



BORDERLANDS AND BEYOND

Lock and load with new classes, gear, and more as you get ready to explore the wilds of the Iron Kingdoms: Requiem campaign setting



BORDERLANDS AND BEYOND

Sample



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BEYOND THE WALLS OF THE IRON KINGDOMS

LIFE HAS ALWAYS PERSISTED BEYOND THE WALLS OF western Immoren's cities. In swamps and forests, gatomen and bog trogs emerge from their crude villages and skirmish for territory and resources. In the mountains and scrublands, warbands of porcine farrow vie for dominance. In the deserts of the Bloodstone Marches, tribal peoples who have lived in these inhospitable regions for generations beyond counting keep to their old ways even as they are encroached upon by soldiers of the Protectorate of Menoth or skorne invaders from far to the east. From the frozen north to the desert vastness, trollkin gather in kriels to carve out a living at one with the land, often employing ancient traditions and modern technologies in a sometimes uncomfortable juxtaposition.

Then there are the empires of the elves and dwarves. Nestled within its protective mountains, Rhul is the oldest and most stable civilization in all of western Immoren—at least, to hear the Rhulfolk tell it. And the eerily silent forest empire of Ios is home to the mysterious and xenophobic elves, who have suffered calamity after calamity ever since their gods came to dwell among them millennia ago.

Even before the Claiming, the borders of Ios were largely closed to outsiders, and those few who had ventured within the uncanny woodland realm described a land as unwelcoming as it was beautiful. As a result, many outside the elven nation's borders were unaware of how much the Iosans suffered during the Claiming and how badly the desperate alliances and terrible betrayals rocked this isolated land, and no one beyond the forests of Ios knows what happened after. Not even citizens of the elven kingdom who were outside its borders when the event known to Iosans as the Sundering took place have been able to return. They have found the boundaries of their former homeland closed even to them, guarded now by black-eyed soulless and haunted by some new cataclysm more terrible than any in the elves' long history of suffering and misfortune. Whatever this catastrophe is, it seems destined to change the face of Ios—and maybe all of western Immoren—forever.

All these peoples and more make their lives beyond the borders of Iron Kingdoms. The brave and hardy souls who carve out a living along these borderlands find areas rife with both risk and opportunity. The Iron Kingdoms may be full of coin, but there are fortunes to be made (and lost) far from Cygnar, Khador, Ord, and Llael. In the deserts, swamps, forests, and mountains of western Immoren, strange creatures stir that haven't been seen in centuries, ancient prophecies unfold, and the brave, the skilled, and the lucky find themselves rising to new heights, while those not equal to the challenge disappear into the dark, never to be heard from again.

USING THIS BOOK

This volume is designed to introduce players and Game Masters to the ragged edges of the Iron Kingdoms, first brought to the fifth edition of the world's best-selling

roleplaying game in Iron Kingdoms: Requiem. Even though the peoples of the Iron Kingdoms have enjoyed relative peace in the years since the Claiming, many of those who live among the borderlands have experienced anything but.

The following chapters give you all the tools you need to embark on adventures beyond the walls of the Iron Kingdoms. From the mountain empire of the dwarves to the mist-shrouded forests of Ios and far beyond, *Iron Kingdoms: Borderlands* offers a look into the wilder and less well-traveled places where prosperity and peril walk hand in hand—and where opportunities for adventure are as numerous as those for an ignoble death.

THE WORLD BEYOND THE WALLS

The first section of this book introduces you to the lands beyond the borders of the Iron Kingdoms, including the empires of Rhul and Ios and the various wild places that lie on their edges. These lands have experienced dramatic upheavals in recent years. Even Rhul, famed as the oldest and most stable of all the nations in western Immoren, finds itself flooded with refugees from the recent conflicts, and the presence of these displaced peoples in various freeholds on the edges of the kingdom has brought change, challenges, opportunities, and risks that are new to the stalwart Rhulfolk.

But no other place in all of western Immoren has changed as much as Ios. The end of the Claiming saw the already beleaguered nation gripped by a new cataclysm—one that those outside its borders cannot even imagine. *Iron Kingdoms: Borderlands* will take you through the history and the present of this mysterious nation, whose ominous transformation will come to affect all of the Iron Kingdoms . . . and all the lands beyond.

...AND THOSE WHO DWELL THERE

The second part of *Iron Kingdoms: Borderlands* gives you all the tools you need to create characters who seek their fortunes on the fringes of the Iron Kingdoms as they wage a fierce struggle for their own survival: from the porcine farrow to the sinister soulless, from bone grinders and shamans to warlocks who command the great beasts of the wilds much like warcasters control the giants of metal and steam known as warjacks. Here you will find new class options, character backgrounds, adventuring companies, and rules for integrating a character's allegiance to a Rhulic clan or Iosan house. You'll also find new spells, new gear, and everything else you need to engage in daring and desperate adventures on the edges of the Iron Kingdoms.

No matter what path you choose, welcome to the borderlands!

1

BORDERLANDS AND BEYOND



OUTSIDE THE NATIONS THAT MAKE UP THE Iron Kingdoms, the western half of Immoren is populated by cultures that stretch back into antiquity. The dwarves of Rhul, the elves of Ios, and the tribal cultures of trollkin, farrow, gobbers, bogrin, and others have all had a hand in shaping the destiny of western Immoren in general and the Iron Kingdoms in particular. The nations not built by human hands were home to advanced civilizations and great cities long before humanity had grown out of their tribal origins, and they have preserved their cultures for many thousands of years.

HISTORY OF RHUL

As with most sentient races, the dwarves of Rhul have their own creation myth. The dwarves do not believe they were created by some form of divine presence; instead, they believe they are the direct descendants of their gods, the literal progenitors of their people: the Great Fathers. According to lore, the Great Fathers came into being in Kharg Drogun, which translates as “The Land Beneath.” Human theologians consider this simply another way to describe Urcaen, similar to the Veld.

The origins of the Great Fathers rest with a living mountain and god named Ghor, Kharg Drogun’s most significant and tallest mountain. Towering higher than any peak on Caen, this god-mountain was a being of tremendous power and deep-rooted malevolence, and his size and scope made him impervious to everything that walked or flew or swam. Yet Ghor was alone, and he sought to distract himself from his loneliness by creating others who could marvel at his majesty. From within the immense bulk of his essence he drew forth thirteen of the finest crystals, which he carved into pleasing shapes that would serve him as valuable slaves. Ghor bound these stone-born creatures with shackles and taught them that they must obey or be swallowed and ground into shapelessness.

These thirteen slaves would eventually become the Great Fathers. Each was gifted with clever hands and sharp eyes, and each knew all that could be known of the shaping of stone and metal. In his arrogance, Ghor assumed that his creations—Dhurg, Dohl, Dovur, Ghrd, Godor, Hrord, Jhord, Lodhul, Odom, Orm, Sigmur, Udo, and Uldar—were mindless servitors, but in truth, each of the thirteen had within him a spark of divinity, and soon after their creation, they began to dream of freedom.

All the Great Fathers would eventually demonstrate their mastery over particular tasks and establish their own destinies, but in their earliest days, they were defined only by the oppression of Ghor and the shackles that bound them. When the spiteful deity finally commanded his thirteen creations to build a great monument to his immortal glory, they discovered a genuine love for working stone and metal and a desire for perfection that would allow them to produce nothing less than their best work despite the hatred they bore their master. For years they toiled to immortalize the mountain-god by crafting the most glorious tribute they could imagine. But when they presented it to Ghor, the cruel

mountain mocked their achievement, unleashed a heaving earthquake that cracked the earth and swallowed their work, and demanded that they commence again and do better.

Insulted and angry, the Great Fathers nevertheless constructed a new, grander monument, but it too was torn down by the imperious Ghor, who once again set his creations to the impossible task of satisfying his vanity. Long did the Great Fathers plot their revenge, and they finally put it into motion by convincing the conceited mountain-god to allow them to mine his very being for the materials they needed to make a suitable monument to his glory. Blinded by his arrogance, Ghor assented, and slowly and subtly, the Great Fathers undermined the great mountain itself. When the work was done, Ghor was a weakened shadow of his former glory, and the Great Fathers brought him low and claimed their freedom.

In the years that followed, the Great Fathers formed the Claywives, and their progeny were the first dwarves. In time, a society of masterful crafters arose—one blessed with abundant resources and guided by the very hands of their progenitors.

The Rhulfolk’s society was already old millennia before humans began to thrive, but constant strife between the dwarven clans held back their civilization’s progress. Twenty-five hundred years before humans settled the lands that now comprise the Protectorate of Menoth and the Bloodstone Marches, the dwarves of Rhul fought a great and bloody civil war. The dwarves refer to this dark and angry time as the Feud of Ages, which historians estimate began around 8500 BR.

War shook the foundations of Rhulic civilization until approximately 8200 BR, when a group of clans withdrew and moved north, thereby bringing an abrupt end to the Feud of Ages. Realizing that further conflict would drive the Rhulfolk apart and into utter barbarism, these thirteen clans left the others to their ends and moved their people to settle in what is now known as Ghord, and these Rhulfolk fortified the borders of their new land against outsiders and prospered in their relative isolation.

THE RHULIC MOOT

To safeguard their society and ward off the threat of another internal schism, the dwarves established the Rhulic Moot as a guiding form of governance and conflict resolution. Predating human civilization by about a thousand years, the Moot is the basis for all Rhulic society, its historic legacy upheld by remnants of the earliest Moot records. The earliest tablets are ancient religious artifacts the dwarves claim date to circa 7500 BR. Human historians assume the dwarves founded the Moot to regulate the feuds arising between clans in the region, but many dwarven historians—typically priests—claim the Great Fathers themselves handed down the tablets of the Moot. The instructions and laws contained in these tablets allow the dwarves to coexist without worrying about descending into a barbaric state of constant war ever again. By the words of the Great Fathers, several grand edicts were established that would form the basis for all Rhulic law and the structure of dwarven society.

The structure of the Rhulic government is based heavily on

the dwarven clans. The clan lords of the thirteen most potent clans are known as the Stone Lords, and each can trace his lineage back to one of the Great Fathers. This ancestry grants each of these clan lords both secular and spiritual authority.

The Stone Lords preside over the Moot of the Hundred Houses, wherein representatives of the hundred most powerful clans form the central legislative and judicial body of Rhul. The dwarven nation is home to more than a thousand recognized clans whose fortunes rise and fall like the swing of a miner's axe, and a clan whose fate takes a turn for the worse may soon find itself evicted from the Moot and replaced by a rising clan. Although the ranks of the Moot Lords shift in response to these changes, many of the more powerful clans have held their seats in the Moot of the Hundred Houses for centuries.

Even though the Rhulfolk no longer fear that their society will collapse into internecine warfare, violent conflict between clans still occurs, just not on a scale large enough to be recognized as war. Like every aspect of Rhulic life, these clan clashes are governed by the dictates of Rhulic law, which establishes the terms under which such a conflict can occur and even prescribes how the victor of a clash is to be determined. Rival clans will often marshal forces according to strict regulations and engage in sanctioned battles that are deemed over when certain conditions have been met, such as the gaining of specific territory or the capture of a clan standard, rather than the routing or slaughter of the opposing forces.

Moot edicts are enforced by special judges appointed by the Stone Lords themselves. These individuals—typically arcanists, priests, and scholars who dedicate themselves to studying Moot precedents and law—are empowered to levy decrees even on the clan lords themselves. Under Rhulic law and the edicts, all citizens are seen as equals.

THE LAMENT OF GHOR

After establishing the Moot, the Great Fathers gifted the Rhulfolk with the secrets of arcane magic and provided strict

guidelines regarding its use. The foundations of their society thus codified, Rhulic civilization gradually progressed for millennia as the dwarves expanded their cities and delved deep into the surrounding mountains. The shelter offered by their mountain homes proved crucial when the Bridge of Worlds collapsed in approximately 4000 BR. Although the Rhulfolk were better protected than many other peoples, they too suffered during this time. As the arcane shockwave passed through the continent, entire cities were swallowed in cataclysmic earthquakes, and whole clans were lost. The trembling of the mountains harkened back to the stories of the god-mountain Ghor and its crumbling from within, and so the people of Rhul named this time of turmoil after the dead god of old: the Lament of Ghor.

When the Lament of Ghor subsided, the Rhulfolk discovered that a new people had settled on the southeastern border of their homeland: the refugees of Lyoss, who had journeyed west to find a new home in the forests. It did not take long for the dwarves to make the connection between these two events.

KINSHIP WITH THE OGRUN

Following a prolonged period of rebuilding and expansion, another unlikely event helped shape the future of Rhul. Millennia ago, the dwarven clans provided shelter and food to several neighboring ogrun tribes during a famine. The ogrun placed the same great value on duty and honor that their dwarven saviors did, and within only a few generations, their descendants had become citizens of Rhul. Although these Rhulic ogrun grew much more civilized than their forebears over time, they retained a unique culture within the dwarven nation's borders—one that complemented Rhulic society instead of competing with it.

Ogrun culture is strongly feudal in nature and full of young warriors seeking to improve their martial prowess and provide good service to a strong lord. This facet allows Rhulic ogrun to adjust quickly to dwarven society and its clan lords, and in some cases, entire families of ogrun look



to a specific clan and its lord to lead them. To the ogrun, this is tied to a vital concept called *korune*, a highly personal relationship between lord and vassal. Traditional ogrun culture can feature several layers of such relationships, with many young warriors serving a senior ogrun who in turn is sworn to an even more influential *korune*. The oath-sworn bond of *korune* is so strong that it can be broken only in death, and those who serve a *korune* are willing to lay down their lives to protect their lord.

Ogrun may spend years or even decades seeking a *korune*, during which they are deemed *bokur*, which means “unsworn.” *Bokurs* are continually seeking a worthy master to whom they can dedicate themselves, all the while honing their own battle prowess to impress their future lord and be worthy of service. Many *bokurs* temporarily lend themselves to a cause or a specific individual in order to determine whether to swear a more permanent oath. Although it was once considered unseemly for a *bokur* to extend this status for too long, this is no longer the case. Rhul’s martial clans increasingly offer their services to other nations as mercenaries and have encouraged the nation’s ogrun to join them. Experienced *bokurs* are highly valued for their loyalty and fearsome skill. They might spend their professional careers as *bokurs* and wait to swear the ultimate oath of fealty to their clan lord only when they are ready to retire. Such aged but highly experienced ogrun make excellent bodyguards and advisors and are welcomed by almost every Rhulic clan lord.

Even when they have not yet sworn themselves to a *korune*, most Rhulic ogrun are full members of a dwarven clan and are thus subordinate to its lord, whom they obey and treat with great respect. Such fealty is still binding but less personal than the oath bond associated with a *korune*. In ogrun-only communities, *korunes* speak directly for their vassals, and an ogrun community may be led by a single great *korune* who sits at the top of a chain of vassals.

THE ORGOTH OCCUPATION

When the Orgoth invaders arrived on the shores of western Immoren, they wasted no time pushing east across the human kingdoms. Rhul has been criticized for its neutrality during most of the Orgoth Occupation, but from the dwarves’ perspective, there was little to differentiate this era from previous human wars of unification, such as those fought during the rise of the Khardic Empire.

But battle came to Rhul unbidden in 542 BR, just after the capitulation of Rynyr. The Orgoth sent an invasion force up the Black River to lay siege to Horgenhold, one of the great fortress cities of Rhul. Dwarven records depict this as a grim and challenging struggle that tested the defenders’ limits and nearly depleted the local garrisons. Rhulic warriors eventually rallied to drive the Orgoth back, and the tyrants never again besieged Rhulic fortresses.

As the scope of humanity’s rebellion against the invaders grew, Rhul played a vital role in fighting back against the Orgoth. Having repelled the occupiers, the dwarves were able to provide support to the beleaguered human rebels, but their aid was not given quickly. Ever since the early years of the

Rebellion, various groups had sent emissaries to Rhul to ask for intervention. All these entreaties had been turned down, but over the course of many years, the political atmosphere in the Moot of the Hundred Houses shifted. Repeated pleas for help and the increasing successes of rebel forces finally persuaded the Stone Lords. The Rhulfolk had started to pay greater attention to affairs beyond their nation’s borders and had seen enough to know that for all their flaws, the native Immorese were a much better option than the Orgoth.

The tipping point came when emissaries of the rebels revealed the plan to construct the colossals, which was considered a calculated risk at that time. The Rhulfolk became fascinated by the possibilities of such technology and were surprised by the advances human arcanists and engineers had made in such a short time. The two sides came to an agreement whereby Rhul would support the Rebellion in exchange for knowledge of the alchemy behind firearms, the secret of the cerebral matrix, and the schematics for the colossals. The dwarven nation refused to intervene directly in the fighting but agreed to ship the rebels vast quantities of materials—not only ore but Rhul-smelted metals and alloys, as well as completed components to build colossals created in the forges of Ghord. These contributions, in addition to later shipments of coal, proved vital in the years that followed.

THE IRON KINGDOMS

Following the ousting of the Orgoth and the signing of the Corvis Treaties, the human populations of western Immoren were divided into the four nations composing the Iron Kingdoms. The four initial kingdoms—Cygnar, Khador, Ord, and Llael—grew to five with the formation of the Protectorate of Menoth, and the Rhulfolk saw a great opportunity in their human neighbors.

Rhul has long kept a close eye on the politics of the Iron Kingdoms. Although it has remained neutral in humanity’s affairs for thousands of years, it has always taken more of an interest in the south, which has been the origin of many of humanity’s most impressive innovations. Many dwarves are pragmatic by nature, and those involved in affairs abroad prefer not to let opportunities for profit or industrial advancement pass them by; others watch humanity because they understand the threat foreign politics can pose to their own security.

The Stone Lords negotiated with the kings of the southern nations, and Rhulic laborers and craftsmen quickly found new homes throughout the Iron Kingdoms in settlements that helped humanity rebuild after the Orgoth Occupation. The leaders of the Iron Kingdoms were only too keen to agree to lucrative trade arrangements in exchange, and the people of Rhul rapidly integrated mankind’s advances in alchemy, firearms, and mechanika into their own society. These settlements also allowed the Moot to insert its own operatives into the political circles of the Iron Kingdoms.

Several Rhulic enclaves sprang up throughout the human kingdoms during this time, with the largest being established in Khador and Cygnar. These enclaves worked closely with their human neighbors and have been a great asset to those nations’ labor and industry ever since. Even though these

communities were created in part after the Corvis Treaties in recognition of the Rhulfolk's aid in constructing the colossals that proved instrumental to the Orgoth's defeat, they are considered Rhulic soil and are governed by Rhulic law. Citizens are expected to be respectful of the ordinances of the host nation, but the Moot is still the ultimate authority.

When these communities were established, they attracted many ambitious and younger clans whose members saw little hope for advancement in Rhul. Working in such an enclave for a time remains a tradition among young dwarves who are seeking their own fortunes before deciding where they will settle permanently, and the same is also true for many of the ogrun who belong to dwarven clans.

Rhul's maintenance of its political neutrality when it comes to warfare among the Iron Kingdoms has also meant that mercenaries of the Searforge Commission see opportunities on all sides of each conflict between the human nations, allowing them to earn significant profits for the Rhulic clans without undermining Rhul's own interests. The presence of Rhulic military forces throughout the human nations of the Iron Kingdoms has also ensured that Rhulic settlements among them are never far from a defending force. Several enclaves nevertheless suffered greatly in recent wars, with

some being lost entirely during the Claiming, but the remaining enclaves are still a vital part of Rhul's political and commercial efforts in the larger world.

THE CLAIMING

Although the coming of the infernals did not affect Rhul as severely as it did the Iron Kingdoms, the dwarven nation was not wholly spared. Even though the dwarves' souls were not part of the compact that led to the Claiming, the infernals did not hesitate to collect them whenever the opportunity arose. From the outset of the conflict, many Rhulic soldiers fighting in the employ of Cygnar and Khador found themselves pitted against otherworldly horrors.

The dwarves of the enclaves suffered tremendous losses during the Claiming. Supported by their human enablers, armies of infernal horrors flooded every major city in the Iron Kingdoms. The Rhulfolk who lived in the enclaves were forced to fight bitterly for the survival of their very souls, and their plight was felt by those living in the relative safety of Rhul.

The Stone Lords quickly resolved to help combat the infernal plague. Unlike the Orgoth, who were seen by the Rhulfolk as just another human tribe, the creatures of the Outer Abyss represented a greater peril—one that was all but certain to threaten the future of Caen itself. Vast armies of mercenaries mustered in Ghord and traveled down the Black River into Llael before spreading out across the Iron Kingdoms and joining the human defenders in the fight against the infernals.

The most famous among these military engagements was the Battle of Henge Hold, the last major battle during the Claiming. A column of Rhulic soldiers and steamjacks helped escort a throng of refugees from the east to Henge Hold, where a cult of Cyrissists had constructed a celestial gate in order to escape Caen. By holding back the infernals, these Rhulic soldiers played a crucial part in protecting many thousands of refugees as they made their way through the gate to the stars beyond.

THE FREEHOLDS

Following the defeat of the infernals, Rhul authorized a practice that has changed the dwarven nation in a way not seen since the arrival of the ogrun: the establishment of freeholds. Rhul had been a largely static society for many centuries, but after seeing the suffering of the displaced peoples of the Iron Kingdoms and the anguish of the Nyss and Iosans who had been driven out of their forest homes, the Stone Lords agreed to allow more widespread colonization of their own lands. They invited those who needed shelter to resettle in Rhul and constructed cities for the refugees in the lowlands of their mountains.

The opening of Rhul's borders to a more cosmopolitan blend of peoples has proven both rewarding and challenging. Many new settlers, keenly aware of the hospitality they have been extended, are eager to repay the Rhulfolk for this kindness, but their ignorance of Moot law has placed additional stress on the nation's judiciary. Conversely, the influx of new residents has created fresh opportunities for



clans willing to adopt communities of refugees. These clans often serve as consultants for the new arrivals and help the displaced navigate the intricacies of the Moot's legislation.

Despite their rapid expansion in the years since the Claiming, the freeholds of Rhul remain a strange sight even today. Their diverse populations are drawn from every major civilization in western Immoren, and the culture and architecture of these small cities are an odd blend of the peoples of the Iron Kingdoms, the Rhulfolk themselves, and the elves.

HISTORY OF IOS

Few remember a time when the borders of Ios were not closed or when the forests around the elven lands were not a foreboding place. The Iosans have never been known for their openness, whether as individuals or as a people, but their reticence is warranted. Like their Nyss cousins, the Iosans have been beset by tragedy and upheaval stretching back to the time when their ancestors were the elves of the Empire of Lyoss.

CHILDREN OF THE DIVINE COURT

From their immortal home in the Veld, the Divine Court created the elves to be the very best of the races to inhabit—and perhaps rule—the mortal world of Caen. The Lyossans were gifted their every need and want by their gods. They were blessed with long life, strong bodies immune to the ravages of age and disease, magic that would be the envy of all other races, and technology that would be considered fantastical even now. But the children of the Divine Court were most elated to learn of their gods' greatest gift to them: abandoning their home in the spirit world of Urcaen and living among their creations. The Lyossans did not know why their gods desired to leave the Veld, only that they did.

Thus, the elven pantheon planned the journey to join their people in Immoren. For centuries, they handed down to the Lyossan priests the knowledge they needed to build the monumental Bridge of Worlds, a dimension-spanning construct of untold scale and complexity that would extend from Nyshyl, the Lyossan capital, across the barrier between worlds. At the same time, the Divine Court and their servants built a corresponding bridge rooted in the Veld. None can say what the bridge built from the Veld was like, and not much more is known today of that which the Lyossans built, but what few records remain tell of a titanic tower with arcane energy generators whose size, capability, and manufacture are beyond the comprehension of any arcanist or artificer alive today.

THE CATAclySM

When the time came for the elven gods to depart the Veld, they successfully crossed into Caen and set foot among their worshippers, but no sooner had they done so than some unseen fault in the Bridge of Worlds caused it to collapse in a catastrophic explosion known as the Cataclysm. The energy accumulated by the assembled generators emitted a blast powerful enough to destroy the bridge and change Immoren forever. The once-great city of Nyshyl was replaced

in an instant by the Stormlands, a region so inhospitable that only the hardest and unnatural creatures can survive there. The aptly named Shattered Spine Islands and much of the Alchiere subcontinent were severed from the Immorese mainland, while the River Hyles was sundered from its bed down to the core of Caen, leaving behind the vast chasm known as the Abyss. Nearly all those at the epicenter of the blast were killed instantly, and those who lived at the fringes of the Lyossan Empire died in the following months from aftereffects and exposure. Only those who were shielded by the gods survived, but the effort of protecting the survivors and guiding them to safety cost the Divine Court dearly.

FOUNDATION OF IOS

That safety was found to the west, and after an arduous journey, the gods and those few tens of thousands of elves who endured the migration arrived at the forests of the Archenbough and the Mistbough. Together, the gods and their creations founded new cities and a new nation: Ios,

whose cities were centered around great fanes built in honor of each god. These cities came to be governed by the gods themselves, with the leading nobles of each city forming the Consulate Court, which was subservient to the Divine Court.

The elves recovered for a time, but they soon realized that the Cataclysm had struck them with an unseen affliction. The elves of Lyoss had been untouched by the effects of age and disease, but they were now shocked by the passing of peers not even three hundred years old and the physical manifestations of illness among those who had never known sickness. Although they were horrified by this development, they came to terms with it as quickly as they could, secure in the knowledge that at least their gods lived among them.

The Divine Court coexisted for centuries with their priests and their people, but as time wore on, a sense of stagnancy settled upon the Iosans—a period called the Great Malaise. The birth rate among the elves dropped significantly, and the descendants of those who had survived the Cataclysm were frequently ravaged by unexplained epidemics. As the suffering of the elves worsened, they naturally turned to the Divine Court for answers, but the gods had none to give.

Dissatisfied, frustrated, and resentful, nobles from one Iosan city would accuse the patron god of another of being ineffectual, inciting petty conflicts that flared up with increasing frequency. When the gods did act, their efforts achieved a measure of prosperity, but these reprieves were only temporary. Ios and the Divine Court went through many periods of dashed hopes followed by a brief respite, only for the cycle to begin again. Ios was slowly turning into a living ruin, and for many elves, this fate was too tragic to accept. Willful ignorance became common. Even the

priesthoods in each city became insular. They refused to discuss religious matters with members of the other fanes, content to care only for their own patron god.

EXODUS OF THE GODS

A little more than three millennia after the Cataclysm, the Divine Court announced their fateful decision to depart, believing that their return to the Veld would aid the Iosans' recovery. The fractured elven population could not object, as it was apparent that their gods were also weakening. And so the elves saw their gods off on their voyage back to the spiritual world amid reverent ceremony and the first sense of real hope in generations.

This optimism carried the Iosans for many years, restoring vitality to their nation and reversing their decline, but not all elves were so confident in their nation's future. Led by the prophet Aeric, the people of Darsael, site of the Fane of Nyssor, abruptly left Ios and embarked on a migration far to the north. The followers of the Winter God had long been pariahs in Ios, and few Iosans were sorry to see them leave, although they would eventually come to regret their brethren's departure.

This was just the beginning of Ios' ongoing woes, however, as the pendulum once again swung from hope to despair in the elven nation. Over the centuries, no fewer than half of the nation's great cities were left for the forests to reclaim. Hope came again some three hundred years after the exodus of the Divine Court, when the Fane of Nyrro announced the return of their patron deity. Celebrations were tempered by rumors of necromancy and fell rites that were soon corroborated by survivors who managed to flee the fane in Eversael. Infuriated by this heresy, the Dawnguard of House

Nyarr, long considered the scions of Nyrrro and protectors of all of Ios, executed the renegade priests and other leaders of the cult. Unbeknownst to the Dawnguard, some of the cultists escaped punishment by transforming themselves into eldritch and going into hiding.

THE RIVENING

The actions of the Cult of Nyrrro were nothing compared to the effect of the Rivening, which occurred some four hundred years later. Fears of what may have befallen the Divine Court during their long absence were brought to life in terrifying fashion when the priests of every fane except Scyrah's descended into hysterical madness almost simultaneously. Struck down by insanity, many ran through the streets screaming incoherently; others became catatonic. The priests of Scyrah helped their colleagues as best they could, but many of the afflicted lashed out at their guardians in fits of chronic madness. The few who managed to recover spoke of an overwhelming sense of loss as their connection with their god was severed. It was at this time that the elves began referring to the Divine Court as "the Vanished." Although they continued to worship all eight of their gods in the aftermath of the Rivening, they soon turned their focus upon the one goddess they knew for certain remained: Scyrah.

The Iosans' troubles did not end with the Rivening. Many of the priests who succumbed to this terrible event rose up as a disturbing form of spectral undead that came to be known as the riven, which continue to haunt the forests of Ios today. But perhaps the most troubling of all of the Rivening's consequences was the birth of children bereft of emotion and motivation: the soulless. Rare at first, they gradually—and alarmingly—became more common, and many elves saw the doom of their race writ large in the face of this new affliction.

Scyrah returned to Shyrr without warning some years later, slipping into the city unannounced and being welcomed to the Fane of Lacyr with very little ceremony. There she slumbered under the watchful eyes of her priests and fane knights, rarely awakening and never venturing in public.

THE RETRIBUTION OF SCYRAH & THE SEEKERS

Soon after Scyrah's reappearance at the gates of Shyrr, scholars and theologians began speculating about the cause of the goddess' weakness. Two theories quickly came to the fore. The first was that Scyrah's affliction was due to humanity's use of arcane magic, something that many considered too well-timed with the Rivening to be mere coincidence. The second was that ancient prophecies provided clues as to what ailed Scyrah, and the problem was not the arcanists of the Iron Kingdoms. These two lines of thought rapidly took root in Iosan society, giving rise to the Retribution of Scyrah and the Seekers, respectively. At the demand of the Fane of Scyrah, the Consulate Court promptly outlawed these two sects for undermining the priesthood's authority. Driven to secrecy, the members of these sects nonetheless continued to investigate the ultimate causes of the Rivening and the remaining goddess' infirmity. The priests of Scyrah's fane turned a blind eye to their actions,

aware that Scyrah was slowly dying but unable to admit it even though they had known almost from the day the goddess was admitted to the Fane of Lacyr.

Over time, the Retribution, the Seekers, and even the common people came to criticize the Consulate Court and the priesthood for their inactivity, lack of leadership, and refusal to acknowledge the state of their goddess. Tensions between these groups grew, eventually leading Lord Ghyrrshyld of House Vyre to loudly and publicly decry the impotence of the Consulate Court. Much to the distaste of many of his fellow nobles, Ghyrrshyld usurped the leaders of his own noble house and declared himself narcissar, or emperor. The self-crowned ruler took matters into his own hands and helped develop technology for waging war against the humans of western Immoren. The need to test the narcissar's new myrmidons—powerful Iosan warjacks—led to bloody and unprovoked incursions into trollkin territories near the southern borders of Ios, and Ghyrrshyld's subordinates took to calling him "Goreshade" under their breath.

Things came to a head when one of Ghyrrshyld's beloved cousins gave birth to a soulless child. Enraged, the narcissar snatched the newborn away and stormed into the Consulate Court while it was in session, berating the gathered nobles before dashing the child's head upon the stone floor. Ghyrrshyld's attendants struggled to usher him away as the court was thrown into chaos. A warrant for the narcissar's arrest was issued that same evening, and Ghyrrshyld and his retinue fled to his home in Iyrss, where he was followed by the Consulate Court's agents. Arriving at the gates of Scyrah's city, these agents demanded that Ghyrrshyld be turned over to their custody, but they were fired upon by soldiers of House Vyre, starting the War of the Houses. Wasting no time, Ghyrrshyld led his armies in a lightning-fast attack on Shyrr and succeeded in laying siege to the court chambers, thereby diverting the attention of the substantial garrison under House Silowuyr's command.

A combined army consisting of Dawnguard from House Nyarr, myrmidons from House Shyeel, and reinforcements from House Silowuyr eventually forced Ghyrrshyld to retreat to his stronghold in Iyrss, where the Retribution, who had distanced themselves from Ghyrrshyld's declarations despite their similar aims, laid the foundation for the final battle of the war. The Retribution's deeds at Iyrss had legitimized the sect to some degree in the eyes of many Iosans. At the height of the battle, Dawnlord Vyros Nyarr defeated Ghyrrshyld in a duel, which compelled the surrender of the remaining forces of House Vyre.

Despite being mortally wounded, the vanquished lord managed to escape Iyrss and flee to Eversael, where he gained the aid of the eldritch Auricant Tyrios, once the chief priest of Nyrrro. Ghyrrshyld sacrificed his mortality and became an eldritch. From there, he threw in his lot with the Cryxians, intending to learn all he could about the soul, Urcaen, and the void in order to find a solution to the problems that plagued Ios.

Ghyrrshyld's quest for answers had started many years before, and his activities had only accelerated when war broke out. Evidence of his determination became apparent

after his defeat, when the victors discovered laboratories filled with dead Iosans—not all of them soulless—who had been vivisected as fodder in the narcissar's mad pursuit of knowledge. It was good that Goreshade, whose name was thenceforth spoken with revulsion, was gone, although the Iosans were ever mindful to extract vengeance if the renegade lord ever showed himself again.

As for the Retribution, they saw their greatest success at a time when their cousins, the Nyss, were suffering their greatest tragedy. When the cunning dragon Everblight rose again and created a legion of blighted thralls from the ogrun and Nyss of the Shard Spires, those Nyss who were able to escape fled south, far away from their corrupted fellow shardfolk. They carried with them a vault of ice containing their most precious possession: the resting form of their god, Nyssor, the Scyr of Winter. Their flight was a race against time, for the dragon, Goreshade, and the avaricious Khadoran arcanists of the Greylords Covenant were all in pursuit, and all of them stood to gain greatly if they secured custody of the vault.

After much deception and diversion, Goreshade managed to steal Nyssor's sword, Voass, but the Greylords seized the greater prize, capturing the vault containing the sleeping god himself. The Khadorans attempted to transport it deeper into their territory for research but were stopped by the Retribution. Led in the field by Ravyn, the Eternal Light, the Retribution—now fully supported by the Homeguard Coalition and the Dawnguard—reclaimed the vault and restored the weakened Nyssor to his rightful place alongside his resting sister, Scyr.

Once Nyssor was inside Iosan territory, Goreshade's plan became clear. The eldritch had discovered what he believed to be the only solution: to end the gods' lives on Caen before their strength became spent. He persuaded the eldritch of Eversael to join him, and together they infiltrated the Fane of Lacyr, using the recent skorne invasion of Ios as a distraction. There Goreshade confronted the last of the elven gods, but he was not given the opportunity to act. Using much of what little power she had left, Scyr purged Auricant Tyrios for his many crimes against the Divine Court, exiled the eldritch of Eversael back to the Fane of Nyrr, and froze Goreshade where he stood. The stricken goddess looked into the mind of the former Lord Ghyrrshyld to discover his true intentions, and upon finding them pure despite his corrupted mind, she restored the fallen Iosan to life. Almost immediately, he was filled with a new sense of purpose and set off to expel the skorne from Ios. Although many Iosans now call him "Ghyrrshyld the Forgiven," his transformation greatly troubled the leaders of the Retribution.

THE CLAIMING & AN UNLIKELY ALLIANCE

With Ghyrrshyld's aid and leadership, the forces of the Retribution succeeded in driving the skorne back beyond the Iosan Peaks, all the way from Aeryth Dawnguard in the north to the Twilight Gate in the south. Despite their successes, though, the Iosans were few compared to the tide of skorne, whether warrior or beast, and Ghyrrshyld knew that the

invaders could not be kept at bay indefinitely. The dynamic was irrevocably changed with the coming of the infernals, as prophesied by the words of the Hermit of Henge Hold, a mad former Seeker who claimed to foretell the fate of the world.

Many wished to deny the words of the hermit when he first appeared, but the compelling truth of his statements could not be ignored. Indeed, the Retribution finally stood justified in their long-held belief: it was because of human deities and for humanity's benefit that all of the Divine Court were either dead or dying. But there was no time to fully ponder and appreciate the hermit's words, for just as the skorne launched a new offensive, the infernals and their tide of horrors arrived.

Unlike the rest of Immoren, Ios was targeted in particular, for among them dwelled the gods Scyr and Nyssor. Despite the diminished state of these deities, their spirit energy was greater than that of thousands of petty mortal souls, and the infernals desperately wished to consume them. To that end, infernalists had secretly built a gate in the north of the Bloodstone Desert, away from the eyes of the farthest-ranging Iosan scouts.

Mutually fearful of such an enemy, the Iosans and skorne turned to each other for aid, and a truce was agreed upon between Incissar Vyros Nyarr of Ios and Supreme Archdomina Makeda of the Skorne Empire. Neither knew of an effective means to combat the invaders from the Outer Abyss, and warrior-scholars on both sides collaborated to find ways to capture and perhaps defeat the infernals.

The two nations' greatest hope lay in the combined efforts of Ghyrrshyld, whose knowledge of the soul was more extensive than that of any Iosan, and his skorne counterpart, Lord Arbiter Hexeris, a mortitheurgical scholar of near-unparalleled skill. By some extraordinary gamble, the skorne succeeded in capturing an infernal master, which was turned over to Ghyrrshyld and Hexeris for study. This brief moment of success was followed by disaster when the pair tried to transfer their prisoner to Shyrr on the orders of Retribution leaders. They were denied entry by priests who refused to have the infernal master anywhere near Scyr and Nyssor, and a skirmish ensued when both parties tried to force the issue. Taking advantage of the disarray, the infernal master managed to escape when matters turned bloody. Unbeknownst to the creature, however, the lord arbiter had cut away a sliver of its essence while he and Ghyrrshyld conducted their studies, and they hastily assembled their forces and began hunting their quarry. Shortly thereafter, the allies discovered that the infernal master had fled to Henge Hold on the Immorese coast, far to the west. The mortals did not have the means to cover such a distance with the same speed as the infernal master, and they arrived only in time to witness the aftermath of what had been a battle of titanic proportions. There the strike force witnessed what remained of a portal to a far-off world and heard accounts of the heroic efforts to ferry as many people as possible through the gate in order to escape the infernals.

With little left to be done at Henge Hold, Ghyrrshyld and Hexeris conferred with other Immorese leaders and agreed to return east. Although the infernals had been defeated in

the battle, one infernal master remained at large and was still a dire threat to much of Immoren and the Iosan interior. The two powerful warriors and their forces were required by their colleagues back in Ios, especially in the defense of Shyrr and the gods within the Fane of Lacyr. As they made their return journey, Ghyrrshyld encountered the mage hunter company he had dispatched into the Thornwood and discovered that they had made a most valuable discovery. The object Ghyrrshyld had sensed earlier was the Mantle of Lacyr, thought lost after the god Nyssor first awoke. Without delay, the Retribution sent the artifact ahead to Shyrr and returned it to Scyrah. Once back in Shyrr, Ghyrrshyld and Hexeris continued to cooperate with each other, studying whatever they could capture and experimenting whenever the opportunity arose, but as the war against the infernals dragged on, they grew despondent. Their forces and their peoples diminished by the day against what seemed to be an endless horde of infernal horrors and their allied cultists. For Ghyrrshyld, this despondence grew into despair. The elf feared greatly for the fate of his people, many of whom had taken the risk of fleeing Ios altogether and setting out for refugee settlements in Llael and Rhul.

Hope flickered to life when the two leaders happened upon a potential solution to their problem. They had entertained the concept of combining Iosan arcanika and skorne mortitheurgy for some time but had been unable to resolve the problem of their incompatibility. Each device they crafted and application of magic they developed proved too unstable for their fellow warcasters and warlocks to use. The answer unexpectedly came to them when they closely observed the void archons that sometimes manifested in battle against the infernals.

Theologians of every race—Iosan, skorne, even Cryxian—had long debated who or what exactly these archons represented and what they truly were. The Retribution had dared to hope that Lacyr, the first among their gods, was still alive and had dispatched these beings as angels of vengeance, but the truth became apparent the longer Iosan and skorne fought side by side. To the elves, these archons were divine heralds whose forms were reminiscent of Iosan sculptures of the gods' servants, but to the skorne, they were physical manifestations of ancestors who had returned from the Void through sheer strength of will. Both theories were disproven when the same archons were observed changing their appearance throughout the course of battle, taking on whatever form best suited those they protected. This discovery caused a great deal of conflict between the elves and the skorne, each of whom claimed these archons as their own, but it gave Ghyrrshyld and Hexeris the vital information they required. Void archons were not in fact tied to any worship, god, or race. Instead, they were tied to the most fundamental path of a mortal soul—from dwelling within a living vessel on Caen to wandering the wilderness of Urcaen. To the two warrior-scholars, these strange beings represented the unconscious and collective will of all the souls of Urcaen, to whom the very nature of infernals was anathema. As manifestations of a vast collective, void archons were too great to hold within any sacral stone and too

powerful to be restrained within any arcanikal machinery.

Armed with this new knowledge, Ghyrrshyld and Hexeris worked tirelessly to create a device that combined these two elements. They initially met with a string of failures as prototype after prototype broke down upon activation with barely a moment to function, even if perfectly timed with the arrival of a void archon. Matters grew more urgent when the Fane of Scyrah brought news that both Scyrah and Nyssor were weakening at an ever-accelerating rate. Even cloaked in the Mantle of Lacyr, Scyrah showed little sign of recovery; the goddess retained only a small measure of strength in her body and seemed entirely beyond healing.

Knowing that action was needed to forestall the potential demise of the two deities, Ghyrrshyld proposed a perilous experiment. Using a modified sacral stone housed within a specially crafted arcanikal field generator fabricated from the Mantle of Lacyr, Ghyrrshyld would channel his own immense arcane power in an attempt to control a void archon, but the unique connection between himself and the mechanism would tether the archon to his own soul. Against Hexeris' better judgment, and also over the protestations of the priests of Scyrah, the two of them took their final prototype into battle.

As it turned out, the device not only magnified Ghyrrshyld's arcane power beyond anyone's predictions but also granted him the ability to influence and even outright control the souls that circulated around him. Armed with this power, the allied forces went on the offensive, now able to deprive the infernals of a substantial source of their strength. But binding himself to the void entity fundamentally changed Ghyrrshyld. The elf lord became uncaring, unfeeling, and unrelenting, and he often shut himself away from all others except to guard the souls of the deceased. It was as if Ghyrrshyld had become soulless himself. Whether because of this metamorphosis or some other reason, the soulless of Ios began to gravitate toward him, led by Nayl, one of the longest-serving soulless warriors among the mage hunters.

THE RISE OF THE ELDRITCH

Although this unintended and uncontrollable aspect of Ghyrrshyld's newfound power alarmed his peers, it appealed to many of the Retribution's most fervent supporters, who wondered openly what it might signify for the fate of the Iosan and Nyss peoples. One such individual was the mage hunter Elara, a young warcaster whose skill in assassination had earned her the nickname "Death's Shadow." In defiance of orders from Ravyn and senior mage hunter commanders, Elara fought at Ghyrrshyld's side as the elves and their skorne allies went on the offensive toward Aeryth Dawnguard in the north. In the drive to push the infernals past the Iosan Peaks, however, Elara was mortally wounded and swarmed by infernals. Enraged, Ghyrrshyld counterattacked and destroyed them in return, but to the horror of the victorious elves and skorne, Elara's soul returned to her lifeless corpse. She rose to her feet again with her wounds healed, but she was no longer a living elf. Instead, she had become an undead facsimile, her pallid skin and dour countenance clearly marking her as an eldritch.



Elara was merely the first among many who fell in battle close to Ghyrrshyld to be brought back in this manner. Ghyrrshyld searched for a pattern to the fallen elves' revival as eldritch but was unable to determine the cause. This was of particular concern to Hexeris, who began distancing himself from the elf lord. Making matters even worse was the reemergence of the ancient Cult of Nyrro. Seeing their fellow eldritch fighting among the ranks of the living emboldened them to reveal themselves, and they soon joined the war effort. There was no time for the Consulate Court to ponder these dilemmas, for the enemy yet remained, and together, the Iosans, skorne, and eldritch began clearing all trace of the infernals from Ios.

With the infernals significantly weakened by a lack of souls upon which to glut themselves and maintain their numbers, preparations were made for one final offensive against the gate in the northern Bloodstone. Battle escalated on the border separating Ios from the Bloodstone Marches, with the combined strength of Ios and the Army of the Western Reaches burning through untold numbers of horrors and cultists.

But instead of simply wiping out what remained of the infernals, Ghyrrshyld, perhaps foreseeing that hostilities between the two nations would inevitably resume once the infernals were no longer a threat, turned his forces upon the skorne. Shots from empowered Hyperions—the Iosans' colossal myrmidons—wiped out unit after unit of skorne infantry while Ghyrrshyld, Elara, and other eldritch hunted down and slew all the skorne commanders they could find. Despite their great beasts of war and their superior numbers, the skorne were no match for the sheer destructive power of the Iosans. The Army of the Western Marches was thrown into disarray by the deaths of many of its leaders, but Archdomina Makeda led the remaining forces in a fighting retreat across the Bloodstone Marches, swearing eternal vengeance upon the Iosans for the many slain skorne heroes who had been denied their rightful exaltation.

Incensed by Ghyrrshyld's treachery, the Consulate Court ordered Falcir of House Ellowuyr to execute the seemingly out-of-control warcaster. Many Iosans, including priests of Scyrh, nobles of the most powerful houses, and—most of all—Vyros Nyarr had long harbored distrust and even enmity for Ghyrrshyld from the moment he stepped out of Scyrh's presence, and with this betrayal, enough was enough.

Falcir, known among the nobility as "the Merciless" for her role as House Ellowuyr's executioner, was aware of Ghyrrshyld's past, and she had studied him in battle ever since his return to life, memorizing every swing of Voass and the casting of every spell in an effort to learn how to defeat him when the need inevitably arose. With the skorne on the verge of being driven across the Abyss, Falcir made her move at the insistence of the Consulate Court, who believed that victory was assured. Confronting Ghyrrshyld, Falcir poured as much arcane power as she could into him, locking away his strength and bringing him to his knees. With all her remaining might, Falcir struck Ghyrrshyld down and then, in order to ensure that he could not be revived, destroyed the arcanikal device that had given him such unfathomable

power. The energy released upon the Mantle of Lacyr's fracturing wounded Falcir so grievously that she was barely able to return to the Consulate Court to report her success.

In Ghyrshyld's absence, the elven armies were led by Vyros and Elara, and though the Iosans missed the fallen elf lord's power at times, the Retribution succeeded in securing the Abyssal Fortress and defeating the last major bastion of skorne resistance in western Immoren. But many of Ghyrshyld's partisans, Elara chief among them, discerned the truth of his absence and disappearance. Without waiting to confirm whether the others were aware of her suspicions, and convinced that the Iosans' salvation lay in Goreshade's answer, Elara retrieved Voass and led her allies on a hasty flight across the Bloodstone Desert and back to Ios. A detachment was quickly dispatched to pursue her. With no time to waste, Elara first made for Ghyrshyld's laboratories in Iryss, where she retrieved several mortitheurgical artifacts and the products of Ghyrshyld's work with Hexeris. She then dispatched Nayl and other soulless warriors to secure the Fane of Lacyr and make sure that Scyrach and Nyssor were still there.

When the soulless came at last to the gates of Shyrr, they were denied entry by Ravyn, who was suspicious of their sudden arrival, which had come without word or warning from any other commanders. A standoff between Nayl and Ravyn ensued. Tensions between the attendant soulless and fane knights slowly grew as the impassive soulless refused to leave and disperse, while Ravyn and the fane knights refused to open the gates to the fane. Weapons were eventually drawn. The deadlock ended with Elara's arrival. Perceiving the problem long before she made her presence known, she approached unseen and stabbed her commanding officer in the back with Voass, after which the soulless quickly cut down the fane knights.

With the way now open, Elara entered the fane with Ghyrshyld's mortitheurgical artifacts in tow. She found Scyrach and Nyssor seated inside the temple, as if waiting for her arrival. Steeling herself against the judgment of her gods, the eldritch cut down the pair, thereby fulfilling Ghyrshyld's original plan.

THE SUNDERING

The death of the two deities released the last vestiges of the Divine Court in a nation-spanning wave of invisible energy. Within the elven nation's borders, the pain of Scyrach's and Nyssor's sudden demise caused a spiritual upheaval that twisted the essence of living things and altered the fabric of Caen but worked its greatest changes on the children of the gods.

In a single moment, every living Iosan and Nyss was touched by the absence of their gods. Some, perhaps resigned to their fate without the protection of Scyrach and Nyssor, died. Others—those with the iron spirit to persist despite any tribulation, unwilling to give up or surrender—were transformed into eldritch. The final passing of the elven gods and its immediate effects would become known as the Sundering, for it broke the links between the elven people and their gods, between the living and the undead, and between those Iosans who dwelled within the forests of Ios and those beyond its borders. Despite the strength imparted by their

new undead form, many of the surviving Iosans watched with horror as their skin desiccated before their eyes and their friends and family members collapsed dead in front of them.

Away from Ios, none knew what had come to pass, but the priests of Nyssor and Scyrach who had been outside the forests of Ios at the time suffered their own Rivening. Driven mad by the disappearance of the last two elven deities from Caen, some were successfully restrained from harming those around them, but others were killed in a panic by elves who feared the worst.

As the forces of the Retribution journeyed back to Ios, tired of war and desperate for rest after so much bloodshed, they found their homeland a forbidding place. They and the refugees who also wished to return to Ios had questions whose only answers were found in the melancholia of those who were once their priests. Refused entry to their own homes, the living elves took one of two paths. Some, miserable in their misfortune, tried to enter the forests by sneaking past the soulless sentinels at the border and were never heard from again, while the rest made their way elsewhere to eke out a new existence, whether north toward Frostbracken or south toward the former skorne holdings.

In the years since the Claiming, rumors about Ios have spread among the Iron Kingdoms. Though many have heard of the Second Skorne-Iosan War, none can say what has become of the elven nation itself. It takes an especially brave soul to find out the truth: that Ios is now a land of the waiting dead, ruled by the eldritch and their sythyss and soulless servants. Scattered as they are among many small settlements and colonies across western Immoren, what few living Iosans remain do not seem long for this world.

GODS OF THE BORDERLANDS

Many gods, both living and dead, are worshipped in the borderlands of the Iron Kingdoms, and each has a tradition of faith stretching back to before the first human cities were constructed. Unlike many of humanity's gods, these deities have long been invested in the well-being of their creations and have bestowed many unique gifts upon their children.

THE DIVINE COURT

The deities of the elves were always fundamentally different from those of other races. Whereas the others originated from or were descended from the primal forces of Caen or Urcaen—even the Wurm, which was born from the chaos that swirled around and amid the world as it formed—the elven gods were formed from the essence of the heavens themselves. Perhaps this difference explains why the elves were a doomed race, for they were ultimately not of Caen but of the distant realms far beyond its skies. For it was the sun and moons that gave rise to those who oversaw the changing of the seasons and the inexorable effects of time, whether hour, day, year, or millennium. They were eight in number, each with a separate domain within the movements of the heavens around Caen, and in unison they ensured that all remained well.

The first was Lacyr, recognized by all the others as the



greatest among them, and she became known as the Narcissar of Ages. Her consort was Ossyris, the Incissar of Hours, and to their side stood Ayisla, Nis-Arsyr of Night, and Nyrrro, Arsyr of Day. The four who followed them were the gods of the seasons: Scyrah, Nis-Issyr of Spring; Lurynsar, Issyr of Summer; Lyliss, Nis-Scyir of Autumn; and Nyssor, Scyir of Winter. As these deities became aware of themselves and the roiling chaos of the spiritual dimensions, they created a forest to rule over, immortal servants to tend to their new dominion, and a palace to represent their divine majesty. The forest they named the Veld, and the palace they named Lyoss, a place of sanctuary for the gods and their attendants, for the wilds beyond the Veld were home to ravenous beasts borne of the chaotic energies that pervaded all dimensions from before the creation of Caen. Had it not been for the labors of the Divine Court and their servants, all would have been lost to these insatiable creatures. And from the safety of Lyoss, the gods looked to the world below, gazed at the creations of the other gods, and marveled at these creatures' toils and acts of worship.

The elves were the result of the Divine Court's observations and study, and it fell to Lacyr to become the mother of this new race. She was aided by Scyrah, who

nurtured the first elves to walk upon Immoren. These became the Lyossans, named after the divine palace and intended to be a mirror of the gods' servants. Over time, they coalesced into the greatest empire of antiquity, which came to span much of central Immoren. The souls of the gods' creations were slivers of divine essence, and they allowed the elves to reciprocate their gods' love for them with piety and earnest adoration. But such a connection between elf and god, and in such abundance, drew the attention of the infernals, beings of the expanse of nothingness called the Outer Abyss. Jealous that their realm had no mortal analogues to Caen and the Empire of Lyoss, the infernals attempted to assault the spiritual home of the elven gods and steal away the wealth of divine essence contained within the multitude of elven souls. For untold years, the gods and their divine servants struggled to keep the horrors of the Outer Abyss at bay. Knowing they could not hold their foes back indefinitely, the Divine Court chose to descend among the elves, but the prosperous coexistence they envisioned with the Lyossans was not to be.

In the aftermath of the Cataclysm, the elven gods realized too late that they did not belong on Caen. Whereas other gods could transition freely between Urcaen and Caen, the gods of the elves came from a place far beyond the reckoning of either of those dimensions. Caen was different—too different for these celestial deities, for it was a realm of life and undeath, not of the heavens. When the Divine Court came to Caen, they were like a tree that had been cut down, no longer attached to its roots and bereft of the strength it needed to grow anew.

Thus it came to pass that the destruction of the Bridge of Worlds—the gods' link to the Veld—disrupted the cosmological balance, sapping them of their strength and vitality. This loss was reflected in their people, who became truly mortal, which increasingly affected the gods themselves as the ages passed. But worst of all, because the Veld and the Gates of Lyoss had been closed to protect what lay within from the attention of those who sought its destruction, this disastrous turn of events prevented elven souls from being guided to their proper destination or sent back to Caen for rebirth, and so they became inextricably linked to the gods' very existence. Only the hardest or most fortunate souls would be able to wander the wastes beyond the Veld and return, and so the Lyossans—now the Iosans—would die out without the Divine Court's direct intervention, for the natural cycle of each elven soul's birth, life, death, and rebirth was now firmly bound to the fate of the eight gods.

Realizing the urgency of their situation almost immediately, they began planning the best way to revitalize the Iosan people. These efforts were intended to replenish their own essences as well, although they took great pains not to let their creations know the truth. Convening among themselves, they discussed how to return to the Veld in order to recover their strength and confer this recovery to the Iosans. Once the eight believed enough time had passed for the infernals to cease their efforts to gain access to the Veld, they announced their decision to return.

The gods departed Ios without giving any indication of

where they would go or how they would return to the Veld. Initial attempts to rebuild a new Bridge of Worlds ended in failure, compelling them to venture to other parts of Caen to find a place where the fabric of the dimensions was weaker. As their search continued, Nyssor expressed his pessimism about their endeavor, and with the permission the other members of the Divine Court, he returned to be among his people, the Nyss, as they ventured farther north. After centuries, the other seven gods found an ancient battlefield where souls had once flooded through the veil to Urcaen. Knowing that they would need to cross another barren world to reach the Veld, they prepared themselves for their journey by undergoing a ritual that would permit their forms to transition across the boundary between dimensions. Just as they left Caen, though, they were betrayed.

When the Orgoth invaded western Immoren and enslaved large parts of the human population, two of humanity's gods, Morrow and Thamar, sought for a way to help their people. Thamar knew of the elves' arcane power and sent emissaries to request lore and tutelage, but they were rebuffed, for the Iosans were desperate themselves, both for news of how their gods fared and for a more concrete improvement in their existence. Angered by the Iosans' rejection, Thamar gambled and made contact with the infernals, aware that they wished to capture the Divine Court and take the elven deities' power for themselves. As she treated with emissaries from the Outer Abyss, she dispatched spies to locate and follow the elven gods. The infernals eventually agreed to grant mankind the gift of arcane magic in exchange for two-thirds of all of humanity's souls to be paid at a later date, as well as the location of the Divine Court. With this most coveted intelligence in hand, the infernals gathered at a crossing point within the realm between Caen and Urcaen, and as the Divine Court left the world of mortals, they attacked. Sensing their peril, Nyssor rushed to their aid, but he was much too late. Although the Divine Court fought valiantly, one by one they were defeated or captured, their deaths and corruption leading to the Rivening in Ios. Nyssor arrived only to see his sister Scyrrah wounded and Lacyr close to defeat. As his empress fell, she handed him her mantle, believing that it would be key to their revival. Unwilling to leave her side, Nyssor fought long enough to ensure that Scyrrah escaped from this accursed dimension and returned to Caen, for they were much too far from any path to the Veld to continue forward. With much of his own strength spent, Nyssor too fled, taking the Mantle of Lacyr with him.

This prized artifact was thought lost when Nyssor was awoken by Goreshade. When the eldritch was cursed by the Scyir of Winter, the god used a little of his strength to spirit the mantle away. After Ghyrrshyld was revived, he sensed the mantle's aura as he journeyed toward Henge Hold in pursuit of the escaped infernal master, an effect of Scyrrah's power having brought him back to life. Although Ghyrrshyld had more pressing objectives, he delegated several mage hunters to investigate. They drew near to the relic, but only when Ghyrrshyld and his forces made their way back to Ios was the power of the mantle made clear to him, and under his guidance, the Retribution recovered this most sacred of

artifacts. It was conveyed to Scyrrah as soon as possible in the hope that it would restore her strength, and this fervent wish became the focus of the prayers of an entire people. But the goddess regained neither her vigor nor her spirit. Even though her physical strength returned and she slumbered less often within the fane, the mantle did not seem to have the desired effect. Instead, Scyrrah's heart continued to wither away, and her body was only held in a fragile stasis by the mantle as elven souls continued to fall to the infernals.

In the end, the solution Scyrrah sought from Ghyrrshyld failed to materialize, for he ultimately abandoned his search altogether during the Infernal War in favor of securing the immediate future of his nation. As the gods weakened further, neither they nor their priests could do anything to quell the rising belief, right or wrong, that their deaths were the only solution. And with their passing at the hands of the eldritch Elara, the gods of the elves are no more, and the cycle of souls is broken. The priests who remain still worship their gods, if mournfully, but the power they once received as a blessing from Scyrrah and Nyssor comes no longer from the Veld, but from somewhere else entirely, and the spells they cast are now tinged with a blankness whose nature remains unidentified. The future of the elven race rests on a knife's edge. If no answers are found, all that will be left of the elves a generation from now are the undead eldritch, who are not known for their altruism. The optimistic among the Iosans, including even some of the new eldritch, believe that now that the gods are gone, their essences can return as one to the heavens from where they came and, in time, be reborn. Their only hope is that this happens before all is lost.

THE GREAT FATHERS & THE CLAYWIVES

Although the Rhulic freeholds are home to a multitude of non-dwarven races and worshippers of non-dwarven gods, these people remain a small minority in Rhul, for the dwarves themselves are adherents to their ancient pantheon: the Great Fathers, from whom they claim to be descended. But their origin goes back much further—to Ghor, the God of the Mountains, who was as uncaring and unmoving as the mountains he ruled over in Kharg Drogun, "the Land Beneath."

In his arrogance and hubris, Ghor created thirteen slaves from the stone of the mountain to serve his every whim, the first of which was to build monuments to his glory. A cruel master, Ghor had nothing but contempt for his own creations; the very idea of truly knowing them or understanding them did not even occur to him. Had he taken the time to do so, he would have come to appreciate their cleverness, their ingenuity, and—above all—their divinity. The slaves were aware of the god's antipathy for them and returned it in kind, but being creatures of industry and endeavor, they obeyed their creator's command and poured all their efforts into the construction of his monuments, satisfied only with perfection. The slaves were proud of the finished work, but the callous god regarded it with scorn and mocked its lack of grandeur before destroying it with an earthquake and commanding them to begin again.