faithful seek to attain a true relic of a saint but, given the Auroroy habit of burning their dead, it can be a bit of a challenge to obtain a body part from the newly dead. Some have speculated that the burning was in part instituted among the Auroroy to prevent wholesale mutilation of corpses. However, graverobbing is still surprisingly common in the Hearthlands, and the resting places of those revered by the faith are often their first targets.

RELICS OF THE AURORYM

THE WOOD OF THE WHEEL

When Magnus Blayne was executed by King Richard II he was placed upon a breaking wheel and tortured before being burned alive. The Wood of the Wheel is said to be pieces of the breaking wheel upon which the First Martyr died. Over the years, many have claimed to possess fragments of the wheel, including House Bannon itself, which is said to have kept the piece not as a relic, but as a trophy – a source of great agitation for many Auroroy faithful. The fragments of the Wood of Wheel are said to confer near invincibility to those who possess it, be able to cure any ailment, and legends say that any army who marches with the Wood of the Wheel at its head cannot be defeated in battle. This legend was all but confirmed at the Battle of Lanton when Giles the Younger marched with a fragment of the Wood of the Wheel at the head of his invading army and won an impossible victory.

THE CHAINS OF THE MARTYR

These chains allegedly were the ones which bound Magnus Blayne shortly before his death at the hands of King Richard II's executioners. The chains are said to unbreakable and

cause great agony if they are placed upon anyone who is unjust or wicked. The tales say that the wicked who wear the chains will be forced to confront the harm they have done to others and that the evil they have wrought upon the world will either be purged from their animus or consume them entirely.

SHIELD OF SAINT CUTHBERT

The shield is said to have been worn by the legendary warrior, Saint Cuthbert during the Battle at Exeter, during which he laid down his life to defend a group of innocents. According to tales the formidable bulwark allegedly unbreakable and it is also said that so long as the bearer is of pure heart and deed, the shield will make them invincible while they are defending those who cannot defend themselves. While it is unknown who holds the shield now, rumors say that it sits in the armory of the Fervent Order of the Vellatora and has been used in combat by the Living Saint Decima on several occasions, turning this already formidable warrior into a true juggernaut.

FINGER OF SAINT SABINE

The body of Saint Sabine was never found but it is said that in the days after she became a Witness to Magnus Blayne, the hexen master lost a finger in combat against a terrible beast. Rumor has it the finger was claimed by the hexen order and has been kept by them in secret for many years. Those who claim to have seen the relic say it is little more than an old, withered finger often worn on a leather cord. The finger is said to have the power to always point towards source of the greatest evil in a region and possess very powerful warding effects that can drive off or protect an area from creatures.

QUILL OF THE SERVITOR

This relic is said to have been the quill that was used by Saint Phillip the Servitor to build the foundations of the Auroroy faith. Some have claimed the quill is a thing of extraordinary beauty, trimmed in gold and silver, but others say it is little more than a rather plain, well-worn writing instrument. Those who wield it to write the written word are said to be struck with true inspiration and otherworldly insight, particularly about matters of the Auroroy faith. The scholar Lubinus allegedly used the Quill of the Servitor to pen his famous *In Nomine Fides* essays on the nature of the Auroroy religion in 623. It is also said that whomever wields the quill cannot speak or write a lie. The location of this relic is unknown but credible rumors exist that the Apotheca have managed to acquire it and are extensively testing its potential applications.

DAWNBREAKER

Dawnbreaker is the legendary sword wielded by the Living Saint, Casilda the Dawnbreaker. Allegedly forged from the broken weapons of the first warriors who fell in the name of the Aurorym, it made its first appearance on the field at the Battle of Exter, where it claimed the lives of many who stood against the faithful, including the commander of the Bannon expedition. The blade's prowess has been on display quite a few times since then and it is said to be able to cut through almost anything and imbue the wielder with incredible combat abilities. In addition, the blade is said to bear an aura of sanctity that repels evil and that it can put the bring peace to the restless spirits of remants if it is thrust into their grave.

VEIL OF MERCY

This relic is said to be the cloth that was used to tend to Saint Orione in her last days as she lay dying. The Veil is said to be little more than a soot and blood-stained cloth but allegedly once the relic is soaked in the waters of a river, it possesses the power to cure any disease or curse, no matter its state or origin. The cloth also is said to be able to purify any impure water that it touches. Rumors about where this relic lies are many and varied. Some say it's in the possession of the Aurorym in Scrow but has also been linked to the Corveaux house of Peneose and their knight order, the Order of Mercy.

CUP OF THE ILLUMINATED

This common-looking wooden cup is said to have been owned by Saint Symeon. Allegedly possessing incredible restorative powers, any injured who drink from this cup find themselves fully restored from the most grievous injuries. It is even said to be able to restore life to those who have recently died. The cup also is said to have an uncanny ability to give its possessor the ability to sway others to their viewpoints and should a group of people drink from the cup, for some hours after, they will find themselves more agreeable to working toward a mutual and peaceful agreement. The cup is held as part of a relic collection in the Cradle of Light rectorix in Highcourt and has been used by Giles II in negotiations to settle various disagreements during his reign. Some say this relic is the sole reason that the King has managed to keep his throne despite having so many potential rivals and enemies.

SACRED VOWS

Oaths are as important to Hearthfolk as they are in other land, but sacred vows are held in even higher esteem because they

represent a sacrifice in one's life to show their devotion to the faith. In a land that is so centered on religion, there are few more serious ways of expressing one's commitment to a person, a thing, or an ideal than to swear a sacred vow. These are generally sworn before an auron and entail the faithful declaring what vow or vows they are swearing, why they are swearing the vow, and how long they will hold it for. True traditionalists will also have the auron impose a punishment upon them if they are found to have broken the vow. These can range from minor acts of contrition to harsh physical punishment or even being removed from the Aurorym faith. The individual is now called a Vowsworn in the faith and as long as their vow is maintained, they are accorded additional respect for their devotion and piety. To fail a vow is a deep humiliation and source of shame. It is not uncommon for direct servants of the faith such as aurons or Vellatora to maintain one or more permanent oaths as a sign of their ongoing service. It is less common for a faithful to take a long-term vow but somewhat common to take a short-term vow when engaged in a particularly pious activity such as a pilgrimage or while in mourning for the death of a loved one.

Belo are some of the most common sacred vows:

Vow of Poverty - The Vowsworn promises not to ask for or take any income or coin or goods. They may take charity that is freely given but must give coin they receive to the needy.

Vow of Chastity - The Vowsworn may not engage in any type of sexual contact with another. This can also be extended to even something as innocent as touching. Chastity is often sworn as part of a knightly devotion and is thought to exemplify and demonstrate purity of body and animus.

Vow of Silence - The Vowsworn may not speak a word when under this vow. They may write to communicate with others.

Vow of Pacifism - The Vowsworn may not take any hostile action towards another, even if they are being attacked. This can also mean that they cannot bear a weapon of any kind. The Vowsworn can be defended by others not under this vow.

Vow of Obedience - By taking the Vow of Obedience the Vowsworn promises to do the will of whomever they swear the vow to. Aurons take a Vow of Obedience to the faith and to obey higher-ranking priests. All Vellatora knights and many nobles in the Hearthlands take this vow alongside their traditional Oath of Fealty to ensure their loyalty and fidelity.

Vow of Enclosure - The Vowsworn promises to be enclosed

within a certain location or specific area. This is meant to be a somewhat small place, such as a castle or chantry, but can be a region around a town or other such geographical limitation. The Vowsworn can travel anywhere within the enclosure but no matter the reason, must never cross a specified boundary.

Vow of Celebacy – Similar to a Vow of Chastity, a Vow of Celebacy also means the Vowsworn cannot marry and also may not have any sort of sexual contact with another. This vow is often undertaken by those who have fully committed themselves to their faith and do not wish to place another within their heart. Vows of Celebacy are very commonly long-term commitments and often last for an entire lifetime.

THE DAWN CHARTER

Signed in 664 after the death of the Lord Paragon Theodric Blayne, the Dawn Charter brought an end to one of the darkest times in Hearthlands history, the Regnum. Though the Paragon who succeeded Lord Theodric, Lady Emalia, signed the document under duress, it is still seen as a significant step forward for the rights of the commonfolk. The Dawn Charter did what few documents in history had ever done, giving the common people some documented rights and a level of equality with the nobility. Unfortunately, in the years that followed, the implementation of the Charter, while still providing some rights, certainly did not deliver all that was promised. The reality was that most commoners were happy to be free from the tyranny of the Regnum and while the Dawn Charter did not provide everything they wanted, it was progress. To this day, it stands as one of the most important documents of the Age of Kings and is an inspiration to all commonfolk in Arnesse who toil beneath the yoke of tyranny.

The Dawn Charter consists of four tenants:

I. Freefolk in tenancy upon the lands of House Blayne are entitled to a trial in a noble court overseen by their peers.

This tenant of the Dawn Charter allows those accused of a crime to request to be heard by their peers. An allegedly impartial group of peers must be chosen before a court session. This group of peers will listen to the case along side the noble and supposedly render advice to the lord or lady. The intent behind this was to render out any class bias that may go on when a commonfolk has their case heard. While any freefolk has the right to ask to be heard by their peers this is done infrequently, because having the uneducated and often very inexperienced advising a noble can often do more harm than good. In addition, the selection process has often proven

problematic with numerous cases of these peers being bribed or coerced to a certain decision. In the last few decades some freefolk have taken upon themselves to learn the law and offer services as “Professional Peers” for those who can afford their exorbitant fees. While it a Professional Peer does not ensure a good outcome, it provides a chance that someone is present who can advocate for the accused with a reasoned argument.

II. Freefolk upon the lands of House Blayne are entitled to be consulted on matters pertaining to taxes and taxation.

This is by far one of the most controversial tenants of the Dawn Charter, for the nobles have long held that taxation rights belong to them and no one else. This tenant entitles freefolk to be consulted when a tax is created or changed. This tenant was intended to mitigate frivolous and excessive taxation by nobles. During the implementation of this tenant, the nobles demanded that the representation be an elected office and thus the position of actuary was created. Actuaries must be commonfolk and are charged with representing the people to the nobles on matters of taxation. They are elected to two-year term and can serve more than one term. While actuaries have accomplished some goals of the Dawn Charter, many are alleged to be on the payroll of nobles and allow the same taxation problems that have existed for years to persist.

III. Freefolk upon the lands of House Blayne are entitled to hold beliefs of their choice without fear of persecution or prosecution so long as they do not violate the King’s Laws.

This tenant of the Dawn Charter was specifically put into place to protect against religious persecution of commonfolk. Of all the provisions, this one has been adhered to by most of the nobility throughout the years. Though this appears to allow a great deal of freedom, the fact that it is limited by the King’s Law still allows nobles to take legal action against beliefs that the nobles determine are subversive or treasonous.

IV. Freefolk upon the lands of House Blayne are entitled to inherit or give inheritance of property without interference.

This tenant was put into place to protect freefolk from greedy landlords who would retake their land when the original deed holder passed on. While not all nobles engage in this type of behavior, it has happened enough that it was included in the Dawn Charter. While not an ironclad provision, this tenant at least provides some potential legal recourse for families to avoid eviction upon the death of a loved one. Unfortunately, because of this provision, those greedy landlords have now taken to using knights or brigands to run families off their

land or simply kill them when they wish to reclaim a property.

Violation of the Dawn Charter by a noble, if proven, goes before the Paragon of the Dusk for review and judgment. However, this is extremely rare and only three times in the century since the Charter has been signed has this happened. Of those three times a noble was only found guilty once, and even then forced to pay minor reparations to the injured party.

ALMS & CHARITY

Hearthfolk are looked down upon in most lands for being a simple people, but they are renowned for their charity and care for their community. Because of the frequent and serious hardships placed upon the residents of the Hearthlands, few places in Arnesse have communities so close-knit and willing to aid each other. Families that experience hardships are often aided by others and it is not uncommon for larger families to choose to live together in a commune-type arrangement.

Children with parents who have died are often taken in by their next of kin or the larger community if they don't have any. Unfortunately, this sense of community often does not extend to outsiders or strangers as they are often treated with suspicion, skepticism, and even hostility if they create trouble. The one exception to this is those of the faith, who will generally be welcomed with open arms by other Aurorym.

One major tenant of the Aurorym faith is almsgiving, or any material favor which is done to assist the needy. The Aurorym feel that the process of aiding those who are less fortunate increases one's own virtue and they are renowned for their generosity. However, the state of the Hearthlands has created some intriguing social dynamics around this generosity. Firstly, the nobility is almost the universal exception to this. As a matter of fact, their greed often rivals or exceeds the generosity of their people. Secondly, given the generally poor conditions in the Hearthlands, the most generous, often the commonfolk, don't have much to give, so much of what is exchanged hands is services and goods rather than actual coin. This is only compounded in towns and cities, where living conditions are even worse, and people have even less to give. It is not uncommon to see actual homeless and street-people in town and cities, whereas those are non-existent in the countryside. Lastly, as with most of the Hearthlands, the generosity is often restricted to other Hearthfolk and faithful.

One highlight of the Hearthlands society is its network of orphanages. Originally founded by the current Lord Paragon's father, Clovis, to shelter the children of nearly a decade of civil war, these orphanages have become recruiting grounds

for the knights of the Fervent Order of the Vellatoea. While they are a form of charity for children in the Hearthlands, they also serve in a practical capacity as well. But some of these orphanages have developed a reputation over the years for poor conditions and overly harsh treatment and many children attempt to avoid going to them at all costs. Because of this, homeless children are still fairly common in the Hearthlands, particularly in urban areas such as Scrow, where they are referred to as 'street rats'. Due to the homeless problem in some areas, nobles frequently offer bounties for these orphans, employing bounty hunters known as 'ratcatchers' track these children down, capture them, and deliver them to an orphanage. It is also not unheard of for the nobles to also offer bounties for homeless and vagabond adults, who, when captured, are then turned over to the Vellatora knights to be pressed into service as a foot soldier in the Hearthlands army.

CRIME AND VICE

Criminality is a fixture in Arnesse and the enforcement of the King's Law is something that all nobles in the Kingdom contend with. However, in few places is illicit behavior, criminal activity, and corruption as deeply seeded as the Heathlands. Scholars have speculated why this is the case, especially in a land that is so traditionally faithful. The best that anyone can conclude is that the frequently poor and often dire living conditions present in the Troth, coupled with the oppression by nobility, has led to a state of mind where people feel they must do anything in their power to survive. This mentality has led many Heathfolk to believe that hard work is not enough, but that they must take from others, just as they themselves are taken from. Desperation and despair have led many to chase the dream of wealth; for most, the only quick path to this end is illegal and often dangerous.

Early on, the people of the Troth realized that wealth from throughout the Kingdom passed through it. Thus, this wealth became a ripe target for Hearthfolk looking to better their fortunes. So, while many among the Hearthfolk are honest and upstanding, working their farms and jobs common in the Kingdom, others take up illicit professions such as bandits, highwaymen, con men, and thieves. While some of these criminals work alone, many realized that there was strength in numbers and formed gangs or organizations around their illegal enterprises. Today, the Hearthlands has one of the highest concentrations of criminal organizations anywhere in the Kingdom. This has made the Hearthlands one of the most treacherous places to visit and due to its reputation, only the unwise go there without some sort of reasonable precautions.

One might think that the nobles of this land could do a better job of enforcing the King's Laws and protecting the roads, but many times the lords and ladies of the Hearthlands are as guilty or more guilty of crimes than their own subjects. Mind you, the nobility are rarely seen doing crimes themselves, but they are often at the head of operations that involve acts of bribery and corruption that stretch across many layers of Hearthlands infrastructure. They frequently overtax and oppress their subjects and are unafraid to demonstrate the severe price of disobedience. While not all nobles in the Hearthlands are corrupt, enough are that the system of government there has largely adapted to it as a normal state. Bribes are king in the Hearthlands; little gets done without paying a bit extra to accomplish the simplest things. This bribe is often called a tax or a duty to hide implications of corruption. Graft among the nobles and officials is shockingly common as someone is always seeking a piece of the action.

Two things have emerged among this criminal culture, likely as a result of the strong influence of faith in the Hearthlands. Firstly, many lower-level criminals among the Hearthfolk have a code of honor, or honor among thieves, as some may call it. Most will steal from outsiders but not those native to the Hearthlands, feeling that their peers already suffer enough and generally don't have much to steal. Secondly, while people may be hurt in their crimes, the Hearthfolk are not a particularly murderous lot; committing a bloodless crime and making a profit is ideal. Therefore, many have taken to theft and things like graverobbing to make a living. Though this has a practical application in that punishments for murder are far more severe, it also is thought to be kinder on the animus should one suddenly die and then be judged in the afterlife.

The Aurorym faith has had a big impact on criminals in the Hearthlands. The faith discourages lawlessness in general and as the religion has grown, in places that it is strong, crime tends to fade and be far less common. This is one of the primary reasons that the Aurorym faith has come into conflict with the nobles as it often calls them to abandon their wicked ways and be more virtuous leaders. However, the faith has yet to change the fact that the Hearthlands people still suffer and as a result, desperation still drives people to do what they must when out of sight of the faith. This is compounded by the fact that power tends to corrupt and as the faith has grown in influence, aurons have taken increasingly important roles in Hearthlands society. They are human like anyone else and this subject to vice and corruption. So, while it in its purest form, the faith is a bulwark against wickedness, the Aurorym have continued to struggle against vice and corruption within their own ranks, even as they preach the values of virtue to others.

HOLIDAYS

THE GODSFALL

The death of the Old Gods and the abolishment of religion has not been quickly forgotten within the Hearthlands. So, while the rest of the Kingdom celebrates the establishment of the Bannon monarchy and the rule of the first Queen Catherine, many Hearthfolk hold a vigil to remember the faithful who have died in the past so that they could practice their religion today. King's Day events tend to be somewhat muted in the Hearthlands are instead often replaced with more somber events that mirror Remembrance Day rather than a celebration.

SAINTS DAY

This is not a singular day, but the name given to each of the days of celebration held throughout the Hearthlands, each celebrating a single particular Saint. Each of the major Saints have their own specific day and many small villages have local Saints that have their own days of celebration. On a Saints Day, faithful of the Aurorym will gather to recite the deeds of heroism performed by the Saint and reaffirm their devotion to the faith. Festivals generally accompany this recitation as the day turns to night with the setting of the sun.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

On this day none in the Hearthlands work. Instead faithful families come together as one to spend the day in quiet contemplation of the deeds of their ancestors. Families will rise with the dawn and gather within the familial urn room. No meals are served in the morning as the deeds of their ancestors are recited by the youngest member able to do so beginning with the dawn of the sun. Afterwards, the family will spend the day in quiet meditation in the presence of the family's Urn. It is encouraged for individuals to focus on what they might be able to do in the coming year to bring the light of the dawn with their own deeds or bits of heroism to the community. As the last vestiges of light disappear with the setting of the sun, the family will have supper together. As they finally break their fast, it is customary for each member to speak of what they contemplated on as they all meditated.

FUNERAL RITES

The Aurorym faith has specific funerary rites and in many places in the Hearthlands they have become common practice. When a loved one dies, their family members, close friends, or comrades will set a vigil in the night as the body of the

deceased is burned to ash. Over the course of the night, those present will speak on behalf of any deeds performed by the departed. Should the deeds be heroically significant enough, they may be declared a Saint of the faith. Once the last ember has cooled, the ashes are gathered together and distributed to those present. For the commonfolk, a family may have a single large urn that houses all the ashes of their ancestors. For fallen knights of the Vellatora, the ashes are typically spread to each of their surviving comrade in arms to carry in their personal reliquary, for the knights are each other's family

LEGENDS OF THE HEARTHLANDS

BLOOD OF ANCIENT KINGS

Tales are told that the blood that runs through the veins of the nobles of the Hearthlands is purer than any would assume. Most nobles in the Kingdon disregard the Hearthlands nobles as no more than a family which has inbred with the common people so much that it has diluted any of the ancient blood of the kings of old. But there is a legend of a pure line of House Ulster, founded by the the last descendant of the First King, Edryn Wolfson, and wielder of the legendary blade Aurantis. Many have openly scoffed that anyone in the Hearthlands could bear that lineage and have it hidden for so long, but the tales also go on to say that this line has long concealed itself from House Bannon, who, centuries ago, usurped the throne from the true and rightful king, forcing their family into exile. If such a noble line were to exist, they could have a claim to the throne that is even stronger than that of House Bannon or anyone who has sat upon the throne during the Age of Kings.

CHIME HOURS

*They that be born of a Friday's chime,
Be masters of musick and finders of rhyme,
And every beast will do what they say,
And every herb that do grow in the clay,
They do see what they see and hear what they hear,
But they never do tell in a hundred year.*

Hearthlands Children's Rhyme

The chime hours folklore seems to indicate that individuals born during certain hours of the day or night gain special abilities. Although what these times are seems to be disputed depending on the individual source or location. Some argue that the only true chime hour is the witching hour, midnight but others have claimed eight in the evening, midnight, and four in the morning are chime hours and still others say it also includes high noon at midday. There are also a wide array of abilities said to be granted to those born within the chime

hours. For example, some claim that these include the ability to see ghosts or spirits and to speak to these ghosts and fairies without risk of coming to any harm. Others claim the abilities include power over black witchcraft, being musically gifted, control over animals, and being able to cure ailing animals and plants. Additionally, "chime children" are believed to be born with the ability to have access to sensitive information due to others lowering their guards and speaking openly around these individuals. Unfortunately, the allegation of being a "chime child" and the powers that go along with it have seen people accused, tried, and burned for witchcraft.

LEGEND OF MISTLETOE BRIDE

*The Mistletoe hung in the castle hall
The holly branch shone on the old oak wall;
And the lord's retainers were blythe and gay,
And keeping their Winter holiday.
The Lord beheld with a father's pride
His beautiful child, Lord Lovall's bride.
While she, with her bright eyes seemed to be,
The star of the goodly company, Oh the Mistletoe Bough,
"I'm weary of the dancing now," she cried,
Here tarry a moment, I'll hide-I'll hide;
And Lovell, be sure though't the first to trace,
The clue to my secret lurking place,
Away she ran, and her friends began,
Each tower to search, and each nook to scan,
And young Lovall cried, "Oh, where do you hide?
I'm lonesome without you, my own dear bride" Oh the
Mistletoe Bough,
They sought her that night, they sought her next day,
And they sought her in vain when a week passed away.
In the highest, the lowest, the loneliest spot,
Young Lovall sought Wildly, but found her not.
And the years flew by, and their grief at last,
Was told as a sorrowful tale long past;
And when Lovell appear'd, the children cried,
"See the old man weeps for his fairy bride." Oh the Mistletoe
Bough.
At length as old chest that had long lain hid,
Was found in the castle, they raised the lid,
And a skeleton form lay mouldering there,
Oh, sad was her fate! In sporting jest,
She hid from her Lord in the old oak chest,
It closed with a spring, and dreadful doom,
The bride lay clasp'd in her living tomb, Oh the Mistletoe
Bough.*

The Ballad of Mistletoe Bough

Known as the Tale of the Mistletoe Bride or Mistletoe Bough, this ghost story has also been popularized by Hearthland bards. Both the tale and the song are frequently recounted on cold Winter nights, usually around the time of the Festival of Lights. The legend tells of a winter bride, the daughter of a nobleman, who marries a lord of high-standing named Lovall.

During the wedding celebration and tired from dancing, the Bride calls a game of "Hide and Seek" and disappears to hide.

The young groom and the guests attempt to find the bride and search all over the castle in vain. Frantically searching, well into the night, but alas, it appeared that the young bride had disappeared. Her Groom and her Father are grief stricken.

Eventually, the weeks passed into years and one day a large oak chest with a spring-lock was opened and inside was a skeleton in a wedding dress - the hidden bride who has died when she became trapped while hiding in the old oak chest.

HAG STONES

Known as adder stones, witch stones, or serpent stones, they a glassy, smoot rock with a hole through it. Hag stones are believed by some to have magical powers such as protection against eye diseases or evil charms, preventing nightmares, curing a cough, the ability to see through fairy or witch disguises and traps if looked at through the middle of the stone, and recovery from deadky snakebite. According to popular belief, a true hag stone will float upon the water.

Two traditions exist as to the origins of hag stones. One holds that the stones are the hardened saliva of large numbers of serpents massing together, the holes being caused by their tongues. The second claims that a hag stone comes from the head of a serpent or is made by the sting of an adder. These stones are looked upon with a great deal of suspicion when found by Hearthfolk. Many commonfolk feel that these stones don't naturally form in the Hearthlands, but rather wash down the rivers from the Thornwood, where many believe they are used extensively in the magic of the 'Wood Witches' of Innis. Most of the hag stones found in the Hearthlands are turned over to aurons so they cannot be used in any wicked deeds.

MAY QUEEN

*The leaves are budding across the land on the ash and oak
and hawthorn trees.*

*Magic rises around us in the forest and the hedges are filled
with laughter and love.*

*Dear lady, we offer you a gift, a gathering of flowers picked
by our hands, woven into the circle of endless life.*

*The bright colors of nature herself blend together to honor
you, Queen of spring, as we give you honor this day.*

*Spring is here and the land is fertile, ready to offer up gifts in
your name.*

*We pay you tribute, our lady, daughter of the Fae, and ask
your blessing during our feast.*

Ancient Prayer to the May Queen

While nearly all the practices of the Old Ways and religions of the past have vanished from the Hearthlands in the Age of Kings, there are some that have survived as folklore. The May Queen is spoken of as a primordial spirit, the goddess of the flowers, and the young blushing bride, and a princess of the Fae. She is Spring, the embodiment of the Maiden, of mother earth in all her fertile glory. There are not a few Heartfolk who believe Queen Aline is a manifestation of this spirit.

As the summer gets later, the May Queen will give forth her bounty, becoming the Mother. The earth will blossom with crops and flowers and trees. When fall approaches and the Darkest Night comes, the May Queen and Mother are gone, young no more. Instead, the earth becomes the domain of the Crone. She is Cailleach, the hag who brings dark skies and winter storms. She is the Dark Mother, bearing not a basket of bright flowers but instead a sickle, scythe, the touch of Death.

When the Feast of Flowers arrives each spring, the May Queen arises from her winter's sleep, and does battle with the Crone. She fights off the Queen of Winter, sending her away for six months, so that the earth can be abundant once more.

Though few in the Hearthlands make the connections the May Queen is strongly associated with the origins of the Feast of Flowers and the appointment of the Summer Queen during Midsummer Tournament. The symbolism involved with the May Queen, the Maiden, Mother, and Crone are also said to be deeply tied to the mythos surrounding the Fayne Moirai.

ROBYN THE HOOD

Robyn the Hood is a tale told of a legendary outlaw who was said to have once roamed the Hearthlands. According to legend, he was a highly skilled archer and swordsman and his story is unique because he was said to have been born a noble.

The tale goes that Robyn was off to war at the command of the King. Before he left, he pledged his undying love to a young noble woman. At war, he learned to be a great fighter and a keen shot with a bow, earning many heroic accolades. Robyn was extolled for his virtue and just ways. Upon his return to his estate and homelands he found that his father had died, and, in his absence, he had been declared dead. As a result, his family's lands had been seized by a wicked local Sheriff. Thinking him dead, the young noble woman to whom he had pledged his undying love had now married the Sheriff.

When he revealed that he was alive, the Sheriff declared him a pretender and made him an outlaw, offering a bounty for his capture or death. Robyn retreated to the nearby forest and there he came across other bandits and brigands, with whom he quickly formed a comradeship. Together, they made a band of outlaws that began to attack the Sheriff's lands and steal wealth from his coffers. This wealth was not kept but was given to the local poor and needy people as an act of charity. Robyn's calling card becomes his arrows and, in time, he is known as Robyn 'the Hood' for his many criminal activities.

In time, the Sheriff's failures drew the attention of the Lord Paragon himself and in some tales the Sheriff was hanged for his failures and in others, there is a climactic battle between Robyn and the Sheriff in which the wicked minor nobleman is soundly defeated by the hero. Her husband dead, the young noblewoman becomes Robyn's wife and the dead Sheriff is exposed to have been stealing from the Lord Paragon. For his efforts and charity, Robyn is given a lordship of the Sheriff's lands and rules them justly and fairly until the end of his days.

This story is the very personification of Hearthlands lifestyle and represents the ideal that the oppressed would rise and fight against their oppressors, acting not out of vengeance, but in charity. There have been many who have claimed to know the true identity of Robyn the Hood and many have debated if the story even relates to a real person. The names of the young noblewoman, the Sheriff, and the forest have been changed to suit the needs of the storyteller, but the essence of this tale has inspired Hearthfolk for years. There are many outlaws in the Hearthlands who see themselves as taking up the cause of Robyn the Hood and do as he would do, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. The likely truth of the matter is that Robyn represents the aspirations and hopes of all Hearthfolk and his spirit lives within all of them.

EATERS OF THE DEAD

This macabre practice all but died off as the Aurorym have risen to power in the Hearthlands but some Eaters of the Dead are said to still practice. In days following the death of the Old Gods, people struggled to understand what happened to an animus after one's death. Concerned over the state of their loved one's afterlife, grieving family members of the recently deceased would pay these Eaters of the Dead to cleanse the newly departed of all the worldly crimes and transgressions that they had accumulated during their lives. The Eaters of the Dead would then perform a complicated and eerie ritual that allowed the deceased to pass into the Land of the Dead.

In the past it was believed that a piece of bread or pastry that was placed on the chest or the face of a dead person, absorbed all the deceased's transgressions in life. When a loved one died, family members gathered around the corpse to drink ale and mourn, and an Eater of the Dead would literally eat the crimes of the deceased by consuming these funerary snacks.

Even though the Eaters of the Dead performed a valuable service in enabling the anima of the dead to safely pass into the afterlife and prevented the wicked dead from returning to the Vale in spectral form a ghost or wraith, they were shunned from communities and often were forced to live in isolation. This was primarily because people feared those who were so willing to soil their own animus by adding the crimes of the dead to their own collection of dark deeds. Such an act, even though respected, was considered as the work of dark magic, foul witchcraft, or supernatural forces; to look an Eater of the Dead in the eye, was considered a sign of extreme bad luck.

Not only the Eaters of the Dead were shunned but those who employed them were considered equally vile. Therefore, the Eaters of the Dead were usually forced to keep their business shrouded in a veil of secrecy. As the Aurorym faith grew, this practice was branded to be dark sorcery and outlawed. Many of the remaining Eaters of the Dead were burned at the stake for being witches. Today, rumors persist that Eaters of the Dead still wander the Hearthlands in secret, doing their part to save the anima of the dead. But mostly these rumors are used to scare children into behaving themselves, lest an Eater of the Dead come to devour their animus while they slumber.

WELL DRESSING

Well dressing, also known as well flowering, is a tradition that is practiced in rural parts of the Hearthlands in which wells, springs and other water sources are decorated with designs created from flower petals. Though the origins of the tradition are obscure, it has been speculated that it began as an Old Ways custom of offering thanks to gods for a reliable water supply; other suggested explanations include villagers celebrating the purity of their water supply after surviving a plague, or alternatively celebrating their water's constancy during a prolonged drought. Being as most wells are typically dressed in the Spring time, some have also tried to connect it to tales of the May Queen. While it seems unlikely that the true origins of this practice will ever be established, it remains a custom that is still very much alive and well today.

CORN MOTHERS

This legend is associated with the fall harvest and speaks of an ancient spirit that allegedly lives 'between the rows' in the fields of farmers. Known as the Corn Mother, Crop Mother, or "She Who Lives Between the Rows", the spirit is said to bring prosperity and healthy to growth to crops. But when the harvest is taken in, the Corn Mother no longer has a home in the fields amid the crops. To prevent this, the farmers will craft a doll called a 'corn dolly' or 'crop dolly' out of the last sheafs of the harvest and the spirit makes a home within it during the Winter. During the next Spring the dollies from the previous Winter are sown into the fields along with the seeds.

The dark side to this mythology is that legends say if the Corn Mother does not find a home in the Winter, the spirit is said to grow sour and vengeful, seeking out the warmth of the living, consuming them, and then sowing their remains in the fields. Only the coming of the Spring and planting of new crops will placate the angry spirit and even then, the crops will yield a poor harvest until balance is restored. The practice of making corn dollies at harvest is prevalent among rural farmers of the Hearthlands but the practice is done even beyond its borders.

FOLK REMEDIES

There is hardly a substance known to man that has not been tried as a medicine, nor any disease for which faith-healers have failed to prescribe. Despite the Apotheca's proven remedies, many commonfolk find these solutions to be too expensive or inaccessible. Thus, the practice of folk remedies remains popular among the poor people of the Hearthlands.

The following are some folk remedies commonly employed: It is said that an ointment made of goat's gall and honey is a cure for cancer, and if this fails to cure the disease, it is often suggested that incinerating a dog's skull and powdering the patient's skin with the ashes should cure them of the disease.

For the 'half-dead disease', a stroke, inhaling the dark smoke of a burning pine-tree is supposed to be very efficacious.

People suffering from ague, a form of malaria that is often characterised by fits of shivering, often call on the 'Quake doctors'. If the doctor can't charm away the fever with a magic wand, the patient is required to wear shoes lined with tansy leaves, or take pills made of compressed spider's webs.

Wart-charmers have many strange cures. One was to take a small piece of meat, rub the wart with it and then bury the meat. As the meat decays, the wart will slowly disappear. Another wart-charm was to prick the wart with a pin, and

stick the pin in an ash tree, reciting the rhyme, "Ashen tree, ashen tree, I Pray buy these warts from me". The warts are then said to be transferred from the patient to the ash tree.

Holding the key of a chantry door is claimed to be a remedy against the bite of a mad dog. The touch of a hanged man's hand is said to cure goitre and tumours. Toughing a rope that had been used for a hanging, supposedly cures fits. To cure baldness, sleep on stones, and the standard treatment for colic is to stand on your head for one quarter of an hour. Copper rings are often prescribed as a treatment for colic, gallstones and bilious complaints when used with nutmeg in a pocket.

CREATURES OF THE HEARTHLANDS

BLACK DOG

A black dog is a spectral or demonic entity found primarily in the folklore of the Hearthlands. Said to stalk the moors and bogs, the black dog is a nocturnal apparition that was regarded as a portent of death. It is generally supposed to be larger than a normal dog and often has large glowing eyes. It is sometimes associated with electrical storms, crossroads, places of execution and ancient pathways. There are tales of many different black dogs throughout the Hearthlands and some are given different names, such as the Barghest of the Byremog, the Shuck, commonly seen around the swamps near Harker Manor, Hairy Jack, or Yeth Hounds. It is unclear if these are different creatures or the same one with different names, but few things can strike terror into the hearts of men faster than the unearthly baying of a dog upon a lonely moor.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW

Also known as a Puck or a hobgoblin, this mischievous but helpful nature spirit is considered a benevolent entity by many in the Hearthlands. Those who claim to have seen a Puck say they are very small, hairy, naked men who had an aversion to clothes and do work around the home at night while the hosts slept, like dusting, ironing, and needlework. All they ask in return was a bit of food. They can be mischievous in their work at times, often jokers, but they do their work well. But if they are offended, which could be done by forgetting to feed them for a time, destroying part of their home, or leaving them clothes, they would leave the home, often after doing some sort of nefarious work out of revenge upon their host.

WILLOW-O'-THE-WISP

A light floating in the darkness might seem innocent, even friendly, but those who would follow it should use care. These attractive lights are known as will-o'-the-wisps and are almost always malevolent. Often found in swamps or bogs, these spirits are also known as jack-o'-lanterns or hobby lanterns. They are said to be the ghosts of those who died lonely deaths and were refused entry into the Land of the Dead. Trapped between worlds, they are now drawn to places of danger and death, their glow often luring others to share in their dark fate.

BEAN NIGHE

The bean nighe is a figure in folklore that is said to foretell the deaths of mortals as a visitor from the Otherworld—the world of gods, fairies, and spirits. It is said that she appears as a washerwoman who cleans the bloody clothes of those who are fated to die, and if one asks nicely enough, she can tell them the names of those who shall die. If one is especially careful, they can ask her three questions, but only if they answer three in return. The bean nighe is said to be horribly ugly with webbed feet, a single tooth, a single nostril but it is also claimed that she can appear in the form of a beautiful woman. It is said that these dark creatures are the spirits of women who died giving birth and are that they are doomed to perform their tasks until the day their lives would have normally ended. It is also believed that this fate could be avoided if all the clothing left by the dead woman had been washed. Otherwise, she must finish this task after her death.

WIGHT (BARROW WIGHT)

Wights are hideous, twisted creatures that are said to haunt graveyards and barrows where they were lain to rest. Unable to rest, wights are wretched husks of their former living selves, baring chalk-white skin and prone to committing acts of hatred and violence upon the living. Wights are said to be ferocious in battle and can kill their victims by draining a person's life force through touch. Anyone killed by a wight in this manner can be transformed into one of them upon death. These creatures may be related to the draugr of the Everfrost and seem to bear many similarities, including their attachment to a place of burial. It is said that all one must do to escape a wight is to leave the place they haunt, for they cannot follow.

BLOODY BONES

*Rawhead and Bloody Bones
Steals naughty children from their homes,
Takes them to his dirty den,
And they are never seen again.*

Also known as the Rawhead, this bogeyman is often used to frighten children. The creature is said to dwell near ponds, and so is a cautionary tale to keep children from drowning. However, the Bloody Bones is also said to live in old, dark cupboards, and perhaps most frighteningly, under stairs. The story goes that if one peeks between their ankles and into the space between stairs, especially stairs leading into a basement but any open stairs will do, they may see Rawhead, his head scalped and blood running down, sitting on a pile of bloody bones. And if the terrible creature spies the person, he will come for them and add their bloody bones to his collection.

INDUSTRY OF THE HEARTHLANDS

Scrow is situated along a major land roadway, as thus it is a trade gateway between the northern houses of Hale, Richter and Innis to the rest of the Great Houses in the south. Vast amounts of coin are earned each day from the travelling caravans heading in either direction as tariffs. These tariffs have caused no small amount of strife with the Cirque as they see their own profits reduced by the double taxation. The Troth largely consists of wide swaths of fertile farmlands worked by countless commonfolk throughout small settlements. With the eruption of the Sharmount, Blayne food stuffs are in ever increasing demand in the north. A portion of the Southern Thornwood rests within the Troth and lumber is harvested in small quantities in the safe portions of the forest to be sent to Richter forges or for House Botley ship building. The nobles of the Hearthlands are well known for providing paid labor to surrounding protectorates. The Hearthfolk are known as a hard-working, honest, and industrious people and given that many of them are serfs, they have little choice about where and how they spend their time. Thus, if a construction project needs to be completed, it is common for Hearthfolk laborers to have been involved in the construction. Criminal enterprises are a surprisingly large portion of the income for the protectorate and many lords and ladies make a good living off bribes and graft. These funds then make their way up the chain from vassal to liege until they reach the coffers of the Lord Paragon of Dusk himself.

THE HEARTHLANDS PROTECTORATE

The people of the Hearthlands are largely an uneducated and impoverished lot. This has resulted in a people extremely superstitious of strangers and often jumping to unsupported conclusions of their true intentions. More than one stranger to the Hearthlands has found themselves face to face with a mob in the middle of the night due to the traveller's alien customs.

The people consider entire portions of the Hearthlands to be actively cursed, earning those locations dark names such as the Howling Bog, the Bonewood, and the Dread Reservoir.

The Hearthlands is broken up into two main cultures based on the western and eastern divide of the lands. Historically those to the west have belonged to the Blaynes and the Botleys have had the land to the east. Those in the west are nearly all firmly devoted followers of the Aurorym faith. Those in the eastern Hearthlands are mostly faithful, but about 1 in every 10 have not converted. Outside of the few cities there are few towns in the Hearthlands. Most the commonfolk live on remote, rural homesteads or small settlements scattered across the Troth.

The Hearthlands profits from alternating dry seasons and heavy rainfall from the east blowing winds off the Soundless Sea. This has created fertile farmlands in the higher elevations of the Troth and marshy bogs in the lower elevations. The summers are long and the winters short when, combined with the use of ancient irrigation projects put into place following the Great War allow for crops to be grown almost year round. During the dry seasons, the farmlands are highly reliant on the irrigation canals. Sadly, many of these canals are in varying states of disrepair due to lack of upkeep over the past few centuries. This has prevented the full output of the croplands as many crops often wither and die during the dry seasons.

SCROW

Located on two major trade routes, the Aurean Road and Old Forest Road, as well as the Living River, the people of the Scrow are exposed to travellers from many different lands and thus the different cultures and exotic customs of Arnesse, unlike most the people of the Hearthlands. Sitting within the Revenant Keep is the Hallowed Court. At the end of the hall are three chairs- two resting below the third larger one. The current ruling Paragon and their spouse hold court from the Stewards' chairs at the base while the elegant and massive Martyr's Throne rests above them with what is said to be a life like statue of Magnus Blayne setted within. Scrow is a patchwork of poorly planned and rapid expansion over the years as it has grown at a pace that has outpaced the ability to plan for. The city is filled with many beautiful edifices depicting various saints performing heroic deeds. Those affluent emissaries that visit are given very carefully planned tours, for the Lord Paragon wisely does not wish any to see how many of his commonfolk live in the slums of Old Town. Strangely, the roads and walkways of Old Town are patrolled by hired guards of the Cirque instead of Vellatora as one would expect. Many say that this is another sign of the entirely too close relationship between the House of Blayne

and the local Cirque Ringmaster, Carmilla, the Bloody Bitch, and sister to Lady Paloma Blayne, wife of the Lord Paragon.

EXETER

Also known as the City of Shrines, Exeter is a city grown around supporting the Vellatora Chapterhouse, Wardhall, and the growing military of House Blayne. The numerous fairways, barracks, training yards, and fortified walls are covered in murals depicting the Saints and heroes of the faith. Nearly every building sanctified with a small shrine sitting outside the doorway. The city generates little in the way of resources, being largely subsidized by House Blayne and the Aurorym faith to ensure the continued growth of the knight order. The city itself is nestled directly behind Casilda's Line, the name for the fortifications built by House Hardinger that act as a barrier to entry from the Sovereignlands in the west to the Hearthlands in the east. It is at this western gate that one must walk under a massive forty-foot statue of Saint Casilda the Dawnbreaker to enter the Hearthlands. The huge edifice serves as a reminder to all of House Blayne's military might.

Exeter is the laid out in such an orderly fashion, it almost feels foreign to the rest of the cities and settlements of the Hearthlands. Credit is given largely to the management of Saint Genevieve the Divine Precepta who was both the Castellan of Exeter and Headmaster of the knights at Wardhall. The Saint Genevieves over the last century and a half have kept tight control over the growth of the city. Any new structure must first be approved by the office of the Castellan. Any structure that is built without permission is quickly removed and those responsible punished. In the last decade, it has become obvious that all placements of buildings so far have been according to some purposeful long term plan.

HARKER MANOR

Two days ride by fast horse to the north and west of Scrow, bordering the Howling Bog and Bonewood, is a small city watched over by a shrouded manor atop a hill. Harker Manor is the home to Lady Hesa Harker and her family, the self-proclaimed monster hunters that fill House Harker. There is no great industry to be found here as the land is considered cursed. Instead, the many hunters of the area specialize in obtaining high quality or rare hides from the creatures of the swamps and woods to sell to the rare visitor. More than a small number of Hexen pass through this area on a regular basis and almost all are invited to spend time trading tales of the unnatural with the head of the house. In recent years, more hunters than normal have gone missing. There are

rumors of a growing darkness originating from the west seeping into the bogs and woods around Harker Manor.

BROKEN RETREAT

Four days ride by horse to the east of Scrow through the southern Thornwood and resting on the shores of the Dread Reservoir is the Keep of House Botley. The keep was savaged by cannon fire during the Great War centuries ago and has never been fully repaired. It thus earned the name, The Broken Retreat. The city around the keep is largely new creations due to the fires that consumed most of the original city. When House Innis was given back portions of the Thornwood the Southern Thornwood remained House Botley's. The Thornwood provides a large bounty of strong birch, hazel, oak, and yew as the forest is cut to create future farmland. These raw materials generally find their way up into the Duskland furnaces or are used in the creation of sailing vessels. The Shipworks, a series of shipyards taking up almost the entirety of the north portion of the Dread Reservoir, were built after the Great War. Their initial purpose was to construct a fleet so that House Botley might hunt the pirates of House Rourke. As expected, no ship constructed in the Shipworks is ever sold to a Rourke captain due to the past grudge. The Dread Reservoir has been a source of fresh fish for those brave enough to risk the murky waters. There are constant rumors that the Reservoir earned its name due to rumors of giant river monsters making their lair in the lake bed. Before the switch of fealty from House Corveaux to House Blayne, the coffers of House Botley, and the denizens of The Broken Retreat were full of coin from the lumber and ship making sales. The economy in the last twelve years has slowed due to Frederick Blayne's heavy tariffs and, while not in full depression, the outlook does not look bright.

RIVER'S END

Home of the broken Serpentine Gate. Legends tell that the gate was originally built to protect the waterways from the beasts of the sea. The gate once consisted of twin hundred-foot-tall statues on opposite ends of the mouth of the Living River with a massive four foot thick steel fence attached to both that could be raised or lowered to allow shipping traffic through. During the Great War, one of House Rourke fleets reduced the western bank's statue to little more than rubble, forever breaking the fence. These days it rests partially on the river bottom and partially inert against the remaining statue. Many of the region fear to this day what the Rourke may have unleashed into the waterways with their destruction. Every few years, a boat will be found destroyed somewhere along

the Living River with the crew mysteriously vanished. These ghost ships make up a large portion of tavern tales, along with creatures of the deep. Superstitions aside, most blame the Rourke, specifically, Captain Harbad Leviathan and the fleet of the Kraken's Maw fleet who they assume did this dark deed. River's End serves as a port of call for many fishing vessels of the sea and as an entry point for trade barges into the interior rivers of Arnesse. There are regular naval battles between The Unbroken and Captain Harbad's pirates off the coast as they attempt to raid vessels heading to River's End.

HOUSE & GUILD RELATIONSHIPS

The following details how the Valefolk generally feel about factions in Arnesse. This information is to be taken as in-play by you and other members of this faction.

HOUSE CORVEAUX

Many of the Hearthfolk don't like people from the Midlands and House Corveaux in general and the feeling is very often mutual. It is a dislike that began when the Troth and House Ulster chafed under Corveaux rulership for centuries. When House Blayne rose into the ranks of true power the dislike transformed into something more akin to a sibling rivalry. Midlanders and Heathfolk see eye to eye on many things and often share the same goals and vision. It's when they attempt to work together toward those goals that things begin to fall apart. It typically begins with the Midlanders seeking to take charge of the situation, which immediately sets the Hearthfolk on the defensive. Hearthfolk are then quick to point out that the Midlanders are too unwilling to bend the King's Laws to accomplish a goal and Midlanders accuse the Hearthfolk of being too willing to become criminals. The Midlanders then typically accuse the Hearthfolk of placing too much value in faith and divine providence, which begins an argument over religion and why Midlanders refuse the Aurorym. The whole affair then typically devolves from there as the Midlanders point out the hypocrisy of Hearthfolk being faithful but also willing to break the law and Hearthfolk remind Midlanders of their unwavering support for the Bannon kings that regularly oppress the very people they claim to support. This argument typically ends with one or both sides walking away from the table in anger. On the rare occasions both these squabbling siblings find a cause they believe enough in to set their differences aside, they make a force for good and justice so powerful that few in the Kingdom of Arnesse can resist them.

HOUSE BANNON

Few people have hated House Bannon and the Sovereignlands more than the people of the Troth. Bannon, the noble house who murdered Magnus Blayne and has spent the last three centuries oppressing the people of Arnesse for their own benefit. While the Ulsters spent a good deal of time resisting their Corveaux lieges, they also directed much of their ire at the House of the King. Sovereignlands armies have invaded the Troth several times in the last century, destroying land, crops, and murdering innocents. The Troth has seen what the iron gauntlet of Bannon can do and its people are not quick to forget it. But, despite this history, almost every Heathfolk has been willing to set it aside for a chance at a King of Arnesse who shares their beliefs and the dream the Aurorym religion will be declared as the faith of the realm. Since Giles the Younger's open insurrection against his father and victory at the Battle of Lanton, House Bannon has had few stauncher allies than the Hearthfolk and House Blayne. Many of the wounds of old have been mended by powerful nobles in the northern Sovereignlands adopting the Aurorym faith; already in the last decade the union between a Bannon monarch and a Hearthfolk noblewoman have prompted many nobles and commonfolk to do the same. That is not to say there is not some tension as many Hearthfolk recognize that there are still Valefolk who do not share their beliefs and could still be a threat to them. But as more and more of the Sovereignlands falls under the Aurorym's influence, the Hearthfolk become increasingly confident that this is a conflict that they can win.

HOUSE ARAGON

By all rights, Tarkathi and Hearthfolk should be fast friends. After all, they share so many things in common. They both have a long relationship with faith, they both strongly dislike House Bannon, and they both have similar beliefs on the fair treatment of commonfolk and the less fortunate. In practice, however, the Tarkathi and the Hearthfolk rarely get along well. This likely has to do with the fact that Hearthfolk are a very 'salt of the earth' people, who live simple and humble lives. They see Tarkathi behavior as excessive, flamboyant, and unnecessary. The Hearthfolk come from a culture where people often don't have much, so they see Tarkathi behavior as wasteful, which is a dire social offense in the Hearthlands. The Hearthfolk are many things, but they are not liars. The Tarkathi habit of being secretive or subversive also never sits right with most Hearthfolk, and this leads to enough distrust that the two sides are not frequently long-term friends. Still, the lands of Tarkath have something of an exotic allure and to many in the Hearthlands, they seem like a far-away land full of danger and myth. In reality, most Hearthfolk will never meet a Tarkathi, so their sole exposure to their people are the

tales they hear of men and women as beautiful as they are deadly and wastelands full of adventure and untold wealth. This mysticism is only enhanced by the tales of Roland I, a Tarkathi King who defeated the Bannons centuries ago and allowed the faith of the Aurorym to flourish. So, while most in the Hearthlands will not rush to interact with the Tarkathi, there is often a temptation for the restrained, conservative Hearthfolk to give into curiosity and see if the tales are true.

HOUSE INNIS

The Woodfolk have had a long and complicated history with the people of the Troth. For centuries, have the lands of the nobles of Ulster and Blayne have sat on the Thornwood's southern borders, and given their desire for lumber and land, there has almost always been a pressure to push further into the depths of the wood. But the Woodswards of the Innis have always been there to meet them and indeed, tales are told of the massacres that have happened because of these failed attempts. When the Hearthlands protectorate was formed, a small portion of the southern Thornwood was given to House Blayne, a move that was very unpopular with the Woodfolk. In response, they grew even more aggressive to keeping Hearthfolk out of their land. To this day, the Innis clearly mark the borders with the Hearthlands by massive wooden poles made from trees that have runes of warning carved into them and painted in blood. The poles are often augmented by the rotting heads or body parts of those who have dared to cross into the Thornwood uninvited. This practice alone has made the Woodfolk into terrifying entities in the Hearthlands. This fear has been augmented by the fact that most Hearthfolk never see their neighbors. But they hear unsubstantiated tales of mystical rituals, human sacrifice to spirits, and witchcraft. In the absence of fact, superstitious Hearthfolk have created their own narrative about the Woodfolk and this, in part, has led to increased friction between these two people. Hearthfolk view themselves as faithful and just, so many want to find a way to do something about what they see as the Woodfolk's flagrant and unconscionable behavior. To date, no one has taken action, but as House Blayne continues to gain strength, it may only be a matter of time until they take matters into their own hands and deal with the 'crimes' of their neighbors.

HOUSE HALE

Up until about a decade ago, the people of the Troth and the Northmen never had much contact. But, since the ascension of Giles the Younger to king and the spread of the Aurorym faith in the North, they have grown continually closer and it has been a bit of a culture clash for many. There are many things that the Northmen and the Hearthfolk have in common

and respect about each other. Both are a people of their word, one expressing it in oaths and the other in vows. Northmen, who value prowess in combat, have some admiration for the Hearthfolk's tenacity and martial skill, especially after the Battle of Lanton. And they are both a people who are used to doing much with very little, so they tend to live simple lives. But the distance between them has begun to show over the years and many Hearthfolk have had a hard time seeing past the rather primal and gruff nature of the Northmen and their tendency to take what they like when they can. In the wake of the Battle of Lanton, many Hearthfolk opposed King Giles II allowing the Northmen to raid homesteads and towns in the Sovereignlands. Early on, Hearthfolk noticed that the people of the Everfrost strongly resented southern lands refused to even consider any kind of cultural integration. Even as the Aurorym faith began to blossom in the Wintervale, the seeds of its division from the central religion in the Hearthlands were sown. Today, faithful Northmen have formed a splinter faction of the Aurorym under protest from the Patriarchs. As the Everfrost has drifted further from the graces of the King, so has the relationship between the Hearthfolk and Northmen begun to sour. There are concerns that the continued separatist inclinations of the Northmen risk the tenuous alliance which brought the king to power and threaten stability in the north and Hearthfolk will not stand to see this king fall from power.

HOUSE RICHTER

If there was a force in the world that the Hearthfolk resent in the modern times, it is the nobility of House Richter and its vassals. In many ways, the Richter nobles have replaced those of Corveaux in the minds of many in the Hearthlands. It was not always this way, but with the spread of the Aurorym faith, the refusal of the nobles of the Dusklands to treat the religion well has soured many Hearthfolk to them. In addition, tales of mistreatment by Duskland tyrants seem to be regularly told by commonfolk and have become the regular talk of taverns and halls throughout the Troth. In response to this, a good deal of the Hearthfolk and Aurorym's attention has been focused on the Dusklands as the faith has encroached into Richter lands despite the efforts of its rulers. While Dusklands nobles have stopped short out outright persecution of the faith, they have done what they can to stymie its advancement. But if there is a force that the Hearthfolk have mastered it is the commoners and their efforts to recruit and agitate been a constant thorn in the side of Dusklands lords and ladies. There also has been a strangely symbiotic relationship that has developed between the peoples of these two lands. In the wake of the devastating eruption of the Shardmount, the people of the Hearthfolk gave invaluable aid to their neighbors and taught them to survive

with less. Had it not been for the invention of the Hearthlands, the Dusklands may not be in the state that it is in today. This brought the common people from these two lands even closer together, but also has sown the seed for what is now rapidly growing dissent and unrest among the Dusklands population.

HOUSE ROURKE

House Rourke has always been a bit of a conundrum in the Hearthlands. If you ask Hearthfolk of the eastern Hearthlands, the Rourkes are just about the worst thing in Arnesse and they would kill any Seaborn they caught on sight and principal. If you ask others outside of House Botley's domain, there is an almost grudging respect for a kindred people who have been also placed in difficult circumstances. In many ways, they view each other as outlaw cultures that are doing what they must to survive. In most other realms, the Seaborn's general lawlessness is held against them, but if any land understands the value of looking the other direction when it comes to the King's Law, it is the Hearthlands and, given that Seaborn are so rarely seen, they have been attributed this mystical, almost otherworldly quality that is revered by not a few Hearthfolk. For, while the Rourkes may struggle to make their way, they have a strong sense of freedom and independence that many Hearthfolk envy and it's not uncommon for them to run from their life in the Hearthlands and make a life on a ship of the High Armada. The Seaborn don't always have a similar view of the Hearthfolk and quite honestly, many seem them as easy marks with lofty principals that stand in the way of any kind of true success. House Botley's utter disdain for the Seaborn is returned in kind, but interestingly if you talked to a Rourke, they would likely tell you that the Botleys were a worthy foe. Not many landbound could hope to hold their own against the Rourke fleets but House Botley has bloodied the Seaborn's noses on more than one occasion, earning a grudging respect.

THE APOTHECA

The Apotheca tend to frequent two places in the Kingdom. First, wherever they are paid. Second, wherever there is lore for them to learn or things of interest. As a general rule, the Hearthlands does not have a much of either of those things. This means that few Magisters make the Hearthlands their homes and those that do are in the employ of the wealthiest nobles. The Hearthlands also attracts a number of visiting Magisters who seek to study the Aurorym faith or the many reports of dangerous supernatural creatures. Hearthfolk tend look on Magisters with a great deal of skepticism and distrust. With their tools, advanced education, and mysterious pseudo-science, Hearthfolk are inclined to believe that the Apotheca is practicing witchcraft than legitimate arts. Hearthfolk have

had little need for learning and the medicinal practices they have employed for centuries have suited them just fine. In addition, the last thing many Hearthfolk nobles want is the enlightenment and higher education spreading among their populace, so they tend to keep their Magisters close at hand.

THE FAYNE MOIRAI

Of the all the lands of all the protectorates of Arnesse, the Fayne are almost patently unwelcome in the Hearthlands. While the people can stomach the mysteries of the Apotheca, the Fayne present themselves as wielders of strange magic that looks to most Hearthfolk, exactly like witchcraft. The Fayne's rise to power following the death of the Old Gods led some to believe that they had a hand in the Godsfall. That in the absence of the deities, the Fayne have replaced them in the courts of nobles as advisors, whispering foul secrets to further the ends of their heathen cult. Aurons have replaced Fayne in all the courts of the Hearthlands and while the Fayne are not killed on sight, it is made very clear when they arrive there, that they should not tarry long in the lands of House Blayne.

THE HEXEN

In few lands are the Hexen held in such high esteem as in the Hearthlands. Here, where the tales of dark forces are common and almost everyone can swear they know someone who once saw a werewolf or fought a ghoul, the Hexen are folk heroes and saviors. The fact that many are part of the Aurorym faith only helps their cause. House Harker is well known to have long been tied to the Hexen order and it is not uncommon for men and women from all over the Hearthlands to aspire to be one of them when they are old enough. The very spirit of the Aurorym faith teaches resistance to the forces of darkness and the Hexen, perhaps even moreso than the aurons, embody that spirit. Despite their popularity, Hexen have not gained power or position. While nobles and the Aurorym leaders will laud them for their accomplishments, most feel the Hexen are good at what they do and should keep doing what they are good at.

THE CIRQUE

The Hearthlands is a massive hub of trade for the Kingdom and the Cirque has a substantial presence there. At least two major troupes and menageries operate within a few hundred miles of one another and the people's willingness to selectively ignore the King's Laws has only made the Cirque's job easier. This is a bit of a double-edged sword in that the fact that the people are willing to ignore the law means that the Cirque get robbed quite a bit in the

Hearthlands. They take extra precautions in the form of extra Naga guards and bribes to ensure that their caravans and goods stay safe. The Cirque have an exceptional relationship with the nobles in the Hearthlands and it is said that much of the corruption and graft that happens starts there. Given that the population of merchants and outlaws is quite large in the Hearthlands, the Cirque recruits quite a bit there and the troupes there are some of the largest, wealthiest, and most powerful in the entire organization. One interesting fact about the Hearthlands is that while the Cirque provides wealth and goods to needy commonfolk in many protectorates, they do not in the Hearthlands. The Aurorym faith has traditionally provided this service to communities as a sign of charity and the Cirque has less involvement in the lives of Hearthlands common folk than they do among any population in Arnesse.

THE AURORYM

Noplace in Arnesse is religion stronger than the Hearthlands. It is the seat of Aurorym power and there are very few among any Hearthfolk who are not a member of or affiliated with the faith in some way. The level of devotion to the religion may vary from person to person, but all pay at least lip service to it. The Aurorym's influence and control is nearly as strong as the ruling nobility, a fact which has begun to cause friction between those to factions as to the direction and future of the protectorate. Even smallest villages have a chantry of some kind and almost every one has a shrine to a saint, either local or known across the faith. Larger and wealthy towns often have more than one chantry and more than one shrine. The Aurorym faith and its servants are held in very high esteem by the Hearthfolk. Aurons are considered wise counselors by the people and representatives of the faith; almost all population centers have at least one. Larger towns can have half a dozen priests and cities like Scrow, hundreds. Those not of the faith are often not trusted by the Hearthfolk and are encouraged to not make a residence in the Hearthlands if they do not convert.

PLAYING A HEARTH FOLK

The Hearthfolk are said to be the people that the First Martyr, Magnus Blayne, has chosen to lead Arnesse away from the darkness and into the dawn of a bright future. Most people of the Hearthlands have a deep spiritual yearning and in the present era, they have found the Aurorym faith as an outlet for this spiritual longing. Most Hearthlanders will seek to support the faith in some way, even if they are not devout. Spreading the faith is a calling for many Hearthfolk and they tend to join groups like the hexen and aurons in far greater numbers than the Apotheca or Fayne Moirai. True to their motto, "Bring the

Dawn”, many Hearthfolk wake early to meditate with the rising of the sun and then begin a long day of hard labour. As a people, they are extremely industrious, often taking on tasks that others would turn from and do them without complaint.

From an early age, a Hearthfolk is expected to embrace the Aurorym faith and is made to choose a Patron Saint early in life whose ideals they strive to embody. They will generally carry a small shrine of their Patron Saint with them as they begin their morning meditation. Most Hearthfolk live their lives in service and among the commonfolk serfs are far more common than freefolk. These serfs are bound to their noble’s land and most spend a lifetime working that land in the hopes of earning their freedom. Often, they pass this burden along to their children, who continue to work off the debt. The work is hard and often the nobles to whom they are indebted are corrupt and unfair, overtaxing their people and treating them poorly. While some commonfolk in the Hearthlands have made attempts to rise and improve their situation, many have accepted that this is the order of things and serve their lot in life as best they can. They are not a defeated people, but one who has accepted that some must toil and some must rule. Those who have interacted with Hearthfolk find them to be some of the most honest, trustworthy, and humble people in Arnesse, thankful for every day they rise to greet the dawn.

The Troth has a long history of being rebellious to their leaders and starting conflicts. The Hearthfolk always do so under what sounds like a good pretense, but in the end, their low levels of education and lack of experience often lead them to ultimately fail. This has led many to assume those who live in the Troth are ‘bumpkins’ and failures, that they are simple folk who are not worthy of respect. But, what they lack in experience, the Hearthfolk make up for in faith, devotion, and zealotry. The fact that the Hearthfolk have carved a land out of the other protectorates and established a religion in the face of all that has opposed them over the centuries is nothing short of a miracle. While opponents may get the better of Hearthfolk in the short-term they find them to be wily and persistent opponents that often end up victorious despite even when impossible odds are stacked against them.

Years of abuse by nobles and poor treatment have made many Hearthfolk inherently distrustful, especially of nobles or other officials. As a people, they can be extremely hostile to that which they deem potential enemies. This can be troublesome when combined with the low levels of education present in the Hearthlands and strong religious beliefs of the Aurorym. In the absence of an easy explanation, many Hearthfolk jump to conclusions and extreme behaviors for things they do not

understand or their faith does not explain. Given that the Aurorym faith focuses on combating dark forces, it is quite common in for people to attribute malicious or malevolent intent behind benign things. Witchcraft is one of the the most common accusations against someone or something that does not easily fit into what is understood or believed. More than a few innocent people have suffered at the hands of a righteous mob that was attempting to purge their village of an alleged curse that was causing their crops to wither or people to be sick. While occasionally there are malevolent forces at work, the genuine cases of the supernatural are by far the minority.

Not all Hearthfolk labor as serfs or rule as nobles and quite a few have made their way in the military. For over thirty years, the army and the Fervent Order of the Vellatora have been a powerful force in the Hearthlands and their ranks have grown steadily over that period as the Paragons of Dusk have poured coin into improving the military. So, while a good number of the Hearthfolk are good with plows, many thousands are also skilled with weapons. This includes even the commonfolk in the countryside, who often are trained by knights to be ready to defend their towns or rise at a moment’s notice. This has turned the cities and villages of the Troth into encampments of militia ready to die for their faith and lord if commanded.

While there are some in the Hearthlands that are not faithful, these individuals generally keep a low profile and even then, give some lip service to the faith. These people mostly exist among the nobility and elements of the criminal underworld. It is not mandated that one join the faith, but those who do not find that their opportunities for advancement and success are limited. They also run the real risk of being shunned by their fellow Hearthfolk and commonly find themselves accused of crimes or the target of superstitious beliefs. Even those who have chosen to become criminals are known to be often be decent and even honorable individuals. They will still do what is necessary to survive and if this means killing, stealing, or lying, then so be it. Hearthfolk criminals can be particularly unkind to outsiders, who they often see as the source of their troubles. These frequently tragic figures aspire to noble, often hopeless causes, such as fighting for people or battling against oppression. But, as with many Hearthlands tales, they often meet a grim end as their ambition overreaches their ability.