

THE PROTECTORATE OF TARKATH

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 TARKATH...

Tarkath is a land of the barren and the exotic, located in the furthest Southern region of Arnesse. It is a desolate wasteland of ashen deserts filled with deadly creatures, where the very soil itself is poisonous to life. Here, House Aragon and its vassals have carved out an empire that has lasted over one thousand years. The people of Tarkath are hardy, passionate, and freedom-loving, embracing life with a wild abandon as though each day were their last. Here, some of the finest minds in Arnesse make their home. It is a haven for scholars and the home of the Apotheca. Tarkath's warriors are among the most skilled in Arnesse, striking like the snakes after which they style themselves. It is a land of curious wares and exotic goods where one can purchase almost anything for a price. Tarkath is a land unlike any in the Kingdom, with its own customs and practices that are singular among their northern neighbors; a land of fallen dragons and snakes, of ancient tombs, and lores lost long ago to the world of men.

USING THIS GUIDE

The general player supplements for Eldritch are intended to provide detailed information to those players that begin play with characters from the corresponding region. All information in this guide is to be taken as in-play, known by you and others that begin play with characters from the area or who for one reason or another would have occasion to have extensive knowledge of the area. You may over the course of Eldritch events discover new information that corresponds to your homeland, though how you choose to share this information is entirely up to your character.

MAJOR FIGURES OF TARKATH

Giles Bannon II

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

King Giles Bannon II is the King of Arnesse and despite making his home in the Kingdom's capital of Highcourt in the Sovreignlands, he is well known and widely disliked by the Tarkathi. Some may regard him as a brilliant and idealistic visionary, but most in Tarkath see him as little more than a corrupt Bannon tyrant who murdered his own father to gain the throne twelve years ago. Giles II is well known to be a follower of the Aurorym faith, a religious belief which many

in the South feel, at best, is misguided, and at worst, a threat to their future and the future of the Kingdom. The King is said to have fevered visions and now almost entirely rules the Kingdom based on the advice of visions from an imaginary prophet and his priestly counselors. There are powerful rumors in Tarkath that Giles II is entirely mad and that his advisors are merely covering for him. For many in Tarkath, Giles II has abandoned the old ways entirely, one of the few things that made Bannon rulership tolerable. There is a real fear in Tarkath that the King is soon to delcare the Aurorym faith the official and mandated religion of the entire Kingdom. Giles II's decree, instituting a series of morality laws three years ago only increased this fear as it clearly seemed targeted at the Tarkathi and their lavish, often vice-ridden lifestyles. One would be hard pressed to find any Tarkathi who supports the King's rule and thinks he should remain in power. Though few speak openly about it, the sentiment is growing stronger with each passing month that something needs to be done.

Aline Bannon

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

Aline Bannon is the wife of King Giles Bannon II. She was born into the upstart great house of Blayne, now a staunch ally of the Bannon monarchy. Even in a land of alluring women, Aline is considered very beautiful and not a few Tarkathi men are envious that a man such as Giles II is fortunate enough to have her as his wife. She is known as the Queen of Flowers because she often wears floral patterns on her outfits and is well known for requiring flowers be present as a prominent decoration in those places she frequents. Not much is known of Aline beyond the fact that she is well respected among many Tarkathi for her work with the poor and the common people. This has earned her a great deal of respect in the south. There are some who feel that she is genuinely good and that her kindness is one of the things that keeps her husband's tyranny in check. While sentiment against Giles II is often very strong, opinions of his wife are surprisingly positive, many feeling like she may be a prisoner that needs to be rescued from her terrible marriage.

Lyra Aragon

Lyra Aragon, Lady Paragon of Tarkath

Lyra Aragon is the eldest child of Lord Vaeros Aragon, the former Lord Paragon of Tarkath. Lyra is a woman of great beauty with long dark hair and eyes the color of purest silver. She has served as the Stewardess of the Dragon Throne since her father abdicated the seat to her in 746. Since then, she has been a moderate ruler, seeking to pacify increasing tensions in

Tarkath. Quite a few in Tarkath see the Lady Paragon as too moderate and not willing enough to make any aggressive moves against the tyrannical Bannon monarchy. This has caused some level of unrest among the people of the south. Lyra Aragon, like her husband Lord Nebzer, is an excellent fighter. Her favored weapons are a pair of gleaming dragonsteel daggers that are decorated with jade and ivory inlay. She will not take a champion and fights all her own duels. Lyra earned the name the Jade Asp because of the number of men and women she's sent to their graves, in battle or otherwise. In addition her roles as Lady Paragon and a famed warrior, she is also a mother of three children, Dastan, age 18, Valena, age 16, and a younger son named Sethris, who is 6.

Nebzer Aragon

Nebzer Aragon, Lord of the Spire

Nebzer Aragon is the husband of Lyra Aragon and is the First Spear of Tarkath. If Lord Nebzer has been beaten in a battle, no one has lived to tell of it. He is the best fighter in the south and while it's untested, possibly in the entire Kingdom. Nebzer is the twin brother of Mylena Durant. Once, Nebzer was as fiery as any southron warrior; a staunch proponent of marching north war, much like his sister, but after eighteen years of marriage and three children, he has less of a desire to plunge headfirst into a conflict. He and Lyra split many of the duties of rulership, managing the many affairs local to Dragonspire while the Lady Paragon handles foreign matters. Lord Nebzer is also heavily involved in raising his three children and he's been the primary tutor for Dastan and Valena. Nebzer is regarded with an almost legendary status in Tarkath. He is a fair minded and even-handed ruler but can have a vicious temper when roused. This has gotten him into more than one duel and, like his wife, he insists that he fight his own battles.

Vaeros Aragon

Vaeros Aragon, Lord Vizier of Tarkath

Lord Vaeros is the father of Lyra Aragon and the former Lord Paragon of Tarkath. Eighteen years ago, he chose to abdicate his seat to his daughter such that his family might remain in power. It was officially stated that he stepped down due to his inability to show progress on unseating the Bannons from the throne. Privately, many felt that Vaeros was weak on his half brother, King Giles I. He has been a figure shrouded in controversy though it is to Vaeros that Tarkath owes much of their modern success and stability. Vaeros is one of the finest political minds in the Kingdom, a master of the game,

creating plans within plans as he calculates the moves of Aragon's friends and enemies. Vaeros is aging but that has done little to slow him down. He is still the primary advisor to the Lady Paragon and it is not unusual for him to speak in her place when she is unavailable. His personal collection of lore and knowledge of Tarkath is said to be the rival of even the scrolls and tomes of the Apothea's Ashen Tower. His advanced age and long white hair have earned him the nickname 'the Gray Snake' in the court of Dragonspire.

Myles Aragon

Myles Aragon, Knight Master of the Blood of Ezjdar

Myles Aragon is the brash son of Lord Vaeros, brother of the Lady Paragon, and commander of House Aragon's army. Myles is not a scholar or an administrator. He is a warlord in the mold of those from the time before the Great War. To many of the common people in Tarkath he is a modern hero. Currently Lord Myles has been involved in an extensive campaign to rout and drive out the raiders near the Western Blight and the Dragon's Gate. Myles makes it no secret that he wishes to bring many of the outcast factions in Tarkath to heel or to see them eradicated entirely. This has led many to speculate that if war with the north does not come soon, that Myles may instead make targets out of the unaligned and outcast sirats in Tarkath.

HISTORY

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

Tales speak of a generation-old conflict known as the Bastard War, in which Queen Eleanor Bannon battled several half-siblings over almost a decade of bloody conflict. She proves the victor after defeating several rival claimants, until finally marrying her half-brother, Royce Wolf, a bastard, who is crowned as King Miles Bannon I. It is widely rumored that Queen Eleanor and King Miles detest each other, but a child is born from their union, Giles. King Miles had a public affair with Lady Lesha Aragon, who herself is married to the legendary warrior Ser Drevyn Durant, a knight of the Blood of Ezjdar. Miles and Lesha have a son out of wedlock named Charles and when King Miles embraces him as his own son, naming him a Bannon, Ser Drevyn is so incensed, that he boldly challenges the king to a duel to the death. Arrogant till the very end, King Miles Bannon accepts and, after refusing to elect a champion, is killed in the ensuing fight.

The Queen does not remain widowed for long, soon marrying Lord Astor Aragon, and places a member of the Aragon family on the throne as King Regent. King Astor Aragon and Queen Eleanor rule wisely for many years, seeking to restore the land to health after years of civil war left the people and the country ravaged. Both monarchs did a great deal to bring stability back to the Kingdom of Arnesse but struggle to fully restore prosperity and health to the Kingdom. Queen Eleanor and King Astor have a son born from their union, Vaeros. King Astor is like a father to young Giles and raises him to be a good and just man, seeking to prevent the boy from being corrupted and twisted by his Bannon blood. King Astor and his Queen are both well-loved by the people and to this day King Astor Aragon is lauded by the people of Tarkath as a hero; an example of what Tarkathi rulership would bring.

Giles comes of age in, and takes the throne in the time of a struggling Kingdom. Thanks to the teachings and wisdom of Astor Aragon, he proves to be a fair-minded king who spends most of his twenty-five-year reign improving the administrative structure of Arnesse. King Giles proves to be a wise administrator and, though he is not well liked by many of the people, his reign brings a great deal of prosperity to Arnesse. Among the commonfolk, Giles I is best known for his significant rework of the kingdom's legal systems, wherein he gives non-nobles more rights and protections, but also places more power in the hands of the local nobility. While some nobles use this newfound power wisely, others find it to be an effective means by which to more mercilessly abuse their people. The new laws also allow for spouses to annul marriages, though this had little impact on most commonfolk, who infrequently ended their unions.

But the cursed blood of Bannon would not be denied. King Giles I has deep flaws as a person and the people find it endlessly entertaining to gossip about his lascivious personal life. His love of women would become the stuff of legend. When he is crowned, Giles takes Lady Rosalind of House Bannon to be his queen and she bears him a son, Giles. Rumors of malcontent between he and Queen Rosalind become reality when he annuls their marriage. Almost immediately, he marries Lady Elysande of House Corveaux, who too, bears him a child, a daughter Emma. The King remains married to Elysande for several years, but he eventually tires of her. Shortly after, the Queen is accused and found guilty of adultery, resulting in her execution. Less than a year later the King marries Queen Elysande's young cousin, Alice. It is said that the King has had a love curse placed upon him, a notion that seems true when his ill-fated union to

Alice ends when she and her son Kerrigan die less than a year later in childbirth.

Within Tarkath, the current Lord Paragon, Vaeros Aragon comes under attack from his own nobles. They accuse him of not doing enough to place an Aragonese King on the throne. Despite Vaeros's insistence that there is a larger plan, he is forced to acquiesce. He narrowly manages to avoid civil war within Tarkath by wedding his daughter Lyra to Nebzer Durant and abdicating his title as Lord Paragon. In the north, the situation gets even worse as reports tell of a King Giles I that has gone quite mad, declaring that he has received a vision that the Aurorym faith would bring about the end of the Kingdom of Arnesse. In response, he passes an edict placing massive restrictions on religion throughout the Kingdom. When Giles I marries Lady Maeve Innis, the growing tensions in the Kingdom come to a breaking point.

When Queen Maeve is announced to be with child in 750, the fear of an Innis heir to the throne fuels the rumors that the King and Queen are both involved in witchcraft. These accusations are joined by powerful voices from within the Aurorym faith who claim that the King must be removed from power. In 751 Giles II, son of the King, marches on Highcourt with a rebel army to seize the throne from his father. House Aragon heeds the call to aid King Giles I in defending his throne and sends troops to resist the rebels. King Giles I refuses the aid of the Aragon troops and they are forced to watch as Giles I is defeated by his son on the battlefield at Lanton. Rumors run wild throughout the Kingdom about the Aurorym faith and how its valiant Vellatora knights carried Giles II to victory almost single-handedly. King Giles I and Queen Maeve are captured, put on trial for witchcraft, and both are burned at the stake for their crimes. Giles II is crowned King of Arnesse in 752. He promptly cements his alliance with House Blayne by marrying Aline, daughter of Lord Paragon Frederick Blayne.

THE PRESENT

The year is 763 and King Giles II has sat on the throne of Arnesse for twelve years. The King is known to be a purist, a zealot, and a dictator. He believes himself a visionary, a wise ruler who plans to usher in a new age of glory for Arnesse, but in reality has become one of the most divisive monarchs in the history of the Kingdom. He ruthlessly enforces his puritanical worldview on everyone he encounters. The pious are rewarded and the profane are punished. The King empowers those who are loyal to the Aurorym faith. Those who are not faithful are disregarded or marginalized. Those he

deems threats are killed or banished. This has sent many of the rich and power scrambling to either adopt the Aurorym faith or find other ways to gain his favor.

Fortunately for many in the south, Tarkath has always been a land apart. The people there live in such a distant and hostile environment that the events of Highcourt and the north can often feel worlds away. There is a real fear stirring in Tarkath that the spread of the Aurorym faith could change this. For while the desolation of the wastes can alone defeat armies, it is much harder to defeat an ideal. While King Giles has stopped short of making the Aurorym the official religion of Arnesse, it may only be a matter of time before he does. Many feel that should this happen, the faith of the Dawn will shake the very foundations of life in Tarkath to their core and change their way of life forever. The Tarkathi value their families, their freedom, and their traditions. As a result, most Tarkathi are extremely resistant to the idea of a foreign faith and while members of that religion are not forbidden in the southern realm, those who visit find very few friendly faces among the Tors of the south.

Since King Giles II has taken the throne, Tarkathi power in the Kingdom has slowly begun to fade. This is partially because the King does not trust the nobles of Tarkath. In addition, Tarkath is an ancient place who strongly identifies with the old ways. As such, the people of the south are wont to find themselves misunderstood and maligned. The power of the Aurorym is growing in the courts of the north and their religious teachings do not find themselves compatible the Tarkathi's excessive lifestyles. The king even goes so far as to pass a series of decrees aimed at punishing those behaviors found reprehensible by the faith to which he finds himself beholden. The edict has been met with hostility in Tarkath, where many believe it was deliberately aimed at their more liberal lifestyle choices.

House Aragon also have trouble at home. The pressure to remove King Giles II from the throne, and a general civil unrest around his rule continues to propagate. If House Aragon cannot find a way to slow this rising tide, Tarkath faces the very real threat of a civil war that would likely be so bloody it would take a generation to recover. There is an equal unhappiness over the growing Aurorym faith. A particularly vocal minority within Tarkath claims that the Aurorym prophecy foretelling the arrival of their savior, Magnus Blayne, was stolen from a Tarkathi source long ago. They claim Magnus Blayne is a false prophet and that a hero will instead rise from the south, defeat the darkness, and restore Tarkath to its former glory.

To make matters worse, the technology that sustains Tarkath is beginning to break down. Much of this technology is vital to keeping the Tors operating in the wastelands and over time, the knowledge of how to maintain and build it has been lost. This leaves many in Tarkath facing the reality that if they can't find a way to restore or repair these machines, that to survive, they must leave the wastes. This would force a great diaspora and the people of Tarkath would have to find a new home, either in the North or another region yet to be revealed.

ARAGON HIGH HOUSES

HOUSE ARAGON OF DRAGONSPIRE

Castle: Dragonspire

Ruler: Lyra Aragon, Steward of the Dragon Throne, Lady Paragon of Tarkath, the Jade Asp, the Lady of the Spire

The seat of power in Tarkath lies within the ancient Tor known only as Dragonspire. Rising from the surrounding wastes that surround it like a gleaming spike of pure white, it is the tallest architectural structure in Arnesse. Its exact age is unknown, but the the spire has existed since Tarkath was settled a millenia ago. Near the top of the tower sits a massive stone dias, upon which rests the legendary Dragon Throne, a mighty seat carved from the bones of the ancient wyrms that served beneath it. Beneath the Throne rests a smaller seat carved from bone that is reserved for the Steward of the Throne. This is where sits the Lady Paragon of Tarkath, Lyra Aragon. It has been almost two centuries since a Tarkathi sovereign has sat on the Dragon Throne. The Lord Paragons of Tarkath rule the land in the place of a monarch. By law the King of Arnesse has a claim to sit on the Throne, but no northern ruler has ever dared travel to Dragonspire.

House Aragon of Dragonspire has ruled Tarkath for almost four centuries and they have done so with a mix of politics, violence, and guile. Despite rumors to the contrary, the Aragons are known to be one of the most honorable and just families in all Arnesse. Those who see only their misdeeds and give credence to rumors fail to see that in Tarkath, to show weakness is to invite death. While the methods they employ appear harsh to outsiders, they are more survival mechanisms than genuine malice. Were it not for those methods, the more militant houses of the south would be in a near constant state of war with the north. To this end, the Aragon rulers go to great lengths to project an aura of strength whenever possible.

HOUSE ARAGON OF TALIESIN

Castle: Taliesin

Ruler: Rylen Aragon, Lord of the Golden City

Taliesin, the Golden City, was founded centuries ago by the legendary Aragonese King, Roland I. Since then, it has grown into the second largest trade city in Arnesse. A little over a decade ago, Taliesin was run by House Pyon, a vassal to the Aragon family. The Pyon family was removed from power and fled the city. Rulership of Taliesin was given to Lord Rylen Aragon and his Corveaux wife, the Lady Emmeline.

In the last decade, Taliesin has begun to flower once again as Lady Emmeline has opened the gates of the Golden City to foreign traders, visitors, and investors. Taliesin has established strong trade routes with King's Crossing to the north and the Free City of Orn to the southwest along the coast. Foreign goods flow into the city in amounts never before seen and as a result, have made the Aragons very wealthy. The Black Market, though hidden, has an extremely strong presence in this city given the thriving drug trade. Many foreign visitors specifically make a pilgrimage to Taliesin to acquire goods and services that are hard to obtain or illegal in other markets.

HOUSE ARAGON OF TOR SIRAT

Castle: Tor Sirat

Ruler: Nessa Aragon, Lady of the Heavens

If there is a center of spiritualism in the South, it is Tor Sirat. They are the keepers of Karna, the necropolis that is the final destination of those who are judged worthy by the scales of Kephrix. Tor Sirat sits on a massive rise near the end of the Khyber River and has very little in the way of martial defenses; all who make it this far into the wastes are welcomed. This is a city that knows little prejudice. All are equals who come to Tor Sirat in peace. Here, there are no grand palaces or sweeping spires, all things left simple so that its residents might come to focus on what lies beyond the realm of the physical. The residents of the city seek to create sacred spaces wherein visitors and residents can pray, meditate, and exchange ideas with others.

Tor Sirat is ruled by Lady Nessa Aragon, known to many as the Serene Lady of the Heavens. She is a fair minded and wise noble who has done much to grow the Tor over her two decades as ruler. As part of her quest for enlightenment, Lady Nessa has taken a Vow of Sanctity, swearing to take no lover or spouse and eschewing many pleasures of the physical

world. Tor Sirat is open to any who can survive the journey to reach it. It is not uncommon for those seeking enlightenment to travel there on pilgrimage and quite a few choose to stay, joining the ranks of the Ysai, or the Heavensworn, who serve as attendants, guides, and guards. While few can contest that strange, even inexplicable visions when visiting Tor Sirat, skeptics are quick to blame shifting winds carrying hallucinogenic gases bubbling up from great crevasses in the Valley of Vapors to the south.

HOUSE ARAGON OF TOR OBOLUS

Castle: Tor Obolus

Ruler: Ormund Aragon, Lord of the Underworld

If there is a veiled sister to Tor Sirat, it is Tor Obolus. At the end of the River Tethys lies a series of great rents in the earth that lead into a complex network of tunnels, caves, and caverns that are collectively known as Tor Obolus. Night and day, the burning fires within the tunnels cause a pitch-black smoke to pour out of the crevasses into the sky, darkening it for miles in each direction. Whereas Tor Sirat is about spiritualism and ascension, Tor Obolus is about revelation and the acquisition of power, no matter the cost. In all of Tarkath, only House Durant has a greater focus on its military and matters of war. The Aragons of Tor Obolus also have a keen interest in mysticism, welcoming oracles and other spiritualists, a practice uncommon among other High Houses of Tarkath. The Sisterhood of the Fayne Moirai are often shunned from many southern courts, but are welcomed in Tor Obolus.

Lord Ormund Aragon is the ruler of Tor Obolus and if there is a creature that does not fit the mold of a House Aragon noble, it is him. He is known to be vicious, petty, and cruel. What transpires within the depths of Tor Obolus is unknown by most, but it is said that the living can go there to be cleansed of their dark transgressions. Those who seek redemption are said to make a pilgrimage to Tor Obolus and there, the Lords of the Underworld will seek to purge them of their pain, their guilt, and their wickedness. It is said that some who undertake the pilgrimage never return, though there are doubly as many stories as to why as there are storytellers.

The nobles of Tor Obolus are also known for keeping the rare and deadly basilisk as a pet. While a wild basilisk is impossible to tame, if they are raised from a hatchling, it is possible to "domesticate" them. Tor Obolus a feared place for most Tarkathi and stories of what is rumored to go on within its depths are fodder for tales meant to frighten children into behaving themselves. An ancient Tarkathi proverb says that in

life or in death, the wicked will find that all roads lead them to the Underworld.

HOUSE DURANT

Castle: Tor Amnon

Ruler: Mylena Durant, the Black Asp, Lady of Tor Amnon

It was once said that the fire within a dragon's breast never stopped burning and that its heat could only be contained for so long. House Durant never got over the wound left by the death of their allies. Some Tarkathi turned to drugs and vice to stem their deep-seeded depression, but the Durants have only filled that void with rage and anger. House Durant vowed a Shere, or blood oath, to seek revenge for the death of the dragons and to see Tarkath restored to the Dragon Throne. They will not rest until this is done. Their warriors are among the finest in all of Tarkath and they are also specialists in fighting within the wastes. This makes them deadly to any force that wishes to invade the south. House Durant controls one of the largest armies among the noble families in Tarkath, second only to House Aragon.

Lady Mylena Durant is the ruler of Tor Amnon, the so-called "Gateway to Tarkath". As a stop on the road between Taliesin and Tor Oman, the city sees a large amount of trade passing through every day. The irony of the monicker, "Gateway to Tarkath" is that so few actually are able to cross the ashen wastes to reach the mighty statues that overlook Tor Amon. Crossing the desolation of the Field of Bones is the first test anyone faces when they enter Tarkath. The ground before them is littered with those who were unprepared. Lady Mylena is a good ruler to the native Tarkathi and she is well loved by her people. Like her twin brother Nebzer Durant, husband of the Lady Paragon Lyra, she is a master with a weapon and is considered one of the most formidable fighters in Tarkath.

HOUSE ALBARN

Castle: Tor Emon

Ruler: Oberan Albarn, Lord of the Mists

At the Western end of the Valley of Vapors near the foot of the Vokun Mountains, lies Tor Oman, the City of the Dead. This impressive Tor is notable for its numerous towers. The tallest is the Dreaming Spire, the seat of Lord Oberan Albarn and House Albarn. Almost as tall is the Ashen Tower, home of the Apothea. Many think the Apotheon is the true home of the Apothea, but many Magisters know that place to be the Ashen Tower. While less is kept here, it is said that the order's most secret and valuable items are stored within its lowest

levels. The other towers of Tor Oman are home to lesser nobles, and those of wealth. The residents learned early on that with the frequent winds, the noxious, hallucinogenic gas from the Valley of Vapors would find their way into the Tor. Those who did not wish to be subjected to its effects built their homes above it. For the rest of Tor Oman, exposure to the "Green Mist" has left long-term residents as little more than mindless automatons who wander the street in an addled stupor. It is this that has earned Tor Oman the moniker, the City of the Dead. During the times when the mists are not present in the city, the residents who are regularly exposed seek refuge in drug dens within the city known as Dream Houses, where they can acquire mind-altering substances to hold them over until once again the fel winds find their way back to the city.

The ruler of Tor Oman is Lord Oberan Albarn. He is an old man and in failing health, having ruled the Tor for the better part of thirty years. His wife died long ago and two of his sons joined the Apothea. Oberan's eldest son is Edgar Albarns, a man known to be cruel and a bit of a sadist. Increasingly, Edgar has taken the reigns of rulership from his father and Tor Oman is no better for it. Life within Tor Oman is very hard for those without wealth or position. Many who make this place their home are trapped by some combination of addiction and no ability or coin to escape the city. Because of this, many commonfolk in Tor Oman are treated little better than slaves. They are often used in work camps or other types of physical labor and paid very little, often in drugs. Most of the populace despise the Albarns' rulership but few have the will, let alone the strength to rise up and provide any real resistance to their rule.

HOUSE VOREL

Castle: Tor Emon

Ruler: Geddon Vorel, Lord of the Harvest

Tor Emon sits astride the River Emon in eastern Tarkath. In this desolate land, Tor Emon is a treasure beyond gold or gems; arable land can support agriculture. Long ago, great feats of civil engineering bifurcated the River Emon and created an island between the two waterways. A combination of irrigation systems and dams allowed the Tarkathi to control the level of the water and actually flood the island, washing away much of the poison and ash and replacing it with fertile mud. It was on this island that they were then able to plant crops. The harvests were poor at first but with the long growing seasons in the South and man years of hard work, they grew bountiful. Today, the farmlands of Tor Emon have grown beyond the island and extend twenty miles or more to

the north and south of the city. While their yield is far from enough to feed all the people of Tarkath, some feel that it the start of the revitalization of the wastes. Tor Emon is almost a world apart from the rest of Tarkath. It is green and lush in a place where the land is all but withered and dead. Sprawling across the upper terraces of the Tor is the Arboretum, a massive garden that spans three levels of the city. It is said to be one of the finest gardens in all of the Kingdom, filled with rare plants once native to Tarkath but are now all but extinct in Arnesse.

Tor Emon sits astride the River Emon, which is a way that an invader could use to travel deeper into the wastes. To prevent this, the Vorels have built a number of dams and cataracts they can use to either make the river more treacherous to travel or blockade it entirely. The River Emon actually divides the Tor into two halves, running through a deep chasm that it carved between two massive spires. Most of the residents of Tor Emon live on one side while the other is for working, storage, or shopping. The Tor contains several markets and visitors come to Tor Emon from all over Tarkath to acquire fresh produce and livestock. From the spires of Tor Emon one could easily see a blackened, blighted land spread out to the east and into the shadowy Espar Mountains. This is the fabled Dead Kingdom. Here the living dare not go and expect to return. Whatever tale holds the truth about what is here, it is powerful and evil.

HOUSE VAITH

Castle: Tyranthis

Ruler: Damon Vaith, Lord of the Delta

House Vaith was founded as the result of a dispute between House Rourke and House Aragon. A truce was reached and was sealed with the marriage of an Aragon nobleman to a Rourke lady. Tyranthis occupies a prime position on the Emon delta and has a fine deep-water harbor which makes it a port of call for large shipping vessels. Tyranthis is a bustling port city that bears the marks of Aragon and Rourke influence. White stone manors with beautiful, swept roofs stand next to ramshackle wooden buildings that sit at slightly odd angles due to their poor and hasty craftsmanship. Whatever planning had gone into the layout of the city has been abandoned in the two centuries since House Vaith took power. The city streets now are twisted, dark, and confusing to navigate, leaving many who are unfamiliar with them lost in one of its many bad neighborhoods. Tyranthis is a frequent destination for those who seek passage deeper into Tarkath. If one wishes to travel into the wastes, this is one of the best places to find a guide. But travellers should be warned as there are at least as many charlatans as genuine guides here,

each selling “priceless” treasures supposedly stolen from the tombs and tunnels of Tarkath, or offering services to take adventurers down the River Emon. They pray upon the unwary and will very likely leave them stranded on a riverbank after making off with their valuables.

The Lord Damon Vaith, is a handsome rake in his late forties who once had a career on the seas in his youth that earned him the nickname “The Butcher” and one less eye. He is equally as ruthless in politics as he was on the water. Life in Tyranthis can be dangerous and difficult, but also extremely lucrative if one is willing to take some risks. Tyranthis calls itself a city but operates more like a Rourke freeport. Lord Vaith does not pay much attention to the daily affairs of the city and laws of any sort are only enforced when it suits him to do so. Those who are strong, cunning, and entrepreneurial can do very well for themselves, but death is only a turn down the wrong alley for someone who is careless or makes the wrong enemies. If the dangers of the city are not enough, just beyond its walls is Deathlight Swamp, said to be one of the most haunted and forsaken landscapes in all Arnesse. While passage through the swamp by boat is reliable enough, those who enter on foot are rarely seen again, said to be lured to their deaths by phantom lights.

THE TRADITIONS OF TARKATH

Unlike other lands, Tarkath is very removed from the culture of the north and as a result has been able to keep some of its rites, festivals, and practices fairly intact. Though these are still practiced, they are by no means accepted or recognized by the monarchy or by most northern societies. Most of these practices are seen as primitive and barbaric by the rest of Arnesse. Because of concerns over being accused of witchcraft, Tarkathi who practices these does so with some amount of discretion, far away from the eyes of outsiders.

KHOMDAL

This rite of passage was once a requirement for all those coming of age in Tarkath but in the modern has become less and less common. When a young person reaches the age of eighteen, they travel into the wastes with minimal supplies for eighteen days, one for each year they have lived. Those who survive earn the right to undergo the Saar ritual, in which they are blooded and given a Saarkat, or a blood name. While it is rare today, many would-be warriors still seek to perform the Khomdal as a sign of strength, spending a good portion of

their teenage years preparing themselves for the trial. It is said that one cannot become a member of the Blood of Ezjdar or rule Tarkath without undergoing the Khomdal.

AMSHERE

While some Tarkathi choose to be married in the northern tradition, others choose to undertake the Amshere, or the blood union. While the ritual shares many of the similarities to other marriage traditions, it is often recited entirely in High Tarkan. It is not uncommon for there to be a combat between the bride and the groom in advance of any exchange of vows. The winner has the right to refuse the loser if they feel they did not fight well. The fight can be merely ritual but is just as often lethal. The ritual itself involves mixing and drinking of the blood of the bride and groom followed by a series of complicated oaths. The bride and groom then have High Tarkan runes scarred into their flesh to seal the marriage.

THE FESTIVAL OF DJET

Also known as the Feast of the New Cycle and is a day that all Tarkathi celebrate a new year. On the first day of Djet, a blessing is said to welcome in the next twelve lunar phases followed by several days of drinking, dancing, and feasting. This festival celebrates the cycle of rebirth, life and death, with thanks being given to the previous twelve moon cycles and blessings offered for the of moon cycles to come. This is often a day when major events and people from the last moon cycles are publicly honored and remembered by loved ones.

DUAT

This is known as the Day of the Dragons, when Tarkathi remember their fallen comrades and honor them with gifts and prayers. Duat is a day of great sadness and is marked by ritualistic drug use, stories of the days past, and martial battles to decide whom is the worthiest in the eyes of the Semut, or the Dragon Spirits. All people are expected to donate gifts within their means that will be loaded into a caravan and sent south, to the necropolis of Septhis, the Dragon Tombs. The victors in the tournaments are given the special honor of escorting the caravan to Septhis. There, special offerings are made to the fallen dragons and the gifts are secured in their tombs. This caravan has led to rumors of incredible wealth within Septhis.

FESTIVAL OF SHABATI

Known as the Feast of Plenty, this is held in the high months of Summer and is meant to commemorate the founding of the Tors amid the wastes of Tarkath. Leading up to Shabati, many in Tarkath will fast for up to two weeks, drinking only water and eating very little food. Shabati marks the breaking of the

fast and what follows is three days of feasting and drinking. The fast is broken by a lone rider who represents Arric the Argent, the hero of legend who founded Dragonspire, entering the city bearing a container of water, brought from another city in Tarkath. In a ritual known as the Rite of Waters, that liquid is mixed with the well at the heart of the Tor and thus, are the people reminded that all Tarkathi are of one people and that they will live or die as one people. The Feast of Plenty is a time well known for forgiveness and healing, when disputes and grudges are settled and set aside.

FESTIVAL OF HEKAT

The mythic realm of Hekat is said to be a place of primal beauty, brimming with life and positive energy. The Festival of Hekat is a celebration of life and all its pleasures that takes place in the fourth moon cycle of a year. During this multi-day event, men and women who have newly come of age are honored with drinking, dancing, and drugs. The handsomest man and most beautiful woman are crowned the King and Queen of Hekat and treated with special honor. Those who have come of age are encouraged to indulge all their senses and give themselves over to the pleasures of the flesh. This holiday is a highly sexual event and couplings of all manner are common between a variety of partners. It is this festival more than any other that is celebrated in the south that has given Tarkath a reputation as a land of promiscuity and debauchery.

FESTIVAL OF UDJAT

The mythical realm of Udjat is said to be a great labyrinth filled with shadows and eternal darkness. During the week-long festival of Udjat, people gather and make pilgrimages to the tombs of those they have lost bearing gifts to honor their loved ones or the great heroes of the past. Udjat typically takes place during the ninth cycle of the moon in a year. The cities of Tor Sirat and Tor Obolus overflow with visitors seeking to make their way to the necropolis and give their gifts over to the Tombkeepers. The Veiled Market in Tor Obolus and Canopic Market of Tor Sirat swell with thousands of new visitors seeking gifts. Udjat is a festival to remember those who have departed, but also reminds others of what they have not yet finished. Many Tarkathi reserve this as a time to swear oaths and finish business that has yet to be finished. As with many Tarkathi festivals, Udjat is also filled with feasting and drinking. Interestingly, drug use during Udjat is not as common as people need their wits while on pilgrimage.

GEBAL

Gebal directly follows the Festival of Udjat in the tenth moon cycle of a year. This is not a festival but a warning to others that on this day the veil between the world of the living and the dead is at its thinnest, and that the dead may be found to walk with the living. It is a time to connect with their departed loved ones through séance, though also a time of terror, when people ward doors against creatures that stalk in the darkness, just out of sight. The bravest do not hide in their homes but dress up like the dead and wander the night, going from door to door and placing the blood of freshly slain goats upon the mantle. It is said that when the dead come to a house marked with blood, they will take so much time licking it up that the dawn will come, banishing them back to their tomb. Within those homes the living gather and tell stories of the terrors of the wastes and hug their loved ones close until the dawn comes.

THE CULT OF HESET & AMMET

The Tarkathi also understand death is an omnipresent force in the world, especially in the land of Tarkath. When the Gods were slain, the people of Tarkath turned to the only higher power that they knew remained - Death. In the north, they call her Lirit, but in the south, she is revered as both Heset, the Great Mother, who pours a person's spirit, or Ket, into their flesh when they are born, and Ammet, Keeper of the Underworld, who determines into which realm a Ket will pass upon dying. The Tarkathi believe that the spirits of those who die never truly leave this world and that they remain, watching over the living and are able to grant wisdom from beyond the grave. As a result, they have created complicated death rituals that preserve and prepare the body and spirit for the journey into the afterlife. These rituals involve the removal of the deceased's organs as well as a mummification process so that the deceased's body is preserved for eternity.

The mourners of the dead make a pilgrimage to Nekros, the City of Tombs, to hand their deceased over to Nekrite priests who prepare the departed by weighing their organs upon a great scale known as the Kephrix. Those judged worthy by the scales are placed upon a funerary barge and sent down the Khyber River to Tor Sirat, where they are laid to rest in the Necropolis of Karna, ascending to the Heavens to guide and watch over those who still live. Those who are judged unworthy are placed upon a barge and sent down the Tethys River to Tor Obolus, where they are laid to rest in the Necropolis of Abydos, their Ket sent to the Underworld to suffer tortures for all eternity. It is said that those fail to undergo these rites have their Ket stuck between worlds and will not rest in peace. They will be doomed to wander the

land as an undead and seek to ruin the lives of those who yet live.

It is worth noting that there is a special order of priests known as the Tombkeepers who take custody of the bodies once they reach Karna or Abydos. Little is known about this group other than that they wear dark robes that do not allow their faces to be seen and that all members of the Tombkeepers have their eyes removed so that they might not ever witness what they see within the depths of the necropolis.

O my heart ...

Do not stand up against me as a witness!

Do not create opposition against me among the assessors!

Do not tip the scales against me in the presence of the Kephrix!

You are my soul which is in my body,

The great Heset who makes my flesh sound.

When you go forth to the Hereafter,

My name shall not stink to the courtiers who create people on his behalf.

Do not tell lies about me in the presence of Ammet!

-Prayer to Ammet & Heset

THE BLOOD OF TARKATH

Blood has been featured prominently in Tarkathi culture for many centuries. Though none now remember the blood rites rumored to have taken place in ancient times, the people of the south honor their heritage by involving blood in many parts of their modern society. The most prominent examples are that oaths are sealed with a blood pact known as a Shere wherein the participants cut themselves and place the blood upon a contract. Some will mix the blood with the sealing wax just to keep the page cleaner. Traditional Tarkathi wedding ceremonies always involve blood to seal the union between partners and vengeance against a foe is often sworn by cutting one's self to demonstrate intent to commit the task.

Blood debts are common in Tarkath. If one is unable to pay a debt in traditional currency they offer to swear a Shere to someone instead. If one saves another's life, it is customary to be able to ask a blood debt from them if the person is lower in station. If the person is higher in station, they may ask for a Homdar, blood price. The individual must grant the blood price if it is asked of them. While in modern days a Homdar is sometimes paid in coin or other goods, it is not uncommon to ask for payment in actual blood. The amount asked for can be a few drops or as a gesture of final gratitude, a life.

TARKATHI LEGENDS

QUEEN VALENA, THE MOTHER OF TARKATH

In the wake of the Great War that devastated the land, the very magic that protected the Tors and all life in Tarkath disappeared entirely. A woman, the last of the line of ancient dragon lords, rose to lead the people. Her name was Valena and she was one of the greatest minds of her age and perhaps any other. She witnessed the devastation wrought upon Tarkath and, seeking to save her people, scoured the libraries for any knowledge of the ancients that might aid her. In doing so, she was able to construct devices using lost technology that, while not magic, served to protect the Tors once again. The Tarkathi people were so grateful that they chose her to lead them as the first Queen of Tarkath. For the next three decades, Valena worked tirelessly to rebuild and strengthen Tarkath. Almost all modern Tarkathi culture, technology, and government can trace its origins back to her rule and she is openly revered by many as the Mother of Tarkath. Statues of Valena are very common sights throughout the region and she is often prayed to by those who seek guidance or aid in a difficult endeavor. The name Valena is commonly given to female Tarkathi who are especially blessed, special, or born beneath a favorable sign.

ROLAND I, THE LAST GOD KING OF TARKATH

The legends speak of a Tarkathi King of old named Roland, who was descended from the line of the noble Queen Valena. He was the last God King of Tarkath to sit upon the Dragon Throne and is revered among many in the south for his bravery and wisdom. It is said that Roland led an army into the north and attacked the home of House Bannon in Highcourt, unseating a corrupt King from power and taking the throne of Arnesse for Tarkath. In doing so, he became known as the “King with Two Crowns”, as he sat upon the both the Dragon Throne in Tarkath and the throne of Arnesse. His reign was marked as a time of great peace and prosperity in the Kingdom. A time when the people of Tarkath could freely venture forth into the north, spreading their culture and influence. Among many modern Tarkathi, Roland is the very pinnacle of what a Lord of the South should be – a scholar, a warrior, a philosopher. They long to find a ruler who can take up his mantle and lead them to victory against the tyrannical lords in the north. There are countless legends of his exploits, including a popular book known as the “Deeds of Roland”, which tells the tale of his meteoric rise to power and of his tragic downfall.

LOST CITY OF NEFRAS

It is said that once, Tarkath was a lush, green land that was home to beings even older than the Gods of the Eldra. Stories say they lived in a mystical city known as Nefras that was said to be made of solid gold and held the secrets on the very nature of existence. The stories go on to say that there was a massive war between the ancients and the Gods that ripped the land apart. The resulting destruction scoured Tarkath free of all life and soured the soil with poison. The story does not say what happened to Nefras other than that the city was swallowed in a great cataclysm. Still there are tales of those who have travelled into the deepest parts of the wastelands and said that there, they have seen an ephemeral, shimmering golden city half buried in ash and always just out of reach. There are those who dismiss this as a mirage or hallucination, but the rare expedition still braves the Deep Waste searching for Nefras to this very day.

HAKKAN & THE BAND OF THIEVES

The story is told of a man named Hakkan. His brother marries a wealthy woman, but Hakkan finds a poor wife and lives as a poor man. While foraging in the wastes, Hakkan spies a group of thieves accessing a secret cave with the words ‘bex saag zey’. He goes into the cave using the words and finds a horde of gold coins. He takes a bag of coins home to his wife, but his greedy brother finds out Hakkan’s secret. The brother goes to the cave and steals as much treasure as he can but is caught inside and killed by the thieves. Hakkan recovers the body with the help of Merena, his brother’s servant. In the process, Hakkan’s identity is discovered by the thieves and they mark his home for death. In the process they are spied by Merena and Hakkan is able to mark another house in the neighborhood to throw them off the trail. This happens twice more and eventually Hakkan and Merena are able to trick the thieves and kill them all. The story ends with the leader of the thieves making a final bid to kill Hakkan in his home only to be foiled by the cunning Merana, who is then wed to his son in thanks for her services.

THE SHAITAN

Legends tell of someone finding an object deep in the wastes who appearance betrays it to be of value. When touched, a smoky mist emerges from within and the air fills with the smell of brimstone. The mist coalesces into a shape not unlike that of a man yet bears a number of unnatural, animalistic features. The creature offers three wishes in exchange for a drop of blood, though those who agree to its demands eventually find that anything these beings give is but poison and ash. The tales call them the Shaitan, or Ash Fiends. Their true origins are unknown and scholars have speculated

that if they do exist, they may be some kind of being from Tarkath's ancient past; trapped remnants from a forgotten age. While tales warn people not to traffic with the Shaitan, stories of those who seek to outwit the foul creatures still seem to propagate.

THE SIX ETERNALS

All know of the death rites of Tarkath, of the necropoli of Karna and Abydos. But there is said to be a darker tale of death in Tarkath. Once, there existed six of the greatest warriors to ever live in Tarkath, known only as the Six Spears. They defended the weak, upheld the law, and saw that justice was done in the land. While they rode across Tarkath, it was said that evil knew fear and had no hold over the people. But they were betrayed by a man they trusted; a Lord in the service to dark powers who bore the name of Ashet. The Six Spears were murdered. Worried they would not be given proper rites, a group of their loyal followers took their bodies away to a secret tomb deep in the wastes between Karna and Abydos. They gave them the death rites and sealed the tomb, each taking poison to ensure they would never tell the tale of its location. It is said that, when called, the Six Spears will rise from their tomb and walk the earth. Though not in the name of justice and the law, but for vengeance. In modern days, they have come to be known as the Six Eternals and it is said if one speaks all six names and offers the proper prayer, they will seek revenge upon the named. It is also said that at the end of days, when all is lost, the Six Eternals will rise from their tombs of old to fight alongside the people for the glory of Tarkath. To this day the name Ashet is never used by parents.

BEASTS OF TARKATH

Tales abound of terrifying creatures that stalk the wilds of Tarkath. Most of these stories are used to scare children, but one would not have to go far in Tarkath to find adults who believed they were real and have stories to tell of them.

THE NASNAS

Said to be the spawn of a dark spirit and a human, tales say these foul creatures can strip a person of their flesh just by touching them. They are said to have half a head and half of every human body part, capable of great leaps to catch human prey.

THE QUTRUB

Stories say this creature is almost hairless and lives in and around places of the dead such as necropoli and tombs. They

are said to stalk these places and devour fresh corpses. They will, with equally vile enthusiasm and terrible ferocity rend the flesh of the living given a lack of corpses.

THE QUAREEN

Sometimes referred to as doppelgangers, these creatures are said to be the spiritual copy of a person. Appearing as ghostly visages of the living, the Quareen are said to be the heralds of death. Should a Quareen present themselves as your likeness, your end is nigh. It is said that the person who dies cannot be truly put to rest until the Quareen is hunted down and destroyed.

THE HATIF

Whether the Hatif are spectral phenomenae or just one of the hallucinations of the waste is unclear. They are said to be disembodied voices that convey important messages to travellers in the wasteslands. Though whenever the origin of the voice is pursued, nothing is found. Other interpretations of this story are perhaps more insidious, claiming that these voices imitate lost loves, luring desert travelers out amongst the hardpacked, scorched earth, and often to their deaths.

THE WEREJACKALS

Like the north is plagued by tales of wolves who take the form of men, in Tarkath legends are told of jackals that can do the same. These beasts are said to roam in packs, hunting for living flesh but will eat just about anything that they can find. This makes them especially dangerous in Tarkath, where meals in the wild are few and far between.

INDUSTRY OF TARKATH

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

In a land as desolate as Tarkath, options for industry are extremely limited. Much of what is acquired in the south is used there. From an early time, the Tarkathi have had to focus on quality over quantity to maximize their profits. They also have taken advantage of the fact that much of what is made in Tarkath is seen as exotic and exclusive in the north. Thus, their industry is focused primarily on goods for the wealthy. Some of the rarest and most sought after spices are produced in the dry southern climate. The Dune Moth, a native of

Tarkath produces an extremely soft, lustrous silk that is then woven into some of the finest fabric in the Kingdom. Tarkath is also home to the deadly vore spider which, while its venom is able to kill a man in a single day. Its silk is both tough and supple and vore spider silk can be woven into garments that are extremely hardy and soft. Tarkathi masters sew spider silk into fine clothing and make it strong enough to turn a blade.

Some of the finest and most expensive perfumes in all Arnesse come from the South and it's said that a scent from Tarkath has a strange, almost magical power to seduce a lover. While Tarkath has no vineyards, it brews several unique liquors and beers with the grains that it imports. Tarkathi distill a potent draught of liquor called the Blood of the Dragon for its rich red color and fiery taste. Tarkath is also well known for brewing of all manner of potions, elixirs, and decoctions. The finest alchemists in Arnesse are found there and if one is seeking a substance of any kind, there are few better places to look than the South. Rumors persist that those who seek less-than-legal goods such as poisons or drugs can find them hidden in secret markets and alleys of Tarkath.

With how desolate and dangerous Tarkath was, it would be easy to think that few were willing to brave the wastes to move goods through it. The South has more markets than anywhere in Arnesse and has the most active trade industry in the Kingdom. House Aragon made it a priority to build a strong relationship with the Cirque and with the constant need to keep Tarkath supplied, there is a steady supply of gold for those who are willing to risk the dangers of travelling here and fulfill that need. In exchange, merchants can bring caravans of rare and exotic goods from the South that can be sold at premium prices at any market. The further North one takes those goods, the higher the price that can be demanded by the merchant. Cirque caravans in Tarkath are known as the Crimson Cortege due to their red flags and wagon covers. The red color actually has a more mundane purpose as it is easily seen against the grey landscape at great distances from high vantages. The colors make it easy to spot when a caravan is coming along a trade route and serves as a warning to raiders that the caravan protected and owned by the Cirque guild.

Though not an industry, Tarkathi markets are known to often have lore, artifacts, and treasures for sale. Sellers often claim that it is loot stolen from an ancient tomb within the wastes, the treasure horde of a bandit lord, or even from the vaults of the Ashen Tower itself. Much of this is fake, but if rumors are to be believed, the deepest parts of the wastelands are filled with ancient ruins and tombs that hold untold mysteries and

treasures. Occasionally those brave enough to take the risks and survive come back to markets with legitimate valuables. Those who have an eye for forgeries and are willing to risk punishment for purchasing stolen goods or the occasional death curse can possibly find real treasure in the marketplace.

THE PROTECTORATE OF TARKATH

The Protectorate of Tarkath is a wide wasteland in the South of Arnesse that stretches between the Vokun Mountains to the West and the Espar Mountains to the East. As one travels South through the lush greenery of the Midlands the lands quickly transform, becoming increasingly barren near the gap between the Vokun Range and the Spires of Castellan known as Snake's Neck. South of there, all plant life becomes brown and withered, eventually disappearing and being replaced by nothing but extremely fine, rocky soil. The landscape of Tarkath is open and flat with outcroppings of rock dotting the landscape at regular intervals. Not even the remains of plant life exist here. This land has been dead for so long that even the remnants of life have disappeared. Birds and mammals are rare, but some genuinely hardy creatures have found a way to adapt to life in the wastes. All of them are either reptiles, insects, or arachnids of some kind and almost all are deadly poisonous. In the harsh landscape of Tarkath, only the strongest and most vicious can survive.

Few places in Arnesse are as desolate and inhospitable as Tarkath. Those who have not visited often speak of it as a vast desert of sand, but the soil of Tarkath is laden with very fine ash that has permanently rendered it unable to sustain life. The soil also contains a substance known as scrith that is poisonous when inhaled over time. In addition to the typical dangers of exposure and lack of both food and water, the traveller in Tarkath must contend with the fact that the very earth on which they walk on is trying to kill them. The amount of scrith in soil varies throughout the Protectorate and some areas are less dangerous than others. Unexplored regions have more scrith than those which are inhabited. In the unsettled regions, known as the Deep Wastes, it is said that it is impossible to survive outside unprotected for more than a single day. Scrith is commonly used as a base for most of the poisons made in Tarkath. It not only increases their toxicity, but allows them to stay potent longer in the air on weapons. It can also be rendered into very fine powder that dissolves quickly in liquid or is very easily blown into the air.

To travel deeper, outsiders likely must employ a guide. The best in Tarkath are known as Dustrunners and their services do not come cheaply. Dustrunners use special suits and masks that filter out scritch so that they can survive longer in the wastes. They are also said to set up numerous shelters around Tarkath known as wadi which contain stashes of food, water, and are more secure from the harsh environment. The Tarkathi city of Taliesin is the best place to hire Dustrunners. Further South, the Tors of Tarkath lie hundreds of miles apart. Finding them without a reliable map and the skills to navigate the wastes is surely suicide given that there are no water sources and the only food is deadly poisonous. The Tors are impressive, rising from the flat landscape of Tarkath like giant rock monoliths. It is said that they are naturally occurring structures but legends say they were constructed using mighty magics. The Tors have mystic wards that keep them free of the poison, though the Tarkathi themselves are especially resistant to scritch. Two hundred miles South of the border into the Midlands, the might River Emon cuts a wide channel through the wastes, eventually dividing into two smaller rivers, the Khyber and the Tethys. These rivers are all treacherous for the inexperienced to travel on and are filled with a dark water that is tainted with scritch. Thanks to their resistance to the poison the Tarkathi can drink it, but others experience illness, delusions, memory loss and in time, death.

The weather in the South of Arnesse is hot and dry. While one might think that the Vokun Mountains act as a rain catch for Western Tarkath, the flow of winds takes much of the wet weather to the North where it falls on the Sovereignlands. While there is rainfall in Tarkath it is rare, it is more common in the West near Tor Oman and the Western Blight and in the East near Tyranthis and the Emon Delta. The wastes can be unrelentingly hot during most times of the year and when the winds kick up it can create a 'grey out' during which one can barely see a few feet in front of them through the grey haze. The wind can also create ash spires, tornadoes made of ash and dust that vary from a few feet in height to hundreds. The worst of all the weather hazards are the mighty ash storms, during which winds can rage over two hundred miles an hour, kicking up massive amounts of ashen soil and rocks. If the winds don't kill a man, the storms are poisonous enough to severely sicken anyone exposed to them without protection.

DRAGONSPIRE

Home to approximately sixty thousand souls, Dragonspire is one of the oldest cities in Arnesse. Legends say that it was founded by the hero Arric the Argent in the Elder Days when he made a deal with the ancient dragon Menat to share the mystical well known as the Lifespring. Approaching Dragonspire, one would note that the tor's rocks rise almost

four hundred feet in a sheer cliff face. Passage into the tor is granted only by a complex series of elevators. There are rumors of other ways to get in and out, but if they exist they are all closely guarded secrets. The center of the Tor has been hollowed out and within is a massive pit. Emerging from the center is a massive, white stone tower that rises above the rock walls of the Tor to a height of over one thousand feet. Living quarters for residents are built into the rock walls on the inside of the Tor and are linked by a series of stairwells and lit by crystals that glow in low light. The wealthy of Dragonspire live in the highest tiers of the walls with the poor and visitors being forced to live on the Tor's floor in an orderly array of stone huts that extend from the spire's base.

The Dragonspire itself is a massive structure that it is said has a nearly uncountable number of rooms, halls, and passages. In the ancient days, when the city was thriving and alive, the tower was often full and often used. Now, the Aragons barely use the upper quarter for their own living quarters and administrative needs of the Protectorate. Though few ever are given access, the spire is built around the Lifespring itself, providing fresh water for all Dragonspire's residents. The visitor may notice that there is a surprisingly large amount of high technology here. From the elevators that lift people into the Tor to the indoor plumbing available in most of the homes to the wonderful public baths and pools that are available for all to use. Though the city itself is built out of the very rock, it is appointed with a luxury and wealth not seen in Northern cities. Vibrant paints, mosaics, and rare materials decorate the walls in the wealthy areas. The low quarters are not as well appointed but are kept clean and well designed. Water flows through parts of the city in rivers and along trestles and plants brought in from all over Arnesse bring stone and rock to life.

TALESIN

Built around the massive fortress known only as the Jackal's Tooth, a vibrant mix of stone hovels and tents sprawl out in a haphazard way from the city's center. Taleisin is not a Tor, but a city in the traditional sense. The fortress dominates the center and close to it is the Golden Quarter, where the wealthy and the nobles live. A fifty-foot wall separates the Golden Quarter from the Market Quarter where most of the merchants and tradesman make their homes and living. There are three formal markets Golden Market, Ash Market, and the Sand Market but a good deal of commerce goes on outside those venues. A thirty-foot wall separates the Market Quarter from the Ashen Quarter, where the lower classes make their homes.

Beyond the Ashen Quarter is Shacktown, barely more than a series of tents and hastily assembled shanties that shelter the

homeless and those with no useful skills. Life in Shacktown is hard and dangerous. Even though the amount of scritch and ash in Taliesin is less than in other regions, living out in the open air without any kind of protection can be hazardous to one's health. The city guard does not patrol Shacktown and the crime rates are high; thefts, murders, and muggings happen every day. Taliesin sits at the end of the longest highway in Arnesse, the mighty Aurean Road. A near constant stream of caravans, carts, and travellers on foot passes under the gates to the Market Quarter under the watchful eye of the Golden Guard, the city's official watch for Taliesin. This city is frequented by quite a few from the North who want to get a 'taste of the South' but not risk travelling deeper into Tarkath. A thriving tourist trade has cropped up and merchants and guides cater to outsiders who come to Taliesin with full coin purses looking to sample some exotic pleasures from Tarkath.

SERAPIS

The sirat of Serapis is located a hundred miles to the East of Taliesin, South of the Spires of Castellán. The term sirat comes from the ancient tongue and means 'sanctuary'. Sirats are not as large as Tors, but feature significant respite from the wastes and some type of reliable water source. Many sirats are underground, built into caverns and cravasses to keep off the heat and dangers of the wastes. Sirats lie far out of reach of the Tors, the nobles, and their armies and they very often become havens for those who are disaffected or outcast from mainstream Tarkathi society. Serapis is an underground sirat and is reached by descending a long lava tube into a wide cavern that leads to a series of caves and tunnels beneath the foothills of the Spires of Castellán. Less than two thousand individuals regularly make their home here and about half of that population is somewhat transitory.

Serapis is run by Master Jafer Pyon, a highborn son of the former rulers of Taliesin. There's no formal market in Serapis but the taverns and grottos are said to be the place to go if you are looking for goods or services that can't be found anywhere else. It is said that in Serapis for a price, anything can be acquired or accomplished. Quite a few criminals and undesirables make this place their home, laying low in a haven that no noble or law man would dare show their face.

HAGGA

The sirat of Hagga lies a hundred miles to the Southwest of Serapis. It is a refuge for the poor and diseased ruled by no lord. Once Hagga was said to be a haven for the wealthy, a paradise amid the wastes. Now it is only haven for plague and the gangs of infected who have organized themselves into rowdy organizations that control sections of the ruined city.

The strongest of these gangs is known as the Temple of Rot, led by an insane zealot known only as Jodah. Rumors abound that they perform rituals, sacrifices, and even cannibalism.

DOKAAL

Dokaal is a sirat that lies along the Scaled Road to the West of Tor Oman. One of the few sirats that is not below ground, it is said that Dokaal was built around the remnants of an ancient guard outpost from the days before the Great War. Western Tarkath has always been a tumultuous region, with various groups of Tarkathi who live beyond the reach of the Tor's nobles surviving in any way they can manage. While House Aragon tries to patrol the Scaled Road, the dangers of raiders from the Withered Forest or the hills of the Vokun Mountains is always a threat to trade, commerce, and travellers. Dokaal is ruled by a man named Farok, a self-appointed Trade Prince. Farok came from the West just under five years ago. He brought with him a band of hired mercenaries that some say were backed by coin from the Free City of Orn. He defeated a bandit lord named Assan who had controlled Dokaal and was using it as a base to raid caravans all along the Scaled Road.

Farok has restored a bit of order to Dokaal and while it houses less than five thousand residents, it is a thriving sanctuary that serves as a staging base for trade in the West. Dokaal is still very much a frontier settlement, with very few comforts. Farok does little to enforce the law and crime is common, especially theft. Raids from the wastes happen now and then but as more wealth flows into the sirat, it becomes a bigger target for those brave raiders desperate enough to attack it.

NEKROS

Nekros is a sirat that sits at the juncture of the Rivers Emon, Khyber, and Tethys. Nekros sits on a wide plain less than twenty miles from Dragonspire. The seat of the Protectorate is so near that the great spire can be seen in the distance on a clear day. Upon approach one would see a huge pyramid made from black stone rising four hundred feet from the waters where the three rivers meet. This is the Ossuary. Four black stone obelisks are placed on each side of the pyramid, rising to a height of two hundred feet and covered in ancient runes. It is here that the people of Tarkath bring their loved ones, nobles, and heroes to seek the final burial rites that will ensure a peaceful transition into the afterlife. Though like many things in this world, these rites are expensive and often only for the wealthy or very successful. More than a few Tarkathi are buried in tombs and graves near their homes and never see Nekros. There is always a concern that those who do not receive the rites will return as spirits or undead to haunt the living until they are properly laid to rest in Nekros.

There are no bridges that cross to the pyramid so those who seek admittance to the Ossuary must pay a black robed figure known only as the Ferryman for passage across. The boat ride is costly and more than many can afford, but people are often willing to scrape together whatever coin they can to ensure their loved ones will have a safe journey into the afterlife.

The Ossuary is not the only thing in Nekros. Along the banks of the rivers are gathered a collection of stone buildings, temples, and shrines that make up the sirat of Nekros. Though less than a thousand people make this their permanent home, an industry has risen here to support those who come to bring their deceased to the Ossuary. There are taverns and inns where people can stay and take refuge but little in the way of trade or industry. An air of mysticism in Nekros attracts those who seek to make coin off the bereaved. Seers are commonplace on the streets and for enough coin one can find someone who can allegedly contact a deceased loved one. For those who cannot afford the services of the Ossuary, less official burial rites can be purchased from local gravekeepers and the body interred in a necropolis not far outside of town.

THE DRAGON GATE

Anyone seeking to enter Tarkath from the West along the Scaled Road would find themselves face to face with a hundred-foot wall that stretches for almost fifty miles between the Vokun Mountains and a Southern spur known as the Dragon's Fang. Blocking the way into Tarkath is a massive portal and attached fortress known as the Dragon Gate. The gate itself is over one hundred feet high and said to be made of a rare metal that is stronger than steel. The gate itself has two dragons carved into it, one into either door and is ornately decorated with reliefs that rival the metalwork of House Richter. Written into the door in High Tarkan are the words '*Nid hokoron aal rahn*' which means 'No enemy may pass'. Indeed, the mighty Dragon Gate has never been broken and never been successfully sieged. The fortress itself could easily house ten thousand troops but in modern days only a thousand Aragon soldiers known as the Westwatch are stationed here.

THE DEAD KINGDOM

To the East of Tor Emon is an area of the land known as the Dead Kingdom. Little is known about this place as so few who have gone there have ever come back alive. Those that have, were all changed, driven mad by whatever they saw there. It is said that within this cursed place, whole cities of old lie abandoned, eternal tombs to ancient civilizations the world has long since forgotten. It is a place of shadows and

nameless horrors that does not welcome the living. Stories of what truly lies within are as many and varied as the teller, speaking of lost lore and treasures beyond reason. Not a few intrepid adventurers are tempted to plumb the depths of those hoary crypts, seeking power, wealth, and fame. Of those that go there, few ever return, swallowed by the darkness within.

HOUSE & GUILD RELATIONSHIPS

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

HOUSE INNIS

The ancient forest of Thornwood, home of House Innis, is far to the north of Tarkath. To many Tarkathi, who have never even seen a tree, the Thornwood seems a place of mythical wonderment. Said to be a forest of lush green flora as far as the eye can see, there are not a few Tarkathi who even believe that such a place exists or could exist in the world. The people of the Thornwood are said to be followers of the old ways, and while many Tarkathi have never met a Woodfolk, they feel a strange kinship with them. It is said that centuries past, the noble families of Innis and Aragon were once allies and that they share much in common as far as their goals in Arnesse. It is extremely rare that any member of House Innis or any visitor from the Northern Reaches is ever seen in the southlands, and to most Tarkathi, the mysterious Woodfolk of the Thornwood remain creatures of tales, myth, and legend.

HOUSE ROURKE

While many Tarkathi who live outside of Tyranthis have few dealings with House Rourke, they are well known to many in the South. To people who live in a waterless wasteland, men and women who make their lives on the water sailing on ships seem exotic and exciting. Their reputation as scoundrels and cutthroats has turned them into the subject of more than a few tales and stories that detail their exploits on the high seas. Those within Tyranthis have frequent dealings with the Rourkes who operate out of nearby Blackwatch Bay. They have learned that the Sea Lords can be the rakish criminals that stories make them out to be but that they also have their own unique sense of honor. They are a proud people who value freedom perhaps even more than those in Tarkath. The nobles of Tarkath have had good dealings with the Rourkes and the two factions share many common values and goals. One thing that all Tarkathi know well is to be careful when

trusting a Rourke as they may have a code, but they are well known for crossing a deal when it suits them. It is this fact that causes many in the strongly honor-bound Tarkathi culture to look down on or take pity upon the Seaborn. Tales are told of well-intentioned Tarkathi attempting to redeem a Rourke, only to have the Seaborn always succumb to their natures.

HOUSE HALE

In the dry, desolate wastes of the South, the concept of snow and ice are something that most Tarkathi could never even imagine. Some have likely heard stories of the majestic, wind-swept tundra of the Everfrost, but those tales are of a far-off place that seems more like a mystical realm than an actual place in the Kingdom of Arnesse. Tales also have reached the South of towering men with heavy beards, wearing furs of beasts who are savage, merciless, and utterly fearless in battle. One would be hard pressed to find someone in the South, save perhaps an occasional well-traveled merchant, who had ever met a Northman, let alone knew anything about their culture. Even many of House Aragon's nobles know little about House Hale and its vassals, having so little contact or even a strong reason to pursue meaningful diplomatic relations. Those few tales which make their way South speak of the Everfrost as a frozen, ghost-cursed wasteland in which the horrors of the ancient world stalk the night seeking the blood of the living.

HOUSE CORVEAUX

House Corveaux has had a tumultuous relationship with Tarkath over the years. Even though both societies greatly value the concepts of freedom and fair treatment of their people, the differences in general morality and ancient grudges have kept them from ever being true allies. They share a border and most Tarkathi look upon their lush, green lands with envy. It is not uncommon for a Tarkathi of means to have traveled to the Midlands and perhaps even spent time there. Most find the experience to be pleasant, but restrictive, as the Midlands tend to be a place where virtue conquers vice, and the open-minded and carefree people of Tarkath quickly find themselves longing for home. Many Tarkathi view the Freefolk of the Midlands as a sibling who made different life choices. Quite a few Tarkathi have attempted to seduce a Freefolk to join them in their pursuits and they sometimes are successful. In return, the Freefolk are often hostile and even aggressive about their dislike of Tarkathi, often judging their lifestyles as debauched and dishonorable. Still this has not dissuaded the Tarkathi from idealizing the colorful, valorous Knights of House Corveaux, and tales are often told of their exploits. In recent years, the marriage of Lady Emmeline Corveaux to Rylen Aragon, Lord of Taliesin has opened a door to a stronger alliance between these two ancient rivals.

HOUSE BLAYNE

House Blayne's lands are in the Hearthlands, to the North of the Midlands and are best known in the South for their strong, zealous adherence to the Aurorym faith. House Blayne is a newer power in the world, having just been made a great house several centuries earlier and acquiring its Protectorate only within the last decade. Tarkath itself has been a realm in the greater Kingdom for over seven centuries and its culture is well over a millennium old – easily one of the most ancient in all Arnesse. Many in the South look upon the Blaynes as little more than children, raucous upstarts embracing a misguided path. The Tarkathi's feelings on the Aurorym in general vary from disregarding them as an upstart religion to concerns that the faith of the Dawn may be a force that will destroy the Kingdom of Arnesse. The Blaynes have sent emissaries and priests to Tarkath and all have been greeted with a mix of caution, skepticism, and even open hostility. Many Tarkathi are fearful of those who follow the faith and will shutter their windows and take their children inside at the sight of a priest or a Hearthlands delegation. Not all Tarkathi feel this way, however. There is a growing movement that says Tarkath must discard the old ways and embrace the change that is coming to Arnesse, including the Aurorym faith, which continues to quickly grow in strength, size, and popularity.

HOUSE BANNON

The second of their neighbors to the north, the Tarkathi have had a long-standing feud with House Bannon, their vassals, and the residents of the Sovereignlands. The origins of this are said to date back hundreds or even thousands of years, but the Tarkathi consider House Bannon to be the ultimate embodiment of tyranny, suffering, and oppression in Arnesse. Over the years, the Bannons have shown a willingness to do anything necessary to acquire and maintain power. To a people who value freedom, honor, and fair treatment, the actions of the Bannon nobles are both detestable and dishonorable. That they have been so successful over the years at maintaining the throne has been a source of great shame for many Tarkathi and to point this out to one is likely to raise their ire. Despite their feelings, the Tarkathi understand that the Bannons are a powerful house that commands the throne and many allies. While Tarkathi will speak ill of the Bannons in secret, they offer them grudging respect to their face. A Tarkathi will rarely pass up an opportunity to foil or embarrass a Bannon, a conceit that sometimes causes them a great deal of trouble given Bannon's dislike for losing. Many in the South see the Bannons as the source of countless wicked plots and tales often depict them as puppet masters, with the rest of the Kingdom as little more than marionettes dancing on strings at their command. The

noble families of Aragon and Bannon have had a mixed and often tense relationship over the years, and the two are said to be in a constant state of cold war, with each house trying to find a way to undo the other through political maneuvering. Of late, dissatisfaction with King Giles II has had some Tarkathi calling for House Aragon to go to open war against the North.

HOUSE RICHTER

Heartless. Fools. Murderers. These are just a few of the curses and epitaphs that the people of Tarkath use for the members of House Richter. The source of this hatred are the stories of the Richters being the House which, in ages past, was the one primarily responsible for the death of both the Gods of old and the Tarkathi dragons. This is a slight which the people of Tarkath have never forgiven the House of Iron for and many modern Tarkathi have sworn Shere, blood oaths, to see the Richters dead and their house destroyed. House Richter and its vassals are not welcome in Tarkath. If anyone openly displays their heraldry, they are often attacked and killed, captured, or driven out. Those of Richter blood who live in Tarkath, do so under someone else's protection or they have chosen to have their origins and allegiances remain hidden. Stories about the Richters and the people of the Dusklands tend to be wild and fantastic and in almost every one they are heartless villains who use machines and guns to trample the free and the weak under their iron boots. For many in the South, the rigid, inflexible, mirthless Richters are the very antithesis of the freedom and passions enjoyed by so many Tarkathi. The only thing that keeps both the noble families of Aragon and Richter from going to war with each other is the distance between their two lands. When the Shardmount, a volcano within the Dusklands, erupted and destroyed huge swaths of the Richter's land, many Tarkathi openly celebrated their suffering and proclaimed that the misfortunate was divine retribution for the Ironlord's numerous profanities.

THE APOTHECA

The Apotheca are a regular sight in the South. Tarkath is said to be the birthplace of their order and besides the Apotheon in Highcourt, their largest enclave, the Ashen Tower, lies in the city of Tor Oman. Most of the people of the South are very familiar and comfortable with the presence Magisters in their daily lives. They are regular fixtures in most Tors and sirats; almost every noble of standing has several on retainer. In addition, the wares of the Apotheca are common sights in the markets and bazaars of Tarkath. They are so common that even the average person knows or understands what several different elixirs, tonics, or decoctions do and may use them on a regular basis. In addition, the Apotheca have made learning more available in Tarkath and while the average commonfolk

is not any more likely to be literate or learned, the prevalence of books, scrolls, and other written materials is higher in the South than in any other place in Arnesse. Tarkathi have also learned that while a Magister can be incredibly useful and helpful, they can also be eclectic, fickle, and even dangerous. A Magister's first love is for knowledge and secrets and they let few things stand in between them and the object of their interest. Thus, while Tarkathi view Magisters in a positive light, they are not always completely trusted. Dark rumors about the Apotheca whisper that some particularly insane Magisters have been known to kidnap people and subject them to vile and illegal experimentation against their will.

THE FAYNE

The Fayne Moirai are a mysterious group of female oracles and fateseers who are best known for being advisors to the nobles. While they are popular in some realms in the North, the Tarkathi courts have largely minimized their influence. The Tarkathi value their freedom more than almost anything. Many reject the concept that they are controlled by Fate and therefore not free to make their own choices. Thus, many people in the South look upon the Sisters with a mix of skepticism and distrust. The Sisters have something of a reputation as storytellers, for they walk among the people, spreading tales and stories of the ancient days before the rise of the Kings. Despite their misgivings, the people are often held rapt by their tales and in awe of their oracular abilities. For while the Tarkathi believe in their ability to control their own destiny, they cannot deny the gifts of the Fayne Moirai are real and powerful. In some ways, they are the living embodiment of the mysticism and old ways that so many in Tarkath believe should not only prosper in Arnesse, but grow stronger. However, the fact that they are so deeply shrouded in secrecy makes it difficult for the commonfolk to look upon them as more than unnatural anomalies or spooky harbingers. Wild, lascivious tales are often spun about their lives which often consist of political scandal, rampant drug use, forbidden rituals, and sexual promiscuity with the wealthy and powerful.

THE HEXEN

Tarkath is an ancient land filled with many dangers. The wastelands are home to creatures so deadly that their poison could kill a grown man in hours and beasts from the pages of a storybook are still said to prowl the Deep Wastes. When darkness falls, some places in the wastelands are filled with the howls of the dead, as the ghosts of those who died upon the cursed soil still haunt the land and seek the warmth of the living. Long ago, the Tarkathi learned that they must be strong enough to fight those creatures or avoid them and thus, they do not often call upon the services of the Hexen. Some

Tarkathi find it amusing that the 'soft' Northerners had to create an order to deal with threats they were too weak or fearful to confront. This, combined with the fact that Hexen work alone and are reluctant to hire guides to help them survive the wastelands, means that they are rarely seen in Tarkath. It is also said the Hexen are associated with the Aurorym faith, a fact that makes them generally unwelcome in the South. It would be rare if a Tarkathi knew that the Hexen existed and rarer still if they had met one in person.

THE CIRQUE

Like the Apotheca, the Cirque guild is a common sight in the lands of House Aragon. Trade, commerce, and craftsmanship are all strongly familiar to the people in the South and many make a good living off those businesses. The troupes of the Cirque are all extremely active in their local communities, helping the common people and providing for the poor and less fortunate. Because they don't let nobles join their ranks, the Cirque is seen as a check and balance against the power of the nobles and it's not uncommon for them to use their wealth and influence to negotiate on the behalf of commonfolk. To many the Cirque are local heroes and many aspire to join their ranks, even if it means only working as a roustabout or laborer. The Cirque also have a very good relationship with House Aragon and have almost unfettered access to all the Tors throughout Tarkath. This means that the Cirque are regular fixtures in most people's lives and the arrival of a caravan can be a source of great joy and excitement for a community for it represents fresh supplies and access to the outside world. Many realize that there is a darker side to the Cirque; that they may be deeply involved in Black Market and other illegal dealings. But most people claim those actions are only illegal by the King's Law, which most Tarkathi refuse to obey anyway. In some ways, the more the Cirque disobey the King's Law, the more heroic they become to those who would otherwise lack the strength to stand up to the Bannon rulers.

THE AURORYM

The Aurorym are viewed with distrust and skepticism by many Tarkathi. Once, the Tarkathi were a deeply faithful people, loyal to the Old Gods in centuries past. But when those Gods were taken from them by the greed of mankind, a bitterness crept into the hearts of many about faith. Quite a few Tarkathi fail to believe that the Aurorym faith is real. They contend that the Gods are dead and that no higher power can exist to grant them their gifts. Thus, many in the South feel that the religion is a scam, a dupe, or that their power is not coming from where they believe it does. In addition, the mindless zealotry that the faith demands combined with the almost adoration of a glorious death leaves many Tarkathi

skeptical that the religion encourages and kind of free will or thought. These factors combined with the fact that the Aurorym who have visited the South have consistently brought with them malcontent and promises of apocalypse, have led many Tarkathi nobles to restrict access to their fiefs. The people are Tarkath struggle to survive in a harsh land and are taught to be strong from birth. They are not equals, but all the people are treated well by their rulers and provided for if they contribute to the community. The Aurorym faith takes hold best in places where the people struggle beneath the yoke of tyranny and though many missionaries have tried, the Aurorym faith has not taken hold in the lands of the South.

PLAYING A TARKATHI

"Polish comes from the cities; wisdom from the desert."

Frank Herbert, Dune

The people of Tarkath are a proud, passionate lot who have built an empire that last lasted over one thousand years in one of the harshest environments in Arnesse. In many ways, the wastelands have come to define the people of the South. There is a saying among the Tarkathi that people do not shape the wasteland but that the wasteland shapes those choose to enter it. The Tors and sirats provide refuge and a good life for many who live in Tarkath. But beyond those sanctuaries is the very real threat of death in a land that is harsh and unforgiving. The wastes kill both the common man and the noble in equal measures. This has brought a level of social equality to Tarkath that is unique in the Kingdom. The necessity for the entire community to work together to sustain life has made every member within it of great value. All the lower castes of Tarkath are Serfs and while they are bound to a noble family they have no written contract. Each is bound via a blood oath called a Shere to serve loyally in exchange for protection and resources. Though this may seem cruel, it pales in comparison to the heartlessness of the world in which they live. Tarkathi nobles pride themselves on how well they care for people under their charge and while they are by no means equal in standing or position to those of higher class, they are given more freedoms than many of equivalent social rank in other places in Arnesse. Slavery is utterly forbidden in Tarkath and even those who are captured in war as prizes are always sold back to their original noble for a price. This price is known as the Homdar - or the blood price. In the rare cases that this price is either not paid or offered many choose to take their own lives to honor their existing Shere rather than break the blood oath that they have already made to a lord.

Most Tarkathi place a high value on honor and oaths are taken very seriously, especially when sealed with blood. They detest tyranny and the hoarding of wealth, instead choosing to share what they have in a genuine sense. This is not to say that people of the South are utterly selfless; they know resources are not without limit and choose carefully to whom they give kindness. They have a strong sense of family and loyalty to their people and to their land. This does not apply to Outsiders or Sikun as they are called and to many who visit Tarkath find the people distant and even distrustful. These are a people who spend their entire lives living in extremes and they tend to live their lives in extremes. Once a Tarkathi has found a cause to believe in, they will fight for it, often to the death and against all reason. When a Tarkathi fights, they are as vicious and unforgiving as the land in which they call home. When loyalty is prized so greatly and passions run so high, it is not uncommon for them to fight amongst each other, but they will set aside all rivalries if threatened from an outside power. To survive in such a land requires great skill and personal ability is highly prized in their society. It is said that the wastes kill many but hardens those who survive. It is also said that one Tarkathi is worth three people from the North. Those who have had dealings with them are not quick to dispute this.

The people of Tarkath hail from an ancient and mystical past that is still deeply shrouded in mystery and lore. To many in the North their culture and ways are alien and unnatural. Still, to many their lifestyle can appear exotic and enticing, leading many to be willing to take the risk and indulge the forbidden delights. To those in the North, Tarkath is a place of terror and danger. This is only confirmed by the fact that nobles of House Aragon, particularly those who inhabit Tor Obolus keep mythic creatures such as basilisks as pets. While the basilisk is little more than a house cat is to a lion when compared to a dragon or wyrm of old, it is a huge serpentine creature that spits a venom said to be able to turn a full-grown man to stone in a few seconds. Even the bloodline of the Tarkathi nobility is said to be laced with magic as tales tell that long ago, the most powerful and ancient dragons took on human form had wyrm-blooded children with the most beautiful women of the South. The purest blooded nobles of Tarkath, those of House Aragon, often have vibrant, piercing eyes with a strangely colored hue, a sign that the ancient power of the great dragons of old still courses through their noble veins.

MENAT'S LAMENT

In the ancient days, the Houses of Aragon and their people were said to have been bonded to the great dragons. Stories are told that their greatest hero Arric the Argent struck a deal with a dragon named Menat to give half his soul to him in exchange for half the soul of the mighty dragon. Since the death of the wyrms almost four centuries ago, the people of Tarkath are said to be living half a life, with one foot in the realm of the living and the other foot in the land of the dead. It has created a pervasive culture of profound sadness that has gripped Tarkath for centuries. It is an open wound that never heals, an omnipresent heartbreak, a depression that no drug or self anesthetizing will fix. The stronger one's noble blood and lineage the stronger they feel the deep suffering and sadness.

This has led to two prominent side effects. The first is that many Tarkathi, particularly the nobility, use drugs or drink on a regular basis to ease the suffering. Many of these, such as Dragon's Breath, are designed to create a heightened, euphoric state but others sedate the user into a dreamlike condition which allows them to drift through their days in a blissful haze. This has led many to call Dragonspire, Dreamspire. Northerners often refer to nobles in the South as the walking dead, for they live and move but with glazed over, distant eyes. The drug culture is pervasive in the South and one can, for a price, acquire any manner of substance to induce any desired state they wish. If one seeks the finest drugs in all Arnesse, Tor Oman, the City of Vapors, has the best apothecaries outside of the Apotheon in Highcourt and its residents understand the value of discretion for coin. Quite a few wealthy Sikun risk travelling to the deepest parts of Tarkath for a tantalizing taste of these forbidden substances.

The second is that the people of Tarkath embrace both life and death without fear. They know their time in this world is short and they enjoy the pleasures of the flesh, for they know when they pass beyond into the Land of the Dead, these things will be denied them. At heart, they are sensualists, who enjoy sex, food, drink, and celebration with a wild abandon that would exhaust most others. Sexually, they are open with their affections and there are very few taboos when it comes to whom one loves or chooses to show their affections toward. All Tors have multiple brothels where one can go to find a willing partner who will, for coin, provide anything and everything asked of them. As a result of this lust for life, Tarkathi families tend to be large and close knit. It is not uncommon for husbands and wives to have open lovers or even more permanent life partners attached to their family group. As a matter of fact, multiple lovers is seen as symbol of power, wealth, and fertility/virility. Bastard children tend

to be more common in Tarkath but they looked upon with far less derision as all children are seen as a blessing to a family.