

The Flagship is Launched!

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO WHEN WE STARTED WRITING our first major adventure campaign for the Swedish roleplaying game *Mutant: Heirs of Doom*, we established one primary guideline: we were to design it so that we would love to both read and play it ourselves. *Thistle Hold - Wrath of the Warden* has been created in that same spirit and we couldn't be happier with the result. Our hope is that this book will be as warmly received internationally as it was upon reaching our Swedish gamers, and that you will yearn for the sequel as intensely as we are yearning to start translating it.

Now, go ahead and enjoy the town of Thistle Hold! And for the sake of Prios, be sure to deal with the circumstances explaining why the warden is so wrathful. If you manage to pull through, new and more demanding challenges will be waiting for you on the cliff of the High Chieftain and the Huldra, Karvosti.

Happy gaming!
TEAM JÄNRINGEN



THE HUNTER'S HARBOR

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WRATH OF THE WARDEN

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The Battle for...

... THE THRONE OF THORNS BEGINS IN THISTLE HOLD!

It has been said that the town in the shadow of the great forest is like a shielded island located where a foaming ocean breaks against jagged rocks. Ambria, unruly and beset by growing pains, would be the ocean; the unforgiving horrors of Davokar the rocks and the waves would be the flood of humans fleeing north from despair and misery.

THE ANALOGY HAS its merits, but also reflects a romantic idea that a wooden palisade and strict regulations can function as an effective shield against the forces of nature. Sure, Thistle Hold is in many ways both safer and less chaotic compared to the nearby Blackmoor, and it offers comforts which one can only dream of in other parts of the Ambrian realm. But one should absolutely not be duped into believing that the safety and comforts benefit everyone living in the Hold. And, above all, one should never feel confident that serenity is unthreatened.

The book in your hand expands on the description of Thistle Hold included in the *Core Rulebook* and features the first part of Symbaroum's adventure chronicle, *The Throne of Thorns*. It is composed of three sections: the first written to be read by both players and GMs, the second designed for GMs alone, and the final part consisting of the adventure *Wrath of the Warden*.

The initial section is meant to give the players (and GM) a basic understanding of the Hold, as if

THUS SPOKE AROALETA

"... and the malaise lingers, in earth and rock, in water and air; besets all which breathes, which swallows, which wanders and crawls and flies. The gift of Eneáno must not be shunned, nor be seen as the salvation."

Player Preparation

At various download stores, gamers can purchase a standalone eBook containing the first section of this book, *The Hunter's Harbor*. The GM can use this instead of needing to circulate the entire book among the players for them to have a chance to get to know Thistle Hold as well as their characters probably do.

their characters had lived there for more than a few nights. The idea is that this will make the players (and thereby the player characters) able to navigate the streets and establishments of the town without the GM leading them by the hand. It should be noted that the text assumes the reader is familiar with the *Core Book's* descriptions of Thistle Hold, even if it repeats or references some details in passing.

The second part of the book is aptly called *The Game Master's Section* and describes the truth behind Thistle Hold's façade. It explains events unknown to the public, regarding Thistle Hold's history and the powerful factions operating in the town. It also lists a great many secrets the GM may use to create homebrew adventures or fuel even longer campaigns.

Additionally, Section 2 includes three chapters not directly tied to the town itself. The first one offers some hints and suggestions on how to use the book's setting for so called Goal Oriented Roleplaying, where the ambitions of the characters decide what happens – in this case, based on the goals to a) establish an outpost, and b) stage an expedition. The chapter that follows presents two ruins waiting to be explored; the Game Master can determine the exact location of the ruins and has great freedom to develop what will happen if the player characters find their way there. Finally, the Game Master's Section closes with a chapter detailing new rules relevant for different parts of the book.

The remainder of the book is dedicated to the adventure *Wrath of the Warden*. Its composition is more closely described on page 80, but for starters: it is mainly set in Thistle Hold and the design is primarily meant to introduce the players (and player characters) to the chronicle's frame story and most prominent factions. Aside from that, our hope is, of course, that the adventure will provide you and your friends with many thrilling, intense and entertaining hours around the gaming table!



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**VERY DAY FOR EIGHT LONG** years, Merdalo has risen from his straw bed, combed his shaggy beard and walked to the Antique Plaza. Every day for eight long years, he has entered his wooden box to sing the praises of Thistle Hold, and he has smiled in thanks for every shilling making the bronze cup at his feet sing along. His songs are about

successful expeditions to the forest ruins, about the town as a peaceful orchard in a violent world, about women and men who have risen from the deepest misery – all thanks to Thistle Hold.

Merdalo was once involved in the construction work; ever since he has watched the town grow and evolve from his lowly stage. The songs have always appeared dishonest but that never used to bother him, not as long as the audience rewarded his well sounding lies with equally well sounding coins. But a gnawing feeling has grown in his chest, stronger and stronger with each passing day. Deep down Merdalo knows that **he** is a murderer, just as Mayor Nightpitch and all others **who** participate in upholding the illusion. For what **else** should you call someone who convinces people that they **can fly**, only to silently watch as they dive headlong into the Abyss **with** a hopeful smile on their lips?

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SECTION 1:

THE HUNTER'S HARBOR

The Border Town

ALMOST ALL AMBRIANS share the same dream. Of course, you can craft a tolerable existence by farming the Ambrian soil, alternately by partaking in the construction of Yndaros or some other rapidly growing town. But also those who succeed in those respects can hardly avoid fantasizing about the simultaneously safe and exciting life rumored to be lived behind Thistle Hold's towering palisade.

THEN THERE ARE all those who never consider farming or construction work, those whose adamant intent is in contributing to the aim set forth by the Queen – to make the treasures of Davokar the property of the Ambrian realm. This despite the fact that a majority of those trying to realize the dream quickly find it transformed into a nightmare.

A considerable portion of the town's treasure hunters never find anything besides their own deaths in some predators jaws or at the pointy end of some competitors spear. Others return emptyhanded from a couple of expeditions and cannot afford to launch a third. And some never get started; they remain seated in some tavern, listening to stories about hundreds of dig sites with a terrible anxiety sloshing around amongst black brew and pieces of kidney pie in their bellies.

Regardless of all cautionary tales, the dream of Thistle Hold is firmly rooted in the Ambrian soul. No one believes they would make the same mistakes as the unlucky fools who went before them. No, they would succeed if given half a chance. Because no matter how many fall victim to the dream, the few success stories will always lure young and old, poor and wealthy, learned and ignorant to the fortune hunters' harbor.

This chapter is based on the sort of information about Thistle Hold that one can gain by spending more than a few days in town. If combined with the description in the Core Rulebook, the text should offer enough of an idea of how the town works for you (and, more importantly, your player character) to feel somewhat at home there, in the bittersweet Thistle Hold.

The statue on the Toad's Square inspires both dreams and nightmares – dreams of grandiose finds, nightmares of encounters with the toad's descendants.



First impressions

MOST OF THOSE who enter one of Thistle Hold's gates for the first time do so with clear expectations. It is supposed to be new, calm, organized and clean – at least compared to cities like Yndaros or the equally fast-growing Ravenia.

Initially it may seem as if the expectations correspond with reality. No building is more than eight years old, the atmosphere is void of shouting peddlers and noise from building sites, and the main streets are so free from debris that one might suspect someone wipes them clean every morning (which they actually do). However, it does not take more than a couple of days and nights before it becomes obvious this apparent idyll comes at a price.

Each and every day you can witness grim guards of the Town Watch escorting one or more

inhabitants, apathetic or furious, to the South Gate. Everyone knows that if the person happened to have some belongings the guards will confiscate these on behalf of the Mayor, as compensation for warranted payments or as punishment for crimes committed. And as soon as the villain emerges onto the Southern Highroad, he or she is forever banned from even visiting the Hold.

Other spots of soot and mildew soon appear on the façade. While public displays of drunkenness and aggression figure frequently upon the street called Haloban's Ring, other parts of town treat such behavior with a stretch on the cold stone floor of the Penitentiary. And even the most compliant visitor can become the target of imprisonment or a flogging, if he displeases the Town Watch or some

"The age-old cauldron hanging over the fireplace at the Ruin Inn is actually a helmet belonging to the arch troll Oxvog. The troll still lives and would no doubt reward whoever returned the powerful artifact to him."

prominent resident. Protesting hardly helps in a town where repeated defiance is enough to become banished.

On the other hand ... if one refuses to give in to the strong arm of the law and stays a while in the town, it will soon become apparent that there are ways to avoid detection. As long as you steer clear of talkative witnesses, place a bribe in the right hand, and carefully consider whom your actions might anger you can often get the job done.

When you hear someone say that "Thistle Hold lives in the shadows" this is what they mean – in cover of darkness, in alleys and nooks, behind closed doors and shutters thrives that which would never be allowed under a clear blue sky. Contraband is trafficked in and out of town, artifacts are bought and sold without the Mayor getting his cut, people are murdered or severely beaten, and both stores and residences are burgled. There are even those

Memorable Events

ALL WHO LIVE in Thistle Hold and who are not weighed down by grim reality are happy to share stories about the town's eventful past. Single story-tellers' vivid statements should of course be taken with a pinch of salt. But when one has heard the same event being described over and over, maybe one dares to assume that there actually is some truth to the story.

The incidents described in this section speak both of the history of the Hold and about what it is like to live there. Even if many occurred at a time when Thistle Hold was smaller and less well protected, all of them could be repeated one way or another, something which the residents tend to underline. Because although the palisade stands strong it can be breached, and once the hull has been punctured an intruder can quickly cause catastrophic damage.

THE JEZITES' DOWNFALL (YEAR 10)

Everyone knows that Ambrian forces utterly defeated the barbarian warlord Haloban and his clan after a short siege in year 10. It is also commonly known that the Ambrian force captured Haloban alive and brought him back to Yndaros where he hung by the neck until dead; and that the Ambrian assault totally annihilated clan Jezora. Aside from that, there are some discrepancies in the stories.

Most people believe that Queen Korinthia had managed to persuade some members of the clan to betray their master by sabotaging the gates of the fortress, but other stories attribute the sabotage to

who, convincingly, claim that both members of the Iron Pact and blight-marked cultists live inside the palisade.

Indeed, Thistle Hold is the safest harbor in a storm ridden Ambria and it is indeed a town where representatives of different cultures and factions coexist in relative harmony. But the residents know the truth. The fortune hunter's harbor is a place where dreams are dashed more often than they are realized, a place where death sometimes appears as a more alluring exit than the town gates, a place where your life is never worth more than the sum of your belongings.

Maybe there is some truth to what the subsequently death-sentenced rioter Volfald purportedly shouted during his last night at the Salons of Symbaroum: "Thistle Hold is a crab, a rock-hard shell over flabby insides; I'll mess around in here till naught but the shell remains!"

the heroic actions of a group of Queen's Rangers. And regarding the clan's destruction, several diverse stories are told. Some say that also women and children died fighting, others that most Jezites went up in flames with the hall where they were hiding, and there are even those who maintain that the clan members died in a mass suicide.

No matter what one believes, the annihilation of the Jezites meant the end of the barbarian presence on the southern plains. Haloban's fortress was demolished so that no one would try to recapture it, and after that the area surrounding the ancient bronze well lay desolate for over two years, until Lasifor Nightpitch initiated his grandiose construction project.

THE ATTACK OF ELOAN-EO (YEAR 13)

During the late fall of year 13, while Thistle Hold was still under construction, an attack was launched from the forest. A force made up of at least a hundred elves (some say five hundred) struck just before dawn. Four rounds of fire arrows painted red stripes across the night sky and were followed by a fearless melee assault on the war veterans hired to defend the construction site.

The leader of the elves, later identified as the autumn elf Eloan-Eo, fell to the sword wielded by Serex Attio – several witnesses claim that the elf was beheaded from behind as he was running for the newly built toad statue. The bloodbath ended in Ambrian victory, but many humans were killed and large parts of the town's northern districts went up in flames.

In the following years the elves made numerous attempts to demolish the Hold, through outright attacks or by sneaky acts of sabotage, most recently during the winter of year 20 when two murderous elves were caught in an attic near Nighthome. But none of the later incidents have caused such great losses in lives and property as the attack of Eloan-Eo.

THE BIRTH OF THE BEACON (YEAR 15)

The story of the construction of Thistle Hold's Beacon is a bloody tale that all newcomers soon will hear. It started when Nightpitch asked three contractors for suggestions on how the tower should be built – one of these got his throat slit in a bar brawl, another backed out after having survived a serious blood infection. The one remaining was Balon Daar, and since he could not be accused of taking part in any wrongdoings the contract was awarded to him.

Then the construction claimed numerous lives. The first design was nearly a hundred feet high when it suddenly collapsed – sabotage said the contractor; faulty calculations claimed others. Irrespective of which, two ogres and five goblins died in the collapse, along with four young treasure hunters who were crushed where they were sitting in a tavern, drinking and boasting about their exploits.

Before the work was done, another ogre and four more goblins had died, and as everyone knows, the tower continues to claim lives (since despondent residents tend to use it as a gateway to the after-life). Yes, even if almost all explorers and treasure hunters in town have had reason to thank Mayor Nightpitch for the guiding flame of the Beacon, there are many who claim that the structure is cursed. And if one is to believe the really dark-minded storytellers, the Beacon is an actual living being, brought to life by the blood soaking the ground on which it stands, and forever thirsting for more.

THE TINY GLADIATRESS (YEAR 15)

Those who were present at the inauguration of the gladiator arena The Abomitorium, a spring day in year 15, will never forget what they saw. After a few exciting fights between the town heroes and beasts of the forest it was time for the Grand Finale – twenty hardened war veterans against as many goblins who had been captured during a raid on a robber tribe close to Karvosti.

With wooden spears and shields, the nineteen goblins did their best to defend against the Ambrians. The twentieth creature stood still. Those present swear that this individual could not have been a goblin, even if she had their size, posture and disfigurements. Whatever the case may have



been, she watched the slaughter with a warm smile, until the last of her fellow combatants fell dead at her feet. Then she shook her head, smacked her tongue in disapproval, and went to work.

The dry dirt of the arena whirled up in a dancing, local sand storm covering the scene. Shortly thereafter, the horrified spectators heard the death roars rise from the throats of their celebrated war heroes. And as the storm died out all of them were dead, most of them impaled on their own weapons. The creature dusted off her hands and wiped her bloody face clean with the hem of her skirt. No one tried to stop her as she calmly left the Abomitorium, passed through the Western Gate and disappeared into the woods.

To this day, the reason why this apparently powerful creature let herself be caught along with the goblins is a topic for heated discussions among the Davokar experts of Thistle Hold.

THE BLOOD SPRAY DISEASE (YEAR 16)

The fall of year 16 is remembered as one of the most gruesome in the short but lively history of the Hold. That the town is plagued by epidemics is not uncommon and most often they can be blamed on sniffing goblin trash or explorers returning infected from forest expeditions. But thanks to the novices of Ordo Magica and the priests of Prios the infections are often discovered and isolated before they spread beyond an unfortunate few. This was not the case with the abominable Blood Spray Disease.

"Queen Korinthia was killed by the Dark Lords. In fact, the Dark Lord himself has taken her place. Hence the mask on her face, the completely covering garments and the disguised voice. I've heard she speaks in the voice of a child!"



Fight Day in Thistle Hold. The local favorites Bruiser and Tulga take on a pack of mare cats.

It started with a few cases – people heard complaining about chest pains and who later started coughing up blood. As the number of infected rapidly rose, the condition of the initial victims grew dramatically worse. The cough became so violent that victim's ribs cracked from within and the bleeding spread to all other mucosal membranes. Before they died, especially powerful coughing attacks even made blood squirt out of their pores.

It is said that between five hundred and a thousand persons lost their lives before the outbreak was under control, all of them humans of Ambrian or barbarian heritage. The origin of the disease was never uncovered, but rumor has it that at least four of the initial victims had been seen purchasing medicures from the notorious Miracle Master some days before getting ill. This is obviously one of the reasons why said drug peddler nowadays keeps his transactions to the shady parts of Ambria's towns.

THE TRIUMPH OF IASOGOI (YEAR 16)

The most successful expedition ever to return to Thistle Hold was the one led by Iasogoi Brigo, then an adept of Ordo Magica. On a summer's day, year 16, the rumor spread like wild fire through town; people flocked to the square by the East Gate and when the sun was at its highest it appeared like a mirage on the road from Kastor – a caravan of no less than twenty nine horses and mules, burdened by gold, relics and artifacts salvaged from the depth of Davokar. At the front rode young Iasogoi himself, with a triumphant smile that must have burnt holes in the souls of everyone who had called him a fool and his plans ridiculous.

The trade in antiquities flourished for six months thanks to Iasogoi's bounty. And that is unique. Sure, Lysindra Goldengrasp has contributed to filling the stocks of the antique dealers and Gorakai the Younger returned from the

aqueducts of Clearwater laden with treasure. But never again has the market been flooded with items like it was when Iasogoi Brigo returned from Akkona's Catacombs, located under the ruined city of Odaban.

THE MERCHANTS' WAR (YEAR 17)

When the Hold was young, the trade in artifacts and antique items was handled differently compared to today. In the early days, it was common for the treasure hunters themselves to place a table on the Antique Plaza to peddle their finds, without bothering with registrations and authenticity certificates. This caused problems. For one thing, deceitful merchants have tricked many buyers. Other customers found themselves being the owners of items oozing with corruption (there is, for instance, a tale about a figurine that caused a whole family – consisting of mother, father, grandparents and seven children – to develop blight-marks before the source of the "sickness" was established). But worst of all for the earnest treasure hunters of the Hold was that their hard earned valuables and their whole occupation was dragged in the dirt by charlatans.

The popular notion is that a smaller group of successful explorers initiated the purge; some even say it was performed with the silent approval of Mayor Nightpitch. In any case, within a month more than twenty individuals disappeared, out of which a handful were found murdered and the rest seemed to have been swallowed by the earth. It was in the wake of these killings that Faraldo and Sefira established their businesses and started issuing certificates of authenticity. There is probably not a single soul who believes that the former Ordo Magica magisters are totally without guilt in the purge that paved their way.

AN ABOMINATION AMONGST US (YEAR 17)

On a bleak winter's night year 17, the residents of the town's western districts were awakened by a heartbreaking cry. The Town Watch was quick to the scene and formed a circle around the podium of the hangman's pole, but they could not stop hundreds of curious bystanders getting a glimpse of the source of the scream.

Below the podium sat an abomination, on that everyone agreed. But past that the depictions differ. Most witnesses described it as a black furred, human sized beast, but many emphatically claimed that the body of a human woman was hidden under the fur. Some even stress that the creature cried. Then there were those who spoke of beastly fangs, gold shimmering eyeballs and horn-like

Rumors

In the margins of this book you will find a collection of rumors, mirroring what can be heard on the town's streets and squares, often spoken in a whispering voice. Most likely more than half of them are pure fabrications and the rest infected by mix-ups or exaggerations. But who knows, maybe even those rumors contain some grains of truth...

outgrowths on shoulders and back, but whatever the case it must have had long and sharp claws.

The abomination slew a dozen persons before it almost flew up the palisade and vanished into Davokar. The speculations regarding the event were and remain many. However, the most popular theory has to do with an explorer named Tarleo who had been executed for murdering a greedy antique dealer that same day. Maybe the blight beast was one of the assistants Tarelo lost during his disastrous expedition to the sunken castle Manon Melas?

THE DEATH NIGHT (YEAR 18)

The hardened residents of Thistle Hold are not easily spooked. But after the mid-winter night of year 18, it is no understatement to claim that the whole town was paralyzed with fear.

From midnight up until the following afternoon, no less than ninety nine humans were found dead with self-inflicted wounds. Some were hung by the neck, some had drained themselves of blood with between one and two dozen cuts, some had swallowed toxins or thrown themselves on their own weapons.

After a first inspection it was revealed that the dead only shared one characteristic. Not race or sex, not social standing or age. No, their only common denominator was that they were all explorers, of Davokar and the ruins of Symbaroum.

It took a long while before the next expedition left Thistle Hold, partly because of the cold winter and partly because of the lingering fear. And there are many questions still unanswered. What caused the wave of suicides? Was it only a coincidence that all victims had traveled through Davokar? And even more vexing: why ninety nine? Why not an even hundred? Or are the lost remains of the Death Night's hundredths victim out there somewhere to be found?

"Beneath Ordo Magica's tower are dungeons where the wizards keep all sorts of horrors – an enslaved goblin tribe, a nest of etterherds and a blight born Aboar that has almost broken free on a number of occasions. And treasure. Untold treasure!"

Establishments & Authorities

OVER THE YEARS, THISTLE HOLD has become more and more densely built and with the increasing population the need for taverns, amusements and shops has increased. This chapter presents a collection of popular or for some other reason notable establishments, together with a number of authoritative institutions which are important for running the town.

Taverns

THERE SURELY ARE lots of butcheries, bakeries and market stands for fresh vegetables in the Hold, but a majority of the residents tend to eat their meals outside of their homes. Every tavern, bar and shabby shack serve food of varying quality, at least as snacks to accompany the beer, wine or spirits.

In Thistle Hold the Ambrian food tradition – mostly consisting of refined, spicy dishes in the form of sausages, jellies, pates and pies – has strong competition from the more rustic barbarian cookery. Even if the most exotic specialties, like roasted sawflies and slow-boiled etterherd, cannot be found on any standard menus, all respectable tavern owners can offer their guests roasted wild boar as well as butter seared back steaks and vegetarian stews.

"The Dump Tavern teaches its patrons a special phrase and if you whisper it in the bar keep's ear he cuts all prices in half. Just say: 'Your mother a troll, father an elf, poor little trelf!'"

AFADIR'S TRIUMPH TAVERN

He who has plenty of thaler in the purse and who longs for a culinary journey back to old Alberetor should make a reservation at Afadir's Triumph Tavern. Neither the ingredients nor the spices match the original recipes, but the owner and his staff do their best to find worthy, local replacements. The salmon of Berendoria's bay can be swapped for the rainbow trout of Ambria's rivers; the southern Pepper Fruit has its equivalent in Davokar's Roka Berries; and honey may be used as a substitute for the sugar of Alberetor.

However, sometimes things go wrong. During the summer of year 18, more than twenty people got sick and four died because an ambitious kitchen hand thought that he had found the perfect surrogate for the herb chervil – often used to flavor buttered turnips. Unfortunately, the substitute



TAVERNS

1. Afadir's Triumph Tavern
2. Brew
3. The Dump
4. Odovakar
5. Blackbrew
6. The Salons of Symbaroum
7. The Slaughterhouse

INNS

8. The Court and Harp
9. The Winged Ladle
10. The Witch and Familiar
11. Arkerio's Guest House
12. The Rose Garden
13. The Ruin
14. The Barracks
15. The Seamstress' Rest

ENTERTAINMENT

16. Spectacle
17. Benego's
18. Legends
19. The Hangman's Pole
20. The Abomitorium

TRADE

21. Marvalom's
22. The Rope and Axe
23. Big-Basher's Smithy
24. The Thaler's Drugstore
25. The Treasury
26. Faraldo's Novelty Store

OTHER

27. The Town Seat
28. Nighthome

29. The Sun Temple
30. The Queen's Legation
31. Ordo Magica
32. The Mission House
33. Mother Mehira's
34. The Town Watch
35. The Beacon
36. The Merchants' House
37. Monastery
38. The High Chieftain's Envoy
39. The Penitentiary

SQUARES & PARKS

40. The Antique Plaza
41. The Queen's Square
42. The Toad's Square
43. The Eastern Square
44. Park of the Elders

Facts on Thistle Hold

Founded: Year 13 after the Victory

Mayor: Lasifor Nightpitch

Law & Order: Town Watch (150 watchmen)

Primary income source: Tolls and taxes

Building technique: Wooden houses, 2–4 stories

Number of residents: about 6 000

Daily visitors: about 4 000

Neighbors: Blackmoor, the goblin tribe Karabbadokk and the villages Glimmer and Glimmervann.

Notable residents: Mayor Nightpitch, the treasure hunter Iasogoi Brigo, the Queen's legate Suria Argona, the heretic Sarvola, the theurg Father Elfeno and the trouble maker Serex Attio.

proved to be toxic and the young boy himself immune to its effects. Instead of a promotion, he suffered ten days in the block before he was executed by hanging. Afadir paid the large fines and swore in the name of Prios never to let anyone repeat such a mistake.

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Trout pudding with buttered turnips | 15 shillings |
| Roka Sausage with mashed beats | 12 shillings |
| Tankard of Argona (fine stut) | 2 shillings |
| Tankard of Kurun's Honor (triple fermented ale) | 5 shillings |
| Honey roasted sorrel | 3 shillings |
| Salty-sweet needles | 5 ortegs |

BREW

The beer salon Brew is run by an elderly couple, Kaglio and Sunna, who claim to have been successful as brewers already before the move north of the Titans. Their assortment spans from fermented malt beverages, like the commonly available Stut, to triple fermented and very strong specialties with names like Urtal and Adersel. Since three years past they also serve the beverage Veloum, stemming from clan Vajvod's proud brewing tradition. It is not as strong as blackbrew but just as full-bodied and much more palatable.

Even though Brew is located outside Haloban's Ring, it can become rough in there at times. The clientele primarily consists of successful fortune hunters resting in-between expeditions, and their boasting has an unfortunate tendency to translate into brawls. That is when Brute is needed - the huge and fearless ogre is hired to break brawlers apart and to hurl them out on the Eastern Square, if needs be. No one picks a fight with Brute, especially when it is said that the old crone he calls Mi-Mum is an aged and incredibly powerful barbarian witch.

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Hack Tray (cheese and meats) | 3 shillings |
| Tankard of The Duke's Relief (simple stut) | 1 shilling |
| Tankard of Urtal (triple fermented red ale) | 5 shillings |
| Tankard of Adersel (triple fermented ale) | 8 shillings |
| Tankard of Veloum | 2 shillings |

THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

In two neighboring houses on a back street close to the Toad's Square lays The Slaughterhouse. One is the actual slaughterhouse, the other a tavern that can take about a hundred guests at the long tables. The menu mainly consists of offal - heart, liver, stuffed lung and various pasty stews.

It is cheap but not the least distasteful, and if you are prepared to pay more there is newly butchered

fine meats to order, slow cooked or sautéed in sun-yellow butter.

Were it not for the vile rumors circulating, the owner of the Slaughterhouse, Master Morlam, would have even more guests at his tables. He mutters that it is his competitors who claim that some of the meat he is serving is waste from the Abomitorium - not only mare cats, jakaars and wild boars but also goblins, ogres and a few barbarians. But as long as the proud Master Butcher refuses to comment on such claims the rumor mill will likely continue to grind, not least since they are based on a fair question: what happens to the remains of the creatures killed during fights in the arena?

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Mixed Stew | 5 ortegs |
| Hash Patties with turnips | 2 shillings |
| Stuffed Lung with Black Mash | 4 shillings |
| Slow-cooked Prime Rib with stewed carrot | 5 shillings |
| King's Steak in gravy | 8 shillings |
| Tankard of stut (unspecified) | 3 ortegs |
| Glass of Blackbrew (unspecified) | 1 orteg |

ODOVAKAR

If you want to eat like a true barbarian you should head to Odovakar, at least according to the loyal guests at the tavern and the owners themselves, the barbarian siblings Verama and Melkor. Here you order tender slices of barbecued meat, steaming bowls of stewed root vegetables or other dishes flavored with forest spices and truffles. A specialty is the puff pastry covered, sweet-spicy mushroom pies originating from the owners' clan Odaiova. These pies are preferably eaten according to the clan custom: eat first, drink later - a challenge for anyone who is not used to the burning hot dishes of the Odavs.

Just like all other barbarian-owned establishments, Odovakar is the target of everything from scorn and derision to pure vandalism. The guilty parties often belong to one of two groups: they are either treasure hunters with scars after encounters with barbarians, or the type of fanatical Prios-followers who regard anything barbarian as an aspect of Davokar's wildness and evil. Mayor Nightpitch has made it clear: all who have been allowed to live inside the palisade are first and foremost to be regarded as residents of the Hold, wherever they come from. On the other hand, such statements are hardly any comfort to the relatives and friends of all those who have been banned or even incarcerated because of their, according to the relatives, reasonable actions.

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|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Sweet-Spicy Mushroom pie | 4 shillings |
| Barbecued young-boar with beats | 6 shillings |
| Fiery Root Stew | 4 shillings |
| Tankard of Zarekean Blackbrew | 1 shilling |
| Can of Spring Water | 3 ortegs |
| Truffle buttered Biscuit | 5 ortegs |

THE GRUBBERY

Among the tents and wagons of Blackmoor there is nothing that deserves being called a tavern; the closest you get is the handful of tents referred to as the Grubbery. The cook Alevia was once the first head chef at the Salons of Symbaroum, and a very appreciated one at that - until she was thrown out through the Southern Gate, banned from reentering Thistle Hold ever again.

Entertainment

THE CRAZE FOR barbarian tales and songs which typifies many establishments in Yndaros can hardly be recognized in Thistle Hold. This can probably be explained as an effect of such legends being part of the residents work, and of most people in the Hold wanting to keep anything related to Davokar outside the palisade.

In the town of Mayor Nightpitch entertainment is seldom anything else than a distraction and escape from an all too thrilling everyday existence. Other than that, the heritage of the Ambrian people seems to be appealing, expressed in dances, songs and tales from times prior to The Great War.

Finally one should not forget the gladiator area, the Abomitorium, which can be seen as an exception from what is stated above. But it is likely no coincidence that most residents visit the bloody battleground regularly. To people living with abominations and beasts just around the corner it must feel reassuring to be reminded that the horrors of Davokar can be fought and killed.

SPECTACLE

He who wants to test the postulate that wild partying makes it possible to raise the roof should dance his way to Spectacle. In the great, open salon the carousing goes on from nightfall until long after daybreak. Aside from barrels filled with cheap stut and even cheaper blackbrew, Spectacle's foremost attraction is the entertainers. They perform in the midst of the guests - the barbarian fire artists, the Ambrian jesters, the stilt dancers from Ravenia, the snake-eater Kumuma and many others.

Most popular is the group of dwarven acrobats that the owner, Golonas, has taken under his wing.

Even though many claim to know "what actually happened", the reason behind the ban remains a much debated mystery. If Alevia really brutalized a kitchen boy, if she embezzled valuable ingredients or actually conspired to kill Mayor Nightpitch by poisoning him nobody will ever truly know. But what is evident to anyone visiting the Grubbery is that if you with one hand place a shilling on her palm you will get a bowl of excellent soup and a piece of newly baked bread in the other. Any troublemaker or freeloader will instead get a bash from Alevia's big wooden ladle, if not from her frying pan.

| | |
|--------------|------------|
| Bread | 1-5 ortegs |
| Soup | 1-5 ortegs |
| Cup of water | 1 orteg |

Visitors from Yndaros are amazed, as they have learned to associate the dwarven race with pride, restraint and pure brutality. You never see a glimpse of such traits among Spectacle's acrobats, whose far from accomplished tricks and stunts make them appear more like jesters. Especially loved is the one called Dopey, who spends his evenings falling on his bum, being slapped in the face and having his clothes covered in everything from putrid fish to tar and feathers - always with the same strained look in his face and tears of anger trickling down his cheeks.

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------|
| Tankard of Stut (unspecified) | 5 ortegs |
| Glass of Blackbrew (unspecified) | 4 ortegs |
| Roasted almonds | 1 orteg |

BENEGO'S

Do you lack the funds needed to finance your next expedition? Or are you interested in expanding the meager travelling fund? Among the fortune hunters in town it is said that the chance to become rich is bigger at Benego's than in Davokar, and that is probably true even if your success in that case depends on luck instead of on skill and good planning.

At the tables on the ground floor the stakes are quite modest, playing dice or Prios' Sun - a strategy game based on an ancient mechanic with bricks of different values, which was developed and grew popular during the war against the Dark Lords. On the upper floor, and especially in the private chambers, there is no limit to the bets placed. A tall tale tells of a game that really went out of control, which ended with the opponents betting their body

"The fortune hunter Mireda died some days ago. She owned a house at the intersection Thistle Street and Pitch Street which is full of hidden valuables. If you are quick, you can get there and loot the building before Mayor Nightpitch has signed the order to confiscate the lot!"

parts during the final rounds. One of them cut off an ear and added it to the already huge fortune laying on the table; the other one called him on the ear and raised him three fingers from the left hand. And so it continued, with toes, eyes, tongues and lips until one of them decided to live large and literally placed his heart on the table. The loser left with his life and the winner's family could live like nobles for the following six months, until the winnings were spent.

However, what angers bystanders most is what goes on in the basement below the gambling house. There anyone can bet their hard-earned thaler on death fights taking place in an iron cage. The combatants are roosters of the species Orv, according to the owner captured in the deeply corrupted parts of Davokar - they are small but very real and rampaging abominations! Ordo Magica as well as the priests of Prios regard the activity with disgust and have demanded to know exactly from where the roosters are fetched. But Thistle Hold abides to the laws of Mayor Nightpitch, and so far he has done nothing to stop the popular prize fights run by his former traveling companion, Benego.

LEGENDS

As the name suggests, the tavern Legends is a watering hole for all who are fascinated by the past. Here come the most popular storytellers in the realm, to mesmerize the audience with stories of the feats of House Kohinoor, the suppression of unrighteous rebellions and remarkable individuals who rose from poverty to elevated positions during the olden days of Alberetor. Other stories are about The Great War, its victories but also about the little man's valiant struggle against both fear and dreadful enemies.

Most of what is heard at Legends has been modified and dramatized, just like the many returning patrons want it. But now and again, sessions are arranged with some of Ambria's most prominent historians; events that may be less exciting for those listening but which provide something to enchant the real enthusiasts. Seldonio, the Grand Master of Ordo Magica, has been one such guest, so also Queen Mother Abesina's personal biographer and one of High Chieftain Tharaban's chroniclers. The latter treated the audience to a real horror story about the elves of Davokar and something he called "The Halls of a Thousand Blood-Red Tears".

During sessions like these the security is heightened, not least because of the closeness to Davokar and the fear that the Iron Pact or hostile barbarians will move in on the dignitaries. But so far only two attacks have been repelled. Lasifor

Nightpitch was the first intended victim and the war hero Herakleo Attio the second, and on both occasions the perpetrators were drunk, displeased and misguided residents - in Herakleo's case, his own unruly brother, Serex.

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|--|---------------|
| Cheese tray (simple/aged cheese) | 2/8 shillings |
| Carafe of Vearra Red (simple wine) | 2 thaler |
| Carafe of Southern Slopes (from Alberetor) | 15 thaler |

THE ABOMITORIUM

The term Fight Day is for most of the Hold's residents associated with rising tensions, heated debates and an almost consuming longing for the sun to set. Of course, the excitement is especially intense to the three hundred souls who have been able to afford a presale ticket (3-10 thaler depending on the seat). But others besides the lucky ones place bets on their favorites and many more than the two hundred allowed in are queuing on the Queen's Square long before the gates are opened. Those who are forced to remain outside usually stay to listen to the roars and commotion from the arena, and most of them use what money they have left to place a final bet.

Inside the Abomitorium the show usually starts off with fights between human adversaries, one on one or in groups - fights which are stopped once one side admits defeat. Traveling gladiators and those with their main base in other towns, battle against Thistle Hold's own favorites, as for instance the Sun Maiden with her golden locks or the aged but still powerful war veteran Madrago. The fight when the Sun Maiden took on the master gladiator Hadaro "Scalp Crusher" from Yndaros and where both of them almost bled to death before the local hero managed to land a decisive blow is legendary.

The Fight Day always ends with something extra spectacular, preferably related to Davokar. Fights against, or sometimes between, wild beasts are common occurrences but if the audience gets to decide they would prefer other kinds of combatants. Three shows that are still talked about at the taverns in town are the ones that were announced as The Goblin Rebellion, The Barbarian Uprising and Attack from the Abyss. In the first case Ambrian gladiators fought a ferocious goblin tribe, in the second they pounded the members of a rebellious group from clan Karohar who had been caught after a failed assault on Kastor. And during the Attack from the Abyss the audience got to see (likely for the last time) fifteen gladiators take on a captured and gravely blight-marked Aboar. Only four of them survived and nearly twenty reckless spectators were added to the list of dead and maimed.

"The top tower room at Arkerio's Guest House is haunted by a wraith. Since the opening, only one single person has been able to stay there for a whole night. Can't remember his name, but now he is tremendously wealthy, because he swallowed his fear and was awarded with the ghost's secrets."

Inns

IN A TOWN where a quarter of everyone staying inside the palisade are more or less temporary guests, the inns have a vital role to play. The large number of visitors also explains why the guesthouses in town are so many and so varied. There are beds for rent in almost all of the town's districts, some of them expensive and extravagant, others so shoddy that you should be careful not to let your body make contact with linens and chamber pots.

Up until a couple of years ago it could be hard to get a room at the popular inns, but that is not the case anymore. With the growth of Blackmoor, the demand for rooms in town has declined, meaning that one would be unlucky not to find an unoccupied room at a price one can afford. And should you be that unlucky, it is far from unheard of that someone already staying at one of the inns can agree to hand over the key, in exchange for a handful of thaler or as a result of resolute arm-twisting maneuvers.

THE COURT AND HARP

Do you want to know how Queen Korinthia has decorated her bedchamber? Or would you rather sleep like Grand Master Seldonio? Maybe you are keener on feeling like Grand Duchess Esmerelda? Irrespective of which, the Court and Harp is the inn for you - the inn that claims to have designed its rooms based on credible reports from the bedrooms of various celebrities.

Of course, this requires that you can afford it, and also that you are able to dress and behave like a fairly decent person. The innkeeper Aragina, who has taken over the business from her dead husband, will never accept dirt or bad manners, and she has no problem expressing her opinions publicly. She

has given up on getting the Town Watch to help her with difficult guests; it is commonly known that she resorts to other methods for getting rid of them. She orders members of staff not to clean the guest's rooms, to bang at the door with irrelevant questions in the middle of the night and to "happen" to serve moldy bread and watered beverages at supper. In recent days, there have also been rumors saying that some of the more unkempt guests at the Court and Harp have been brutally beaten and robbed. Can it be that the widow has taken to paying less scrupulous individuals to teach the louts a lesson in manners?

THE WINGED LADLE

While the Hold was being built, it was not a pleasant place to live. The ground was trampled and muddy, goblins and Ambrian construction workers were making noise day and night, and without the palisade in place, the beasts of the forest could attack at a whim. For these reasons, and to be able to oversee the site, Lasifor Nightpitch had his house built in the crown of a towering tree - in fact, the only tree not chopped down in order to make room for buildings and streets.

When Nighthome was finished Lasifor left his eagle's nest, but the tree was left standing and since then a second floor and two annexes has been added to the crown house. Today the inn has sixteen rooms, which often are booked in advance by nobles and dignitaries planning to visit the town. However, if you are lucky, a cancellation has been made and left a few beds available for hire. And surely it can be worth both the high cost and the climb up the stair winding along the trunk,

"Did you hear that the Beast Clan has attacked a woodcutting camp north of Karabbadokk? They say it's Karits in disguise but that's goblin dung! My cousin has met a survivor of an alleged beast clan attack and he swears that the attackers were elves - thoroughly corrupt, blight-marked elves ..."

Table 1: The Cost for Lodging in Thistle Hold

| QUALITY | EXAMPLE | 1 NIGHT | 1 WEEK | 1 MONTH | OWNERSHIP |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Exclusive | The Court and Harp, The Winged Ladle | 1 thaler | — | — | — |
| Fine | The Seamstress' Rest, The Ruin | 2 shillings | 1 thaler | 4 thaler | — |
| Ordinary | The Witch and Familiar, Arkerio's | 1 shilling | 5 shillings | 2 thaler | — |
| Simple | The Rose Garden, The Barrack | 5 orteg | 2 shillings | 1 thaler | — |
| Rent nice | Three rooms at the Antique Plaza | — | 2 thaler | 10 thaler | — |
| Rent ordinary | Three rooms at the West Gate | — | 1 thaler | 4 thaler | — |
| Rent simple | One room east of the Toad's Square | — | 5 shillings | 2 thaler | — |
| Buy nice | Three rooms at the Antique Plaza | — | — | — | 500 thaler |
| Buy ordinary | Three rooms at the West Gate | — | — | — | 300 thaler |
| Buy simple | One room east of the Toad's Square | — | — | — | 100 thaler |