

SHADOW MARCHES

THE SHADOW MARCHES

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A SUPPLEMENT FOR 5TH EDITION D&D SET IN THE WORLD OF EBERRON - FOR PLAYERS & GMS



OVERVIEW

The Shadow Marches are a humid, swamp-filled, untamed region of far western Khorvaire, not recognised as a nation state by the Treaty of Thronehold. Filled with deep, treacherous bogs & mires that the more civilised folk of Khorvaire wouldn't dare tread, the settlements that dot these swamps are mostly tribal societies, populated by orcs, half-orcs & humans, and are wary of outsiders. One 'proper' city stands in The Shadow Marches, however - Zarash'ak - The City of Stilts. Situated near the mouth of the Grithic River as it flows out into Zarash Bay, Zarash'ak is the only real place of commerce & trade in The Shadow Marches, and the most important place for foreigners looking to do business with House Tharashk. It is also the only place where common is spoken, or, at least, common speakers can be found. Most of the population speaks Goblin, like Droaam & Darguun, due to the ancient Dhakaani Empire. Riedran is also spoken in some old human Sarlonan settlements, and only a few tribes of orcs still speak Orc.

House Tharashk is the main dragonmarked house in the region, and the only one native to it. Humans first came from Sarlona approximately 1,500 years ago, fleeing The Sundering in Sarlona. There, they mingled with the population, and humans or half-orcs with the Mark of Finding have existed for almost a thousand years, but were only discovered 500 years ago, by a House Sivis expedition. This highlights not only the geographical distance & isolation between The Shadow Marches & civilised Khorvaire, but also the social and cultural isolation. Tharashk's main revenue source in their homeland comes from The Dragonshard Fields, an enormous modern mining site less than a day's trek from Zarash'ak. This, along with Tharashk's elevated status as a dragonmarked house, has made them the most powerful organisation in the region, and act as a de facto government at times.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are the most diabolical & unspeakable cults & belief systems that are ingrained in the culture of many tribes & communities in the Marches. Madness has touched many of the people in the region, since the Daelkyr inhabited the land thousands of years ago. It is from The Shadow Marches, however, that the Daelkyr were stopped. The green dragon Vvraak taught the orcs of the region the ways of druidic magic some 6,000 years ago, and the orcs formed the first druidic sect - The Gatekeepers. They created seals that locked the Daelkyr in the depths of Khyber, where they've been ever since. Because The Shadow Marches is the most Gatekeeper Seal dense region of Khorvaire, and because of the lawlessness & isolated communities that lay in the region, many cults to Daelkyr lords & other entities can be found. Not just in the insular tribes, but also in Zarash'ak, where multiple cults to many ungodly beings contend against each other & what little law is enforced in The City of Stilts for power, either for themselves, or for their dark lords.

SEVEN THINGS TO KNOW

Listed below are 7 core themes of the region. These are a list of things to remember when writing a story in the Marches, as they highlight the main thematic, atmospheric & tonal differences between The Shadow Marches & other regions of Khorvaire.

1. The Marches are still to this day, mostly full of isolated & uncivilised communities, and the swamp between them is dangerous & difficult to manoeuvre through.
2. House Tharashk is the most economically & politically powerful organisation in The Shadow Marches, especially for foreigners.
3. The isolated villages in the region have allowed many odd belief systems & cultic groups to exist & grow.
4. The Marches are the homelands of the Gatekeepers - both them & their eternal enemies, the Daelkyr, are a large part of the region.
5. Thanks to the Dhakaani Empire, Goblin is the most common language, but Riedran & the ancient Orc language also exist.
6. Monstrous races from Droaam are present, due to Tharashk hiring many, as well as the culture & language that is common between the 2 regions.
7. The lawlessness & local, independent forms of government that comes from being so underdeveloped pervades the region, and is visible everywhere from the lack of organised militia, public services, royal court & ruling families. This lack of centralised rule is actually relatively stable due to the Marches' low population density and tribal culture, and the in more denser areas such as Zarash'ak, the private protection services & almost plutocratic power that Tharashk holds keeps the city from falling into disarray.

HISTORY

Orcs & goblins were the original inhabitants of The Shadow Marches, since the Age of Monsters. Approximately six millennia from present day, Khorvaire was thrown into chaos. The Dhakaani Empire, which had flourished for ten thousand years, was reduced to ruins by the Xoriat-born entities known as Daelkyr. With legions of horrific armies, weapons & powers which was never seen before or since in Khorvaire, they reduced the empire to tiny, fractured clans.

They had their sights on all of Khorvaire, and perhaps Eberron, when a green dragon, known as Vvraak, appeared, to aid the orcs of The Shadow Marches, and teach them the ways of druidic, primal, magic. The first druidic sect, the Gatekeepers, was born, and they grew in size & power, enough to create seals that repulsed & imprisoned Daelkyr, and still remain active to this day, locking them in prison-like demiplanes in Khyber. Vvraak vanished after handing down this knowledge, and has not been seen since. Rumours are spoken that her lair exists somewhere in the swamps, filled with ancient treasure & gold.

The first wave of Lhazaar settlers largely ignored the inhospitable, orc & goblin-ridden swamps of far western Khorvaire.

None of the city-states that would eventually become united as one kingdom under Galifar claimed dominion over the lands, nor did they send settlers, emissaries or soldiers to the region. Approximately 600 years before the kingdom of Galifar was born, The Sundering ocured on the human's home continent of Sarlona. The Quori spirits malevolently incited riots & wars across Sarlona, leading to a new wave of humans settling in Khorvaire. Many of these new settlers arrived in The Shadow Marches, bringing their Riedran language & Sarlonan culture with them. Over the years to come, the 2 races mingled to form what is now a fairly homogeneous culture, independent of racial divides. Orc & human unions were common, and as a result, so were half-orcs.

Come the time of Galifar, and the nation of Breland laid claim over all lands west of the Graywall Mountains. However, this was in name only. Humans hardly settled there - barely anything more than small squadrons of soldiers were sent west of the Graywalls, and it's likely that many Marchers did not even know that their lands were "subject to Brelish law". This all changed, however, when a House Sivs expedition to the Marches uncovered the Mark of Finding on humans & half-orcs there. After discovering the new dragonmark, (which had already been manifesting for five centuries) in 498YK, Sivs quickly brought the culture & standing of those marked families up to the same level as the other known houses, and established what is now known as "The Triumvirate". The Triumvirate is a council of the heads of the three families that manifest the Mark of Finding - Aashta, Torrn & Velderan, which lead the house to this day.

Throughout The Last War, The Shadow Marches & their most powerful organisation, House Tharashk, were largely absent. It was not their lands being fought over, and no-one required any soldiers from them. Tharashk, the only single organisation powerful & rich enough to be called a "leader" were absent from the Treaty of Thronehold, and they & the people of the Marches liked it that way. The mostly still uncivilised people prefer their privacy & isolation, and certainly don't want their villages being ruled over by a group of people that they don't respect or have ever even met. Tharashk, too, for the most part, prefer to slide under the radar of the eastern nations of Khorvaire, and can continue to supply them & the dragonmarked houses with the dragonshards that they so desperately need for their economy & magical items.

CIVILIZATION

Civilization in the Shadow Marches is very different to society anywhere else in Khorvaire, even Droaam.

Approximately a third of the population of the marches live in the only real city, Zarash'ak. The majority of the remainder are scattered across sizeable settlements, and the rest lie in tiny villages & communities that are so numerous & insignificant that they cannot be placed on modern maps. This chapter aims to discuss facets of these people & their communities in general, and to give players & GMs a tool to creating characters from this region that feel rooted in their environment.

RACES

The 3 main races of the Marches, orcs, half-orcs & humans, live in relative harmony, free of any racial divides. This is because either they have been mingling for hundreds of years, or left isolated in tiny villages, usually monoracial, and are unwelcome to anyone, regardless of race. Decent sized towns contain mostly these 3 races, but also host sizable minorities of Goblinoids, and other monstrous races from the bordering region of Droaam.

LANGUAGE

In ancient times, orcs filled the swamplands, meaning that the old Orc tongue was the original language of the Marches. After the rise of the Dhakaani Empire, the Goblin culture & language dominated most of Khorvaire. It gradually became more integrated into society from that point onward, eventually becoming the region's main language that it has today. With the arrival of Sarlonan humans into the Marches, Reidran came into use, with some orcs & goblins learning the language in order to communicate with the refugees. It never overtook the usage of Goblin or Orc, however, and the only continued usage of Reidran is in isolated human communities.

Today, people can anticipate Goblin to be the most common language, and it's expected that many Marchers speak it. Some more modern folk living in Zarash'ak, especially dragonmarked house representatives, or foreigners living in the city should be speaking Common - people that many PCs will interact with in D&D campaigns. Orc is listed in *Eberron - Rising From the Last War* as an "Exotic" language, and for good reason - likely the only place Orc would be spoken, (except by a linguistics professor), would be in the Marches.

As a DM, feel free to use or ignore the language barriers posed naturally by The Shadow Marches. Using multiple unusual and exotic languages in an equally unusual & exotic locale can add a lot to the atmosphere of the game. However, think twice before deciding what NPCs can speak what languages - especially if none of the party can speak Riedran, Orc, or Goblin.

Making a "realistic" setting by having many NPCs speaking an unintelligible language that none of the PCs can understand is oftentimes more frustrating & confusing than it is impressive or atmospheric, but of course, spells such as *Tongues* & *Comprehend Languages* can break language barriers.

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

The mixed people of The Shadow Marches have historically been separated by various racial, linguistic & even cultural boundaries. However, they are distinctly different from modern, or civilised Khorvarian culture, so they deserve an explanation.

One thing that can be generalised across the entire region is the food. If there is any food that can be considered the national dish, or at least, the most ceremonial dish, it is Ghalskeina - a seafood & root vegetable soup that always contains the head of a catfish. The dish may be... rustic to some outsiders, and downright offensive to others, but when made properly, it is one of the most flavourful & largest dishes, worthy of a special occasion, such as a birth of a clan member, a sacrifice of another, or a good hunt!

Zhisha'an is another Marcher dish, a more everyday meal consisting of crayfish meat & rice, with a variety of spices.

Many citizens of The Shadow Marches have little time for more modern luxuries like art, but rooted deep in the swamp's culture is their skill in sculpting & whittling wood. Totems & trinkets are the most common medium of visual art, and many huts, walls & gates can be seen with carvings of deities, people, or animals significant to a particular tribe or family. The written word is unknown to most citizens, & the literacy rate is the lowest of any region in Khorvaire, so all stories & songs are passed down orally.

Those who consider themselves fashionable or wealthy adorn themselves with colours, jewelleries & cloth that is difficult or impossible to obtain in the swamp. For example, many shades of blue and/or white cloth must be imported or coloured magically, and metals of any kind are difficult to find, so jewellery or ornate metalwork are extremely rare & fashionable. Most clothing & equipment are made from plant or animal derived materials, and even textiles that are available, like cotton & silk are labour-intensive & an uncommon trade, making them relatively expensive. Wool is not natively found in the Marches, and commands a high price because of this.

Buildings are mostly comprised of wood or bamboo that grows across the land, as they are the cheapest, most abundant, & easiest material to work with. In some wetter areas, entire homes are built on bamboo stilts & scaffolding to protect against flooding. Stone construction is a rarity, except in the northern towns of Goldmire & Yrlag, as are brick houses.

Kindness is a scarce quality in this part of the globe, & a "survival of the fittest" mentality is prevalent across even the more civilised folk in Zarash'ak. That's not to say that members of tribes do not care for each other, but it displays the inherent need of everyone in their tribe to put in work - everyone has a job to do. Because of these small communities, many people regard everything & everyone outside of them with fear & distrust, as they simply don't understand people or things that they can't tangibly grasp or interact with.

This leads to magic of all kinds generally being treated with distrust. The same is true for large-scale organised religion, and foreign leaders.

Lacking in any sort of large-scale industry or company (with the notable exception of House Tharashk), most commerce is done by bringing goods & merchants on Lyrandar river barges (elemental galleons are too large to pass into Zarash Bay), and from there local traders, or members of Tharashk's "Zarash'ak Merchant's Guild" will distribute goods across the city & swamps. Many rural citizens have no need for items from Eastern Khorvaire, but city folk will pay high prices for goods considered ordinary in the civilised nations.

Finally, education in the mundane, arcane & religious doctrines is quite rare. The vast majority of people are not literate, and Zarash'ak is the only settlement large enough to have anything capable of being called an academy, which is, in truth, simply an extension of the library. Most 'courses' taught there are in Goblin, and focus on basic arcane & druidic magic, as well as history of the Marches. Some theology is taught, and many books on the subject can be found there also.

BELIEF SYSTEMS

Just as the people of The Shadow Marches have never been united as a single nation, neither has their religion or belief systems been unified or even organised. Many simply revolve around worship of Daelkyr or Overlords, but some more eccentric ones will be also be mentioned here.

THE DARK SIX

The Dark Six are not as taboo in these lands as they are elsewhere. Whilst many followers of other religions view Dark Six worshippers as nothing more than power-hungry or evil sadists, the truth is not so black & white. Many followers preach the reverence (or fear) of the Dark Six's powers, believing that these raw tendencies & shows of power are the real forces that affect Eberron. They follow their gods not to love or adore them, as followers of the divine nine hope to do, but to respect the power that lies within each of them, in the hope that when one of them turns their wrath to the material plane, that they will be spared, or even gifted.

Of all the 6 gods, The Devourer & The Fury are the most revered in the Marches, and have the largest number of followers. This is due to the tribal societies, and amount of wilderness present across the swamplands, making nature a force very closely felt. Cults of theirs are usually quite violent & based on living an isolated life, on the land. The Mockery & The Keeper have fewer numbers of followers, but still have many oaths & curses sworn to them. Remember, worship of a particular god of the Dark Six is not exclusive - many citizens of The Shadow Marches do, in fact, choose to follow multiple, as with the Sovereign Host. Many followers of The Mockery are associated with backstabbing & distrust, even in the Marches, and small, dedicated groups to their worship are not overtly violent, but can push for instability in communities from the shadows. The Shadow & The Traveller have the smallest followings, which usually have a magical or nomadic ideology, and cults worshipping them are based on magical knowledge & hiding it from others.

DAELKYR

Dyrn is probably the most infamous of all Daelkyr, and has the largest following, especially in Zarash'ak. Its followers are likely to equip themselves with symbionts, and peacefully or violently try to convert, corrupt, or transform others.

Belashyrra is another common Daelkyr, and its followers fixate themselves on sight & visions. Many of them blind or disfigure themselves, or tattoo eye-like symbols onto them, and claim that this devotion gives them "The Lord's Eyes" (what arcane scholars would refer to as truesight). They typically aren't violent, & tend to keep to themselves.

Avassh has little presence in the stilted city of Zarash'ak, or the Dragonshard Fields, or the rocky northern parts of the Marches. The swamps & forests, though, are full of life & worship to the Twister of Roots. Many of its followers are magically gifted, and are able to bend plants to their will, animating them to create structures or plant-based warriors.

Another Daelkyr mostly seen in the swamps & small communities is Kyrzin. Worshippers of Kyrzin are rarely voluntary - parasitic slime will coat the entirety of a creature until it becomes a host for Kyrzin.

Slime outbreaks are not common in towns, but they can threaten its entire existence, & the Gatekeepers keep a closer eye than others on Kyrzin followers.

The Still Lord, Orlassk, is most common amongst destitute Tharashk workers in the Dragonshard Fields, where they begin to hear whispers - either from the stone itself, or Orlassk's stone-like servants: gargoyles & basilisks. Petrification is idolised by Orlassk followers, and particular cult members might boast their collection of statues - petrified victims of theirs, by a symbiont or by magic.

Valaara is a surprisingly commonly worshipped Daelkyr, among the lower class of larger towns like Zarash'ak, Valshar'ak, Goldmire & Urthold. They believe in the idea of being part of a larger force, and that they are only strong in numbers. There are most likely some number of Valaara followers in any settlement, as they are numerous & spread out across the regions, but are not often violent.

OVERLORDS

Sul Khatesh is the keeper of secrets & arcane knowledge. Many cults to her are in larger towns & cities, where others might gather & thirst for magical knowledge. Sul Khatesh is the Overlord most likely to offer a warlock pact to someone powerful enough, like a particularly charismatic cult leader.

Rak Tulkhesh's followers are most often tribal orcs, as their culture leans them toward chaos & violence. Another high-value target for the Gatekeepers & Tharashk inquisitives, they will often plan violent attacks on certain groups of people who they believe have wronged them. Followers will often wear little clothing & will paint themselves, and are not subtle in their plans or movement, making their attacks easy to counter & foil.

Bel Shalor has little influence from outside the Thranish capital, Flamekeep, but fear & darkness lie in all corners of Khorvaire, and the Marches are filled with both. Followers of Bel Shalor exist in no particular concentration across the region, & seek to de-stabilise people or societies larger than them for their own greed, often under the guise of "liberty" or "justice". This mentality leads groups to Bel Shalor to be inherently unstable, so many followers worship alone, and are often very clever & dangerous.

OTHER

A village of no more than 2 dozen people considers the Otyugh that lives in their trash heap a sacred & god-like being that is immortal. The Otyugh's life has been extended due to it living in a manifest zone of Xoriat, and it has developed psychic abilities powerful enough to manipulate the villagers, & keep them under its control.

A foreign prophet has announced a new religion based around living a free & truly expressive lifestyle, embracing his own "true will", whilst preaching to his followers to "do what thou wilt". He has set up a small but dedicated combine of followers in the ruin of a Dhakaani keep in the Marches, where they live in poverty, but apparent happiness.

A community of Riedran humans have taken their psionic traditions & beliefs to an extreme, and believe the entire universe & everyone's existence to be held within the mind of some universal consciousness. Thus, they believe that their own mental thoughts & state of mind directly influence the real world. This is made all the more believable by the high rate of psionic people in the village, using telepathy & telekinesis.

PLAYING A SHADOW MARCHES CHARACTER

When creating a PC or NPC that is from The Shadow Marches, take time to think about their origin. A human that grew up in a village of less than 2 dozen people & speaking Riedran is going to have a vastly different set of world views, cultural ideals & spiritual beliefs than a human growing up in Flamekeep. So too, would these core concepts be different between 2 orcs from Zarash'ak; one employed by House Tharashk in the Dragonshard Fields, and the other born into the house, surrounded by wealth. See the list below for a concise & important run-down of key concepts to keep in mind when creating & role-playing a Shadow Marches character.

~ Location, community & past experience in it - are they from an isolated community, or the City of Stilts, or House Tharashk?

~ Religion & beliefs - Dark Six worship is common, as are cults to Overlords or Daelkyr.

~ Wealth & class - are they a labourer despising the leaders of House Tharashk, or a merchant peddling wares across the treacherous swamps?

~ Skills & proficiencies - people with a trade or multiple language proficiencies are relatively rare in the Marches.

~ Magic & artifice - how much has the character seen of magic or technology beyond druidic magic?

FACTIONS & CHARACTERS

Amongst the vast rabble of the Marches, a number of individuals & organisations stand out. The Shadow Marches is home to the ancient druidic sect of the Gatekeepers, & it's the seat of House Tharashk, but it also contains more sinister worship groups, not to mention fugitives hiding in the region.

HOUSE THARASHK

The Mark of Finding first started appearing among half-orcs and humans of The Shadow Marches around the same time as Galifar was first forming his kingdom, but the rest of the continent had no idea it existed until half a millennium afterwards when a Sivis expedition to the western mires of Khorvaire discovered them. This piece of history goes to show how different the house must have been - and still is - to the traditional Galifarian houses of Khorvaire. Not much is known about the house before this contact, and the Sivis gnomes were quick to introduce the fledgling house to The Twelve & show them the structure & diplomacy of civilised Khorvaire. Many members of the house will use their family name rather than Tharashk, even when dealing in the name of the house outside of the Marches. However, a newer generation of house members across Khorvaire are beginning to use Tharashk, as a more recognisable name, & to distance themselves from the internal politics of the house.

THE TRIUMVIRATE

Tharashk is also unusual in their leadership. The council of three, the "Triumvirate" debates on the direction that the house should move in as a unit together, all whilst leading quite separate directions in business & personal life. The 3 council members come from sub-houses that bear the Mark of Finding - Aashta, Torr'n & Velderan.

Aashta are the oldest branch of the house, and are the most connected with the people of Zarash'ak & the Marches, as well as the cults that make them up. Rumours circulate about the current leader of the Aashta clan, Khundar, & his involvement with cults. No rumours are needed regarding his eldest son, Thaan, who openly worships the Daelkyr Belashyrra. His father & family condemn his actions publicly, but he still lives & walks freely in the City of Stilts.

Torrn, and especially the houses' matriarch, Maagrim, are the most closely connected bloodline to the Gatekeepers. Members proudly say that a Torrnr was the first leader of the Gatekeepers, and it could certainly be true. The Torrnr line is purely half-orcs, and they show their Orcish heritage & stoicism proudly, as well as their natural skill in magic, either druidic or arcane.

Velderan is the newest family within Tharashk, & the most active across Khorvaire. The current leader, Daric, is human, and many of his family are. Velderans have a strong skill in diplomacy & communication, within & outside the house. Daric's nephew, Rennik, for example, is the head of External Affairs of Tharashk, and Velderans are more likely to be found in Brelish cosmopolitan cities like Wroat & Sharn than Zarash'ak. Plenty of them become Bounty Hunters.

BUSINESS

Tharashk's most lucrative business is in mining & prospecting. Their use of the Mark of Making has enabled them to locate objects of great value under the ground - most notably dragonshards. The Dragonshard Fields are a prime example of this - turning a relatively dry patch of flat marsh into an enormous mining operation turning over millions of Galifar a year. Similar signs are being found in the deep jungles of Q'barra, and Tharashk is investing heavily in a way to create a similar operation without offending both the native Lizardfolk & recently settled human communities there.

The House's other notable line of work - at least to the everyday citizen of Khorvaire - is tracking & finding people & objects, that is, bounty hunting. What was once a niche occupation has skyrocketed in demand in cities like Wroat, Sharn, Fairhaven & Flamekeep, where things & people are going missing more than ever before. A law-abiding citizen now has a perfectly good reason to want someone found, or ensure that something cannot be found.

Tharashk also employ many a shady adventurer or fighter as hired muscle or bodyguards, or as labourers in the mines, especially monstrous races from Droaam. They also run the "Zarash'ak Merchant's Guild", which encourages trade with other nations, whilst they take a cut of the profits. Tharashk has the best relation of all the houses with the monstrous races. This is not due to any philosophical similarity, it is mostly due to history, proximity & pragmatism - trolls & orcs make great labourers & intimidating guards!

LEADERSHIP

As the only semblance of "civilised" life in the Marches, House Tharashk enjoys unchallenged leadership of the entire region. For the most part, the region runs itself. No large-scale conflicts, famines, or unrest trouble the Marches, as the tribal communities are too sparsely populated, disorganised & hard to communicate with to even understand

that they're under rule by another group of people. If given good reason though, Tharashk could muster a force & seize control of an area in the Marches. Zarash'ak is the only place where real Tharashk rule is felt, & even then it's light by Khorvarian standards. No standardisation of construction exists, there are no tariffs on trade, & taxes are a foreign concept.

Unfortunately for the defenceless (which are few in Zarash'ak), there is also no watch or guard force. Private or self-protection are the only methods of defence, and the entire city could collapse if given the right push. For the moment, however, Zarash'ak is a relatively safe place for adventurers, but the same cannot be said for average citizens of Khorvaire, unfortunately.

Their unchallenged power over the region has led Tharashk leadership to covet & consolidate their power, and become even more cut off from the eastern nations. But despite their desperate attempts, their civilisation & way of life may be overtaken by the expansion of the rest of Khorvaire.

CHARACTERS

Khundar d'Aashta, a half-orc male is the head of the Aashta clan of House Tharashk, and despite being educated in medicine & magic in Aundair, is very much opposed to outside influence to his home. Undeterred by the rumours of his association with cults in Zarash'ak, Khundar has never directly dealt with cultists or organised groups to Overlords or Daelkyr. His responsibilities are in shipping, logistics & accounting and is partly responsible for the Dragonshard Fields and the new prospecting venture in Q'barra. He worships the Dark Six, particularly The Keeper & The Mockery, and is respectful & soft-spoken.

Thaan d'Aashta, Khundar's eldest son, also half-orc, is infamously known in Zarash'ak, as well as in the upper echelons of Tharashk, for his open worship of the Daelkyr Belashyrra. Whilst the Marches are a relatively lawless realm, this worship & refusal to accept his wrongdoings does not go un-condemned by his family & his contemporaries. However, he is still a popular & well-known figure in Zarash'ak, who enjoys the spotlight & is well liked by the people, due to his looks & charisma. In reality, he worships no Daelkyr, but has taken on this guise to move through the city's underworld, passing on any dangerous or important information to his father, other members of the Triumvirate, or anyone with enough coin. He ensures that information about violent groups is passed onto the right people to ensure Zarash'ak remains standing.

Foreman George is a short, black-haired male human that, as the leader of the Dragonshard Fields, lounges in his hunter-style log cabin whilst his workers slave down in the mines. His position isn't unearned, though, he was a miner for most of his life, living in Zarash'ak before being promoted, and knows a lot about the multiple sites, shafts, & equipment used in the mines. He may appear to be lazy, though, as the mines essentially run themselves. George claims ancestry to the Velderan line of Tharashk, but his lack of dragonmark & proof has led the clan to deny these claims. His laid-back attitude & abundance of spare time make him easy to talk to, and a good starting contact for anyone coming into the mines.

Maagrim d'Torrn is the wizened, elderly, half-orc matriarch of clan Torr. Usually seen wearing long, flowing, purple gowns, and Byeshk trinkets reminiscent of the Gatekeepers, Maagrim still keeps close ties to the ancient, although dwindling, druidic society. She works heavily with their leader & 2nd in command, Sazhi & Olma. She has lived her entire life in the Marches, and her Common proficiency is still behind her Goblin, using simple sentences & slow speech.

Her duties to the house mostly lie in domestic administration of Zarash'ak & the Marches, she's the closest thing that the city has to a mayor. She also makes a high priority to protect the Zarash'ak library, being close friends with its curator, Hermann. Despite disagreeing with Khundar & his son's methods, she uses their information to keep Zarash'ak safe, and ensures that the Gatekeepers keep track of their seals within but also outside of The Shadow Marches.

Daric Velderan, the head of the Velderan family, is an un-marked male human, who's position in the Triumvirate means that he is abroad more than he is at home, and has lavish homes in Sharn, Fairhaven & Korth. His duties are related to the management & diplomacy of Tharashk, and regularly spends time at The Spire of the Twelve, attending conferences for the Twelve personally, and ensuring that the various bounty hunter & other guilds of Tharashk's are running smoothly. His lack of dragonmark is rare in dragonmarked house leadership, especially in Tharashk, but in spite of it, (or perhaps because of it), he is a hard worker, and his professional yet down-to-earth manner make him easy to talk to despite his status. His colleagues in the Triumvirate see him as half-foreigner, however, and resist his attempts at making modern changes to the house.

Rennik Velderan is a young diplomat, the nephew of Daric, hailing from the city of Wroat, and was recently promoted from Bounty Hunter Guild Head to External Affairs Manager of the entire house of Tharashk, especially Zarash'ak. He's a well-dressed & groomed half orc, with a thick central Brelish accent that makes him sound out of place in the city. He works closely with his uncle to coordinate communication between the public & other houses, and with Khundar to manage shipping & logistics. He is also the most likely candidate to come in contact with adventurers that are not from the Marches, and hire them for business House Tharashk cannot manage themselves.

GATEKEEPERS

Born in a time of need & desperation of the inhabitants of Khorvaire, the Gatekeepers are the oldest druidic society in the continent, and perhaps the globe, but they are losing popularity & relevance in society today, who sees them as an interesting bit of ancient history, and nothing more.

THE GATEKEEPERS TODAY

Since the creation of the many seals that has saved Khorvaire, the Gatekeepers have slowly dwindled, in both numbers & power. What were once respected oracles & leaders of many tribes throughout the marches, are now an embarrassingly small group comprising of mostly orcish humanoids. The majority of the Gatekeepers reside in Zarash'ak, and typically only leave their stilted city to perform the renewal of the Seals across Khorvaire.

They're led by a Zarash'ak native, and full-blooded orc, Sazhi, whose stoicism he most likely received from Maagrim d'Torrn, in their work together. They organise schedules to renew each of the Seals across the continent, and use information from Tharashk inquisitives across the Marches to root out & squash any worrisome cultic activity that pricks their ears. Because of this relatively new duty, the Gatekeepers of today are quite well versed in Daelkyr rituals & their crucial elements, as well as the means of halting them.

This policing of the Marches gets quite a bit of support from Tharashk inquisitives in not only discovering this activity, but stopping it, too. Many of the Gatekeepers themselves are too elderly or otherwise unsuited for physical confrontation, but the inquisitives relish in it, and aren't afraid of hiring Tharashk bodyguards turned mercenaries for some extra pairs of hands. At least one Gatekeeper typically tags along in these "raids" as an arcane specialist, to cleanse a village, or stop a ritual with their knowledge of druidic & cultic magic.

THE SEALS

The Gatekeepers left dozens of seals on Khorvaire, which still ward off Daelkyr & keep them trapped in Khyber today. The Seals are not identical in appearance, especially from different regions across Khorvaire, but they are all quite large (between 5 & 15 feet across), glowing sigils fixed to a surface, usually the ground.

Some use the symbol of the Gatekeepers (seen in *E:RftLW* pg 274), and are surrounded in 6 smaller stars, glowing either green or yellow. Others are a series of concentric squares dug out into the earth, with a dull purple light running in these dug out channels, and other carefully calculated lines chiselled through them. Another type is a crude diagram of the planes of the multiverse, with Gatekeeper symbols showing seals on Khyber & Xoriat, glowing pure white on the surface they're emblazoned upon. But many other types of seal exist.

The seals require regular maintenance in the form of rituals performed by the Gatekeepers. The Daelkyr do not let up in their escape from their prisons, so neither should the druids! The Gatekeepers keep detailed records of these Renewal Rituals for each seal on Khorvaire, and are able to pinpoint on what *day of the week* a certain seal was renewed a millennium ago! These records also let them predict what seal will need renewal at what time. Some, more active seals need renewing every 3 or 4 years, but other, more dormant ones only need renewal once every other decade. If a renewal is not performed on a particular seal, it is safe to say that Daelkyr will not burst forth from it the next day, but it will start to degrade, perhaps generating attention from Daelkyr on both sides of the seal..

The magic used to create the seals is, with much of the ancient magic in Eberron, lost to time. However, it is known that even mages of the highest calibre are unable to break them with spells alone. Knowledge of the particular construction of each unique seal must be found, pulled at & unravelled like a loose thread. The Gatekeepers hold knowledge of the structure of the seals, so it stands to reason that given a certain level of power & time, one could start to pull at this thread. Or other Daelkyr, especially intelligent ones such as Beholders or Spectators, having studied the seals for their entire existence in Khyber, could have both the knowledge & power to do so.

CHARACTERS

Sazhi is a male orc, with thick green skin, dark purple robes, and tiny spectacles perched atop his wide-set face. He is the leader of the Gatekeepers, but is not afraid to get his hands dirty & follow leads towards Cults of the Dragon Below in any & every corner of the Marches. His advanced age & experience trekking across the swamps lead him to be an effective guide across his country. His skill in druidic magic & wisdom occasionally causes him to advise the Triumvirate, especially Maagrim, during difficult times.

Olma is a young human female, born & raised in Zarash'ak, and she was only noticed by the Gatekeepers for her natural skill in magic - especially divination. This has caused her to rise through the ranks in the sect, and now she sits just beneath Sazhi, giving orders to druids decades her senior. Head-strong & overconfident, Olma is eager to go on a raid, not only to see action, but because of her unhealthy fascination with Daelkyr cults. Sazhi sees this as a potential danger to herself & the Gatekeepers, so he keeps her from participating in raids, at the protest of both Olma, and a close friend of hers, Feng d'Tharashk.

Feng d'Tharashk, the most well-known (and liked) inquisitive in Zarash'ak, is a half orc male hailing from Breland. He wears the typical inquisitive overcoat filled with tools of ethically questionable use, a low, wide-brimmed hat & a wry smile. Something of a local legend, Feng is adept at using his natural mark-given abilities to track down sinister activities. Feng is not a member of the Gatekeepers, but is one of their close associates, and his popularity with the people ensure that the druids always have their ear to the ground.

CULTS

The word "cult" is too broad & too discriminatory of a term to describe all of the various groups that practice religions or hold beliefs different from established norms. However, "established norms" in The Shadow Marches are The Dark Six & far stranger religions, so this section will be limited to the more sinister, or largest, or most interesting groups that adventurers in the Marches may come in contact with.

DAELKYR CULTS

In Zarash'ak, the largest cult is one to Dyrnn, the "Dyrnn Devoted", led by Grekash (see the below section *Characters* for details). They're notorious for starting violence & unrest in Zarash'ak, and inquisitives, backed by Gatekeepers, are constantly trying to keep their sermons under control.

An orcish woman hosts a decent-sized gathering of worshippers to Valaara in the wilderness of The Deepwood. She lures unsuspecting victims/new worshippers with her skill in illusory & enchantment magic, and slowly forces them to hold the same adoration for her deity that she does.

A third of the town of Patrahk'n is very subtly under the influence of the aboleth that dwells in the Blackwater Lake. The average townspeople would not even recognise that they are under the control of such a horrific & scheming being, but slight changes in behaviours that can only be observed by outsiders show that they are being influenced towards an aquatic life within the lake, to grow the aboleth's power.

OVERLORD CULTS

Sorrow runs the cult to Sul Khatash in Zarash'ak, and hosts her gatherings in a basement of an old building in the Yaasht district in Zarash'ak, so low that the water of the Glum River passing underneath the town laps the walls of the building. The cult mostly gathers to hope to receive knowledge from The Keeper of Secrets, and every other meeting, a participant leaves with more magical skill than they had before. Under Sorrow's charismatic leadership, the cult is growing, & in fact, it is pulling members from other groups into it.

Rak Tulkhesh, the Rage of War, has influenced a mixed-race & language group of people in the east of the Marches, and the majority of the group meet in Arashuul or Dhavin's Post. The head of the group is a Gnoll woman, Krii, who preys on her followers' anger & resentment at their standard of living, & at their leaders for not improving it. She's been successful in starting riots in both settlements, but no-one has been able to pin down Krii as the inciter of these events.

CHARACTERS

Sorrow is a blue-skinned Tiefling originally from the lower wards of Sharn, but moved to Zarash'ak to lead the cult of Sul Khatash. After being orphaned by a particularly violent group of paladins of The Silver Flame, she fell into the arms of a cult to Sul Khatash. After devoting all of her energy & focus into this group & her worship, she was granted a tiny modicum of power from the Keeper of Secrets herself. She used this to move herself to the cultic cesspool that is Zarash'ak, and take over the group there. Her vision is to have The Shadow Marches as a centre of cultic activity & freedom, and there are many in the city that share her desire.

Grekash leads worship to currently the largest cult in Zarash'ak, the "Dyrnn Devoted". He's a human native of Zarash'ak, who is well known for his role as a preacher & enthusiast of the "Word of Dyrnn", a book he wrote that claimed to be dictated to him in a series of dreams by the Daelkyr itself. He is small & short-tempered, is slightly proficient in transmutation magic, and owns 2 symbiont-tentacles that replace his hands & leave him wearing gloves. He refuses to leave his home during the day, and many suspect vampirism, but no-one dares question him. His dream is to one day transform the whole of Zarash'ak followers to Dyrnn, peacefully or otherwise.

Randal, a male hobgoblin, leads worship of Orlassk, both in The Dragonshard Fields, and in Arashuul. His group has been losing followers recently to Sorrow's cult to Sul Khatash. He doesn't oppose Sorrow's group, despite it being radically different to his own, and often converses with her on theological ideals. He enjoys freedom & popularity despite his bizarre beliefs because of his absolute stress to his followers to non-violence & non-conversion, saying: "each subject must carve their own path toward the Lord of Stone."

Shaagut is an orcish chieftain who rules over a series of small villages in the Deepwood, and is advised by a warlock & a captured human 'oracle', Marlot. All 4 of his villages lie in close proximity to a Gatekeeper Seal and Shaagut focuses all of his & his villages' energies on working on the seal, but to no avail. He does this because whilst he maintains a guise that he & his villages follow The Dark Six, Avassh is his true lord, and wishes for his villages to be the hosts for his lord when it breaks out from Khyber.



Marlot d'Lyrandar was a divination wizard working for her house, & for several expeditions with Tharashk. Her job was to find suitable places to erect airship stations for House Lyrandar in the middle of the Marches, pointing Tharashk surveyors to suitable sites with her spells & divination abilities. Unfortunately for her & her company, she delved too far into the Deepwood, & found herself attacked by the territorial orcish tribes. They slew almost the entirety of the expedition squad, but Marlot convinced them of her abilities as a 'fortune-teller', and so she was allowed to live. From there she learned the Orcish language & their way of life & has almost learned to live with them, although she yearns to escape.

LOCATIONS

ZARASH'AK

The City of Stilts is the only real 'city' in The Shadow Marches, and the business that sustains it comes from House Tharashk & the Dragonshard Fields. The map above is a rough guide & sketch of the layout of the city.

Propped up entirely on bamboo or light wooden stilts on a shallow section of the Glum River, Zarash'ak was created by & has only grown because of trade.

The centre of the city has its first buildings and boardwalks lashed around the wide trunks of the Skai tree, which still stand today. The Skai ("Great" in Goblin), tree is a large tree native to the Marches, with thick trunks, little foliage, and extensive root systems, that travel across the body of water in which they sit - like an enormous mangrove.

Sometime less than a millennium ago, merchants from other nations constructed trade posts around this collection of trees, as well as a series of small warehouses that have since become enclaves for dragonmarked houses. A large bazaar was set up near these buildings, and it continues to be a constantly shifting mass of stalls, carts, goods & coin. As people started to move there permanently, the increasing population needed other services to support them: restaurants, temples, and the Gatekeepers sought to have their own abode in the growing town.

Once The Dragonshard Fields were discovered, the town saw a sudden surge in population, buildings grew out to reach the banks of the river, and docks were built for Lyrandar barges to transport goods & workers.

When The Last War broke out, some workers left to aid their country in the conflict, but many dragonmarked houses still needed their dragonshards, so work continued. Throughout the war, immigration increased, as many fleeing the violence saw that the Marches were far away from the war raging across the rest of the continent. Now in the aftermath of the war, some workers have returned, but the population of approximately 20,000 have largely grown isolated.

DISTRICTS

MOR

Meaning "life" in Goblin, Mor is the oldest district of Zarash'ak, and is a cluster of well-built wooden or bamboo residential structures. Many of the original buildings from the birth of the city still stand in this quiet district, and they are mostly small houses, tiny taverns, restaurants, or grocers, and a theatre or 2. Citizens are mostly orcish or human, & rarely speak anything other than Goblin.

YAASHT

Yaasht is the Goblin word for "worship", and the origins of the name of the district are clear, as 3 out of the 4 religious buildings in Zarash'ak lie within or adjacent to the district. The rest of the buildings are either residential, fisheries, or traders. This is due to the district's proximity to the river & the docks. People in Yaasht are more likely to speak Common than those from Mor, but the district is still populated mostly by locals.

KAPAA

Kapaa is now mostly a ruined area of Zarash'ak - the name of the district being changed over the years, where it's recently settled upon its current one, which means "treachery". Unstable soil coupled with turbulence from the river bank to the east of the district has made many, even properly-made buildings topple, especially after a heavy downpour of rain that is all too common in Zarash'ak. Few live in the district, and ever fewer buildings still stand. This leaves it a perfect haven for sinister meetings, rituals & other crime.

WESTBANK

The newest district in Zarash'ak, Westbank was created by a new, wealthy upper class that has sprung up in the city. This has only recently happened after foreign investment into the region & House Tharashk turned out to be quite profitable for both investors & locals, who have created a new district that spreads out to the bank of the river, and many buildings use expensive imported stone for their construction to keep their abodes sturdy. Most that live here will speak Common and Goblin, and are often richer folk from other nations of Khorvaire that have a professional interest in the Marches.

MINER'S

Not long after dragonshards were discovered in the fields, Tharashk got to work to create infrastructure, equipment & transport for the many workers that flocked there. The result of this being all built in one area of Zarash'ak is the Miner's District. The district holds bulk housing for miners, as well as entertainment in the form of theatres, bars, bordellos, and more. Most of these facilities can be found in the Tharashk Miner's Centre, a collection of adjoining buildings that hosts these facilities. It also houses the Orien-owned Magebred Miner's Cart Service, transporting workers to & from the fields, free of charge.

POINTS OF INTEREST

DRAGONMARKED HOUSE ENCLAVES

A recent development in the city is the Dragonmarked House enclaves. These buildings were originally trader's posts, but all are now bought out by richer houses. Note that not all houses are present here - only ones with the interest & business are, and some of them have alternative jobs in addition to their normal services. For example, Kundarak & Deneith are necessary in securing many goods from The Dragonshard Fields, Cannith is building an artificer's workshop specialising in working with dragonshards, and Sivis, alongside its usual work, also runs a postal business in Zarash'ak. Many of the enclaves exist mostly as office spaces or houses for dragonmarked visitors for work - very few locals live or work in them.

TOWN HALL

The Town Hall of Zarash'ak is a wide, old, oddly shaped building, and only used for events or meetings, both of which are rare. Since Tharashk effectively runs the city, all of the administrative work that typically is done in town halls is done in their offices instead. Tharashk are often too busy to organise public events, so this building has been empty for most of its life. Behind the Kundarak-locked double doors is a small lobby that leads out into a main room with a lectern at the front.

BAZAAR

Free trade is exemplified in The City of Stilts in The Bazaar - a large, open-air market that opens & closes early, & changes daily. Many of the stalls are mobile, and many traders travel to other towns in The Shadow Marches to bring goods to the city. A large portion of the stalls are owned by locals, but many foreigners are attracted to The Bazaar due to the lack of licensing & legislation here, as many stalls peddle goods that are dubious in nature, or illegal to sell in other regions of the continent. As with the rest of Zarash'ak though, protection is not complimentary, and foreign, wealthy-looking outsiders will always attract the wrong kinds of attention.

TEMPLES

The Dark Six are the city's most popular religion, but a murder allegedly committed by a follower of The Mockery has forced the worship of that deity to separate from the others. Otherwise, they're both similarly sized, dark wooden large, single room temples, but without any organised sermons. Both are quite busy at all hours of the day, but particularly dawn & dusk.

The Temple to the Sovereign Host is one of the few buildings in Zarash'ak that uses stone - a series of pillars mark the vertices of this elongated octagonal building. Similar to the Dark Six temple, its much larger single room has space for all the divine nine, but this religion is far less common among the population, mostly foreigners, so it's quiet during the day, and dead at night.

The Temple to the Silver Flame was built by Silver Flame paladins, a company including Tira Miron herself, in the 4th century YK, after an expedition to cleanse an area of the lawless western swamps ended in tragedy & the deaths of half the squadron. A temple was built in their honour, and has not been used since. The simple wooden structure has broken windows, a ruined roof, and is starting to have holes rotting in the walls & floors.

LIBRARY & ACADEMY

This 2 storeyed building - one of the few in Zarash'ak - is centred around a spiral staircase. The ground floor is a large, hexagonal room with shelves pointing radially inward towards the staircase, which take the guest up to a slightly smaller floor holding a restricted section & 1 or 2 small rooms for holding ad-hoc classes. The library is owned & ran by an elderly human man, Hermann, and helped by his dwarven assistant, Faargrim. Hermann is a very quiet, strict type, in contrast to Faargrim's more sporadic, unquenchable thirst for knowledge. Classes in this "academy" are run on an on-demand basis (which is to say, hardly ever), and most of the knowledge & classes are on Daelkyr, history, druidic magic & The Gatekeepers, and botany.

GATEKEEPER SHRINE

Literally lashed onto the Library & Academy, the Gatekeepers Shrine originally was a symbolic gathering point for the members of the group. But being situated in a central location in the Marches, it quickly outgrew its small, original purpose, and has had additions ever since. Behind the magically & mundanely locked double doors lies a cramped meeting space, adorned with Byeshk trinkets & a side table with alchemical ingredients & a magically locked cabinet. This cabinet contains directions & instructions to complete the renewing ritual for the seals.

DOCKS

A series of jetties separate docking points for incoming watercraft. The largest & most important of these are the Lyrandar river barges that haul most of the trade goods to & from the other nations of Khorvaire. Aside from them, many private traders or other sailing craft make their way to the docks. A series of warehouses sit nearby, holding mostly dragonshards but also other precious goods, and are under careful watch from both Deneith & Tharashk guards. A Lyrandar ticket booth sits at one end of the docks, selling passenger tickets for the barges, but also checking incoming cargo & goods from them. A Lyrandar airship dock is planned to be built here also.

SETTLEMENTS

PATRAHK'N

Patrahk'n is a town on the edge of the Blackwater Lake, between Droaam & The Shadow Marches, and is a relatively busy & diverse town. It's the 2nd biggest settlement in the Marches, & it houses people & cultures from both sides of the border that live in relative harmony beside the pleasant climate and the Blackwater Lake. It serves as a large trading nexus between the 2 regions, and is quite hospitable to easterners, with many of its inhabitants speaking Common. It is ran by the currently elected mayor, a Medusa named K'siiss, who is a benevolent mayor, and makes decisions for the good of Patrahk'n, its people & its trade. In reality though, K'siiss is loyal to the hag sisters of Droaam, The Daughters of Sora Kell, but as of yet, they have no need of Patrahk'n or K'siiss.

VALSHAR'AK

A town west of Zarash'ak, built right on the Glum River, Valshar'ak is noteworthy not only due to its size, but also because of its location & produce. The town is home to mostly orcs, and its location on the Glum River enables easy trade of the town's abundant supply of peat.

Small Lyrandar barges can be seen pulling into Valshar'ak and loading up peat for distribution to Zarash'ak & greater Khorvaire. Orien has recently taken an interest in the town, however, & is looking to cut Lyrandar out of more business. The town is mostly made of wooden buildings on stilts, and a large bridge that sits happily over river barges that pass underneath it.

URTHHOLD

Urthhold is a humble fishing town, which houses mostly humans, content with their quiet & simple lives. The town is run by a human Ealdorman warlock, Johor Raitash, who forces the town to worship The Devourer, his warlock patron, for bountiful fishing harvests. Despite the Ealdorman's tight rule, few complain, and many of the people are skilled in transmutation magic. Coin & gold mean nothing to the townspeople, only food, usable materials & equipment. They're hospitable enough, and are willing to give outsiders food & shelter for free. Few in the town speak Common, most speak Riedran.

TAARN DRAAL

"The City of Elves" in Goblin, Taarn Draal takes its name from the strikingly elven style of buildings within it. This, coupled with the carvings depicting elves & goblinoids, and evidence of Elven trinkets, tools & artifacts present in the city, cause scholars to wonder if this town once housed an ancient Elven culture, one that sailed past Aerenal, fleeing the destruction of Xen'drik & into The Shadow Marches. Others believe the town to be made in adoration or imitation of Elven style, but no-one can know for certain. The population of Taarn Draal today, comprised entirely of Goblinoids, prefer to keep to themselves and lead a relatively civilised life, governed by a Warlord Queen, Pashaar, who claims direct ancestry of a Dhakaan ruling clan.

GLUMTOWN

Dressed almost permanently in a low mist or fog, Glumtown sits in an odd place for a settlement - between & around enormous Skai trees. Many are single-room huts lifted far off the swamp floor, resting on enormous trunks thanks to clever construction techniques. With rope bridges, wood construction & magical lighting, the town is remarkably different to others in the Marches. Worshippers to all the Dark Six can be found in Glumtown, with some following the Daelkyr Avassh or Valaara. The townspeople's lack of secrecy though, is their undoing, and many Tharashk inquisitives live here, and are informants for Gatekeeper raids.

GOLDMIRE

The gateway for all land-coming easterners into The Shadow Marches. A new, tiny, artificial town with less than a dozen buildings, Goldmire was built by House Tharashk in order to welcome others into the Marches. An outpost of Tharashk's is an important part of the city, and it's equipped to sell supplies & even guides to those entering The Crawling Swamp. In addition to this is a Sivis enclave, which facilitates communication to the outside world, especially Zarash'ak. Two inns sit in the town, one of which is a Gold Dragon Inn, the only one in the region outside of Zarash'ak. A store that's ran by a Gnoll couple sells adventuring equipment for modest prices.

ARASHUUL

Arashuul borders Droaam, on the Blackwater River, and is inhabited mostly by Goblins & Humans. The town's secret lies in this water - beneath the murky depths is a colony of Kuo-Toa, a rarely seen humanoid race of fish-people thought to be restricted to Khyber. The Kuo-Toa are known for asking for certain items or materials, and will gift great metals & jewels if traded, but they will kidnap villagers if their trades are not met. Tharashk actually knows this secret, but prefers to ignore it, & it tries to keep the prying eyes of their inquisitives away from it.

YRLAG

Yrlag is a tiny, and relatively civilised orc town at the banks of the Grithic River. Many Gaash'kala orcs live here, and much of the town's food has to be brought in by merchants, there's not much farmable land or wildlife nearby. A large temple to Khalok Shah sits at the centre of the city, near a small number of stores that sell supplies to adventurers, as well as a few simple inns. Most buildings are made of granite, from the nearby Byeshk Mountains, but some are wood. The eastern side of the town holds a number of galleys which the Ghaash'kala use to row themselves out into Crescent Bay and sail across to Blood Crescent.

DHAVIN'S POST

Dhavin was a famed Brelish explorer, in the early days of the Kingdom of Galifar. He charted much of the western edges of Khorvaire, and laid the framework for Sivis cartographers to follow in the modern maps of Droaam, The Demon Wastes & The Shadow Marches. Dhavin's Post is the first outpost he made, sailing from Sharn into the Azure Bay. The first buildings were made from imported granite & marble, and pioneers & adventurers flocked to the outpost back in Dhavin's day, but now only a small settlement of descendants from that era still remain. It's one of the few bastions of Galifarian culture in the Marches, but today the township is known for harbouring outlaws fleeing from the law of the Five Nations, a fact which The Twelve repeatedly berate Tharashk for.

SLUG KEEP

Once a Dhakaan fortress, Slug Keep has lost its traditional name in favour of a more modern one. So too, has its population been replaced by newer people & a newer society - a small commune of humans fleeing war from the Five Nations, headed by a visionary leader whom they believe to be holy. They've built small huts outside the ruins of the keep and lead simple lives that they claim are unfettered by materialistic, artificially constructed society. The rarely interact with the only indigenous inhabitant of the keep, an elderly orc woman who lives in the ruins of her family's town and is a Gatekeeper loyalist.

LANTERN TOWER

Built as an outpost by Sivis explorers when they discovered the Mark of Finding, Lantern Tower has never had any permanent inhabitants and was used to survey the foggy, gloomy landscape. In 679 YK, Tharashk prospectors came upon the ruins of the tower, which had reportedly toppled over due to poor foundations. The truth is that the prospectors came across extensive tunnels below the tower, perhaps leading as far down as Khyber, and an encounter with Daelkyr caused the tower to topple and sealed them in their caves. In these caves are a collection of symbionts which some Dwarven Clans would pay large sums for.

NATURAL LANDMARKS & REGIONS

THE CRAWLING SWAMP

The Crawling Swamp is the name for the majority of the swampland of The Shadow Marches. Enormous, teeming with life, wilderness & dangers, The Crawling Swamp is not entirely swampland but is flecked here & there with dryer spots & higher land. Many of these dry spots become villages or towns, far too numerous to mention. It is also, however, dotted with randomly appearing & disappearing manifest zones of Xoriat. Scholars say that the entire swamp is co-terminus with it, and explains the Daelkyr worship that plagues the region.

THE VILE MARSH

The eastern marshes of the region are noticeably different to The Crawling Swamp due to the depth of its bogs, the less common dry land, and the thick, dark, viscous water that lies in it. This leads to very different & unique kinds of flora & fauna to flourish in it, many of them harsher & more exotic than other swamp life. These same waters are also excellent at preserving things - Tharashk regularly sends out squads of inquisitives to recover artifacts, man-made structures, and bodies.

THE DEEPWOOD

The majority of The Deepwood is a dense, temperate-climate forest, but gets increasingly more jungle & swamp-like heading south, eventually ending in The Crawling Swamp. Within the Deepwood, many villages & uncontacted communities exist, and the Deepwood is a great region of interest for Tharashk inquisitives & Gatekeepers. Unfortunately, many patches of The Deepwood look confusingly identical, and a native navigator is often needed to ensure that their raids on villages are successful.

BALINOR'S SORROW

Balinor's Sorrow is a dense jungle region that is markedly bare of any wildlife, hence the name, after the Sovereign Host deity of horn & hunt. That is, until nightfall, as much of the jungle's fauna - including humanoids - is nocturnal. This has House Vadalis researchers fascinated at the myriad of species living in Balinor's Sorrow, and at the nocturnal humanoid societies there. Some say they have seen a building that Vadalis is using for some nefarious purposes in the jungle, but Vadalis denies any such facility existing.

THE DRAGONSHARD FIELDS

The once ordinary patch of land west of Zarash'ak is now a large series of quarry-sized dig sites. Four sites in total, the Dragonshard Fields is a very modern & mechanised operation, with lightning rail tracks laid out across & between sites. On these tracks run modified lightning rail engines moving tons of rock, equipment & personnel between each site & the dozens of smaller shafts that spread outward from them, at seemingly random directions & intervals, at the direction of Tharashk prospectors. Other houses find work here too, with Deneith manpower needed as guards, Kundarak security & Cannith equipment & refineries present directly in the sites.

BLACKWATER LAKE

Named by the Brelish explorer Dhavin, Blackwater Lake is an enormous basin known for its dark, viscous water that fills it & the surrounding swamp & river nearby. The water is safe to drink to locals of the area, but foreigners will become ill if they ingest any of it. What's known to only a handful of mortals is the reason that the waters are an opaque black - in the depths of the lake is an aboleth that has sat for hundreds of years, corrupting the waters & the people that reside near it, waiting for its plans of controlling the nearby town to come to fruition.

ZARASH BAY

The vast majority of House Tharashk's riches travel through Zarash Bay, with its murky waters, and no winds to sail on. Any boats coming into or out of the bay are either Lyrandar river barges, (as the waters are too shallow for elemental galleons), or a rowing craft. In waters as murky & shallow as these, the merfolk & sahuagin of the Thunder Sea cannot live or cross, so apart from the occasional encounter with wildlife, Zarash Bay is relatively safe.

BAY OF MADNESS

The Bay of Madness earned its name from the reports of ships entering and many not returning, and those that did had a mutiny, or were missing crewmen. These sailors never speak of their experience in the bay, leading many to call them mad. There is some truth in this - The Bay of Madness, like much of the Crawling Swamp, holds random patches of manifest zones to Xoriat, and the lack of any settlements on the coastline or nearby speak volumes about the effects of the region.

CRESCENT BAY

The body of water that separates The Demon Wastes from the Marches is known as Crescent Bay, and the rust-coloured water near the coast of the Wastes comes from the red-dust of The Demon Wastes. The Ghaash'kala orcs are the only sane sailors of the bay, but Carrion Tribes from the Wastes have been found stealing sailing craft from the Orcs, or creating their own from bone & wood. Recently, the Gatekeepers have sent miners into the Byeshk Mountains to mine stone & the ancient metal Byeshk. They export their finds across the Crescent Sea, and these Carrion Tribes have been known to attack them.

SHADEBANK

The small, uninhabited, unassuming island off the north-west coast of the Marches houses black sand beaches, rocky, hot landscapes & a single, large, active volcano. Called Vusgraa ('fire stone' in Goblin), it is in a constant state of slow eruption, slowly oozing rivers of molten rock at all times. This lava trails down the sides of the mountain & extends to the ocean, slowly growing the island year by year as the lava cools. This is due to a manifest zone of the plane of fire, Fernia, sitting inside its core. The island has stayed uninhabited due to fear & superstition, but recently Tharashk is interested in exploring the isle & seeing what secrets it may hold or sell to other houses.

UNMAPPED LOCALES

Below are a handful of locations too small & insignificant to place on maps, but are interesting nonetheless.

FORTHALI

Forthali is very strange, and it looks quite out of place along the coastline of the Marches. The buildings are stone, with chimneys, and built quite well. Cobblestones pave a road or 2, and everbright lanterns hang from streetlights. A particularly interesting building in the town is a tall tower, chiselled from an entire, enormous crystal. The people wear pure white gowns, and have an unnerving quality of grace about them. Unfortunately, these visuals are an illusion. The people of Forthali are all Riedran humans, and in the longing for their home country, have coated every surface that they have with powerful illusions. The tower is intended to be an imitation of the psionic amplification devices from Sarlona. The inhabitants are friendly enough, and very honest and open. They're quite proud of this small town, and the illusions that they have weaved to create it.

TAA'RAVASH

A tiny orcish village sat on a dry patch of land in The Deepwood, Taa' Ravash houses around 2 dozen orcs all still speaking the old Orc tongue. Their huts are made mostly of wood & leather, and the walls around the village are logs. The village is governed by a chieftain & his advisor, a warlock to the Daelkyr Belashyrra. Outsiders may be interested in Taa' Ravash due to the town's attempts to interfere with the nearby Gatekeeper seal. These attempts have been in complete vain, but the activity may be suspicious to the Gatekeepers. Both the warlock & the chieftain speak very poor common, but they're the only beings in the village that are willing or able to converse with outsiders.

RAALASH

Raalash is a tiny human hunter-gatherer village on top of a small hill. Not surrounded by fences, 2 people from the village stand guard at all times. They have also recently started trading with House Tharashk & have access to metal tools & equipment, significantly improving their standard of living. Like many villages, Raalash is quite wary of outsiders & may attack particularly aggressive ones on sight. Conversing with these villagers requires knowledge of the local customs & the language Riedran.

VVRAAK'S LAIR

Thought to be a magical non-existent dwelling for the green dragon Vvraak, who taught the Gatekeepers the secrets of druidic magic, Vvraak's cave does, in fact, exist. It's located deep in Balinor's Sorrow, but Vvraak's illusory magic that still lingers around the entrance hide it from all but the most perceptive adventurers. Vvraak herself is long dead, but her descendant Grythaax, an adult green dragon still lives, and jealously guards the hoard that lies within. The cave system itself is not a long, complex one, but it is well-guarded with magical traps & kobold minions.

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