

# THE PROTECTORATE OF THE MIDLANDS

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A SUPPLEMENT FOR THE ELDRITCH LIVE ACTION  
ROLEPLAYING GAME

The ELDRITCH Live Action Roleplaying game is a lovingly crafted work of fiction created by John Kozar, Faye Ferguson, and Spencer McGhin, with additional input from, and content created by Megan Durham, Jessica Sills, Chantelle Yeager, Thomas Marshbanks, Galen Hall, and Joe Meyer. Special thanks to Lehanna Allen, Carl Holzbog, and anyone else who ever listened to us prattle on about the project. Thanks to everyone who helped to make this strange dream a reality.

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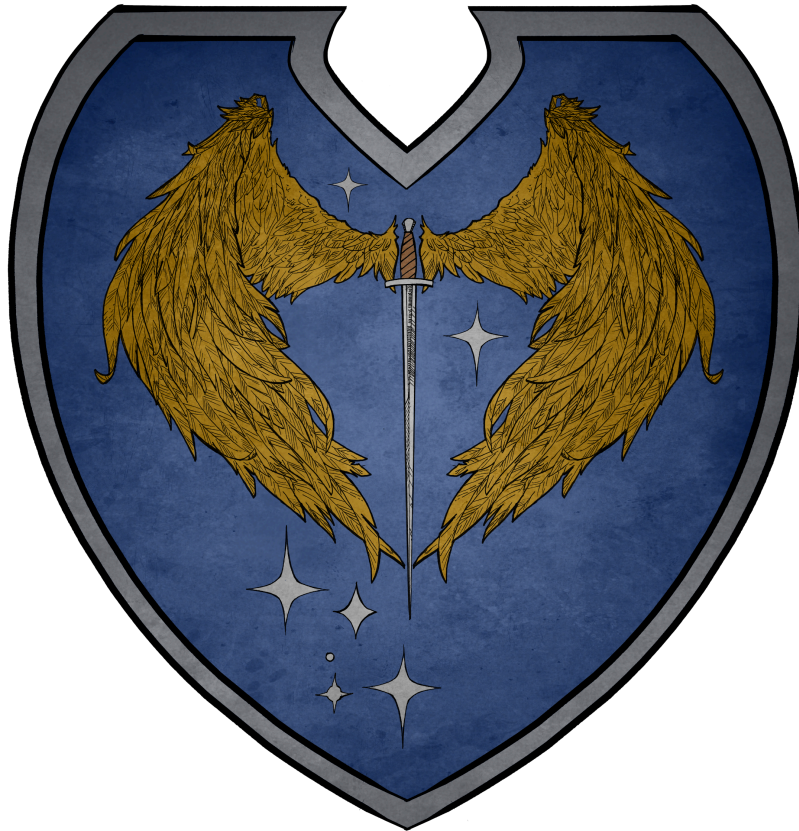
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## WELCOME TO THE MIDLANDS...



With endless, green plains and rolling hills set against the backdrop of towering mountains and snow-capped peaks, the landscape of the Midlands is considered some of the most breathtaking in all the Kingdom. With a temperate climate, good food, mirthful people, and benevolent rulers, many consider the lands of House Corveaux to be a true paradise. Though this is a land of plenty and people want for very little, it has not stopped the folk of the Midlands from developing a culture of martial excellence and its knights are considered the finest in all Arnesse. This is an ancient land that has a long history of conflict, where knights of legend still ride free atop coursers from the purest bloodlines and the virtues of chivalry are held to be the law of the land. Here, one can catch a true glimpse into the ancient feudal society of ages past, where the nobles sit upon thrones within castles built a thousand years ago by the masters of old with techniques forgotten to modern craftsmen. Here the horse and the hawk are sacred, valued for their freedom and unimpeded movement on land and sky. This is a land of justice and honor, where valor and personal skill are the measure of worth and the beasts of a mythic age; the gryphon, the pegasus, the eagle, the stag, and the lion continue to inspire heroism in the modern day.

## USING THIS GUIDE

The player supplements for Eldritch are intended to provide detailed information beyond that which is known to the general player population. All information in this guide is to be taken as in-play information, known by you and others in your corresponding faction. You may over the course of Eldritch events discover new information that corresponds to your faction, however you will be able to share this information as you wish.

## PLAYING A MIDLANDER

*“The travail of freedom and justice is not easy, but nothing serious and important in life is easy. The history of humanity has been a continuing struggle against temptation and tyranny - and very little worthwhile has ever been achieved without pain.”*

- Robert Kennedy

Above all else, Midlanders value the concepts of fairness and freedom. While no land in Arnesse can exist without the feudal system of the Kingdom, the Midlands has come the closest to true equality among its people. There are no serfs in the Midlands; every low caste is a freeman or freewoman and they call themselves the Midlanders. Slavery is utterly forbidden within the Midlands and a violation of this prohibition is a very serious crime. Because of this more liberal society, many Midlanders within the Midlands have more opportunities to move into higher positions within society such as knighthood or even nobility. This tends to make the overall populace of the Midlands happier on average and more loyal to their lords.

Midlanders are naturally competitive, which can manifest itself in more ways than one. It often appears in the form of martial ability; all the men and women of good family are encouraged to learn a fighting style of their choice. But it isn't just weapons and warmongering that they are interested in excelling at. A sharp mind is considered a leadership quality that is just as important as being able to physically fight. A tavern bard knows better than to challenge an Ordo Erdani knight to a duel of riddles, for it is a battle he is sure to lose.

Despite how seriously a Midlander takes their duty, they are often known for their jovial personalities. Bright colors, a broad smile, and a glass of wine in hand are the marks of the Midlanders at social gatherings. At tournaments, the most common Midlands celebration, competitive attitudes are met with friendly back claps and laughter. People are naturally drawn to them due to their boisterous personalities and they tend to acquire friends with ease. They are certainly loyal to their families, but the camaraderie of competition makes their brothers in arms just as important and they often have deep connections with the organizations and orders that they join.

They strive to be the epitome of chivalry, freedom, and justice. They are often the first ones into battle, whether that be a literal fight, or a figurative assault against injustice. Sometimes this desire to live up to their past is so strong and blinding, that they end up working against the very ideals they wish to uphold. Midlanders also tend to be very moral people and uphold the law, even if they don't personally agree with it. The concept of virtue is a very serious matter for Midlanders and they are quick to look down on others who are immoral or criminal. Because of this, Midlands justice can appear swift and, at times, harsh. Interestingly, that harshness is often not lethal as most nobles in the Midlands are loath to become that which they so often fight against. Punishments tend to be creative, instructive, and tend to fit the crime well.

The horse and the bird of prey are both sacred to the Midlanders. They appear in art and literature, and they are treated with the utmost respect. Horse breeders and trainers across the region must follow strict rules concerning how they treat their animals, lest they lose business and face social consequences.

To harm an animal deliberately is also considered to be a very serious crime. All horses are retired when they become too old to work and are sent to pleasant pastures near Avalen where they are cared for by senior members of the Ordo Erdani. Birds are common pets across the region, ranging from small songbirds to mighty war eagles. While raptors and other birds of prey are given special appreciation, any bird that is known to fight back against these predators is given no small amount of recognition. One example of this is the crow, for which the eastern forests of the Midlands were named.

# MAJOR FIGURES OF THE MIDLANDS

## GILES BANNON II

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

King Giles Bannon II is the ruler of the Kingdom of Arnesse and all Midlanders recognize and acknowledge his sovereignty over the land. Countless stories have been told in the Midlands of the King's pious nature and general work to increase morality and justice within the Kingdom. The Midlands have a long history of honoring and respecting the King of Arnesse, but with Giles II, even the typically loyal Midlanders are beginning to express concerns. The people appreciate that Giles II is a moral man and that he appears to do a fine job administrating the Kingdom, but they struggle with accepting how he has treated his long-standing allies in the Midlands since he has taken the throne. It began at the Battle of Lanton in 751. House Corveaux honored King Giles I's call to his banners and many good knights died to Giles II's rebel troops in that humiliating defeat. To add insult to injury, the new king chose the daughter of Lord Paragon Frederick Blayne, Aline, to be his wife, and gifted her a portion of the northern Midlands, which became the Hearthlands. While this happened over a decade ago, many Midlanders have not quickly forgotten these events. Giles II's adherence to the Aurorym faith has also left some in the Midlands wondering if he will try to force that religion upon the peoples of the Midlands, a decision that is widely unpopular. Stories continue to trickle into the taverns and markets of Giles II's ruthless enforcement of his faith's morality – that people are dying and suffering horrible acts of torture. His passage of the morality laws in 760 was viewed as excessive and unnecessary by many Midlanders and for the first time in as long as anyone can remember, quiet malcontent is starting to form in some parts of the Midlands. Many still hope that the wisdom of House Corveaux's nobles can reach the King's ears and return him to a path of greatness, but it is said that there is also talk of what happens if Giles II won't see reason.

## ALINE BANNON

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

Most Midlanders struggle to see redeeming qualities in anyone from House Blayne, but Queen Aline Bannon is as great an exception as there ever was. Even though most agree her marriage to Giles II was a mistake and the land given to House Blayne as a wedding gift was an insult to all Midlanders, most do not hold the Queen accountable for those events. She is believed to be a woman of virtue and genuinely kind to those around her. She helps the less fortunate and there is a strong feeling that Aline is likely a powerful force that helps to keep Giles II's baser

impulses in check. The Queen isn't known to be particularly active in politics, but she is frequently seen abroad and has made many trips to the Midlands over the years. She has a vacation home on the Shining Shores in the eastern Midlands that she often frequents with her courtiers and is occasionally joined by the King. Some Midlanders have taken to calling her the Summer Queen, for Aline is often only seen during the warm months of the year. Queen Aline also shares her love of flowers with many Midlanders. She is known to have a particular fondness for Corvusan Lotus, a rare and exceptionally beautiful flower that is only found in the boggy waters around the Lostmount Fens.

## DESMOND CORVEAUX

*Lord Paragon Desmond Corveaux*

Desmond Corveaux is the current Lord Paragon of House Corveaux. His mother was the previous Lady Paragon Brigid Corveaux, a famously fierce warrior woman. Desmond inherited his mother's fierceness, and he exhibited stern fairness and equality during his proving. It was an easy decision for the Lady Brigid to claim him as her heir. Desmond has held the Corveaux seat of power for since 741, with Lady Amelie Corveaux of Suthwater by his side.

## AMELIE CORVEAUX

*Lady Amelie Corveaux of Suthwater*

Amelie Corveaux is the wife of Lord Paragon Desmond Corveaux, and cousin of Lady Jeanne Corveaux of Suthwater, the current Lady of Suthwater. She is known to be a quiet, kindly woman who is not well known outside noble courts.

## EMMELINE CORVEAUX

*Lady Emmeline Corveaux*

Emmeline is the first daughter of the previous Lady Paragon Brigid Corveaux, sister of Lord Paragon Desmond Corveaux, and wife of Lord Rylen Aragon. Since marrying Rylen in 753, she moved to the Tarkathi city of Taliesin where she was instrumental in reopening the trade routes through the area. Since her marriage, the trade routes between King's Crossing and Tarkath have begun to flourish.

## GARAMOND CORVEAUX

*Lord Garamond Corveaux of King's Crossing*

Garamond is the current ruler of the city of King's Crossing, the second seat of power for the Corveaux, and the head of the Corveaux cadet house of King's Crossing. Before he came to power, the city of King's Crossing had begun to earn a reputation as a hotbed of crime. Under his rule the city has made a massive push to clean up its streets and remove underworld elements. As a result of these efforts, King's Crossing, a city once known to be quite dangerous, has some of the safest streets in Arnesse. Garamond was matched with Lady Jocelyn Bannon, the daughter of the Lord Paragon of House Bannon and uncle of King Giles II, Charles.

## JEANNE CORVEAUX

*Lady Jeanne Corveaux of Suthwater*

Jeanne is the current ruler of the city of Orgonne, the third seat of power for the Corveaux, and the head of the Corveaux cadet house of Suthwater. She has ruled over Orgonne for the last fifteen years, after she was named heir at her uncle's proving. Jeanne has proved to be an exceptionally fair ruler. Her main focuses have been improving sea trade relations with the Cirque and protecting the region from pirate and brigand attacks. She is currently widowed. Her husband, Lord Adrian Penrose, was killed in battle in 760.

# HISTORY

The following section details common historical information known to those who call Midlands their home. While there is certainly more history to the faction, it will need to be discovered via the proper in-game channels. **As of 2025, the in-game year is 766.**

## THE AGE OF KINGS

Generations ago, tales spoke of a conflict known as the Bastard War, in which Queen Eleanor Bannon battled several half-siblings for almost a decade of bloody conflict. She defeated the rival claimants and married her half-brother, Royce Wolf, a bastard, amid a great deal of scandal and disapproval of the unnatural union. Lord Royce was crowned as King Miles Bannon I shortly after. It was widely said that Queen Eleanor and King Miles detested each other, but a child was born from their union, Giles. Their rule was plagued by more scandal as King Miles had a public affair with an Aragonese noblewoman that resulted in a son being born out of wedlock named Charles, now the Lord Paragon of House Bannon. When King Miles embraced Charles as his own son and named him a Bannon, he was challenged to a duel to the death by an outraged Aragon Knight. Brave until the very end, King Miles Bannon accepted and, after valiantly refusing to elect a champion, was killed in the ensuing fight.

Despite her violent ascension to the throne, Queen Eleanor was widely regarded as one of the good monarchs of the modern age. She ruled wisely for almost thirty years, seeking to restore the land after years of civil war left the people and the country ravaged. Though some would argue her success in those endeavors was mixed, the Queen did a great deal to bring stability back to the Kingdom of Arnesse and a restored faith in the monarchy. Though she struggled to fully return Arnesse to complete prosperity and health, she reigned in relative peace before passing the crown to her son upon her death.

Giles came of age in 727 and took the throne of a struggling Kingdom. Though much of his reign was mired in romance scandal, many knew King Giles I as a fair-minded king who spent most of his twenty-five-years on the throne improving the administrative structure of Arnesse. King Giles proved to be a wise administrator and his reign brought a great deal of prosperity to Arnesse. Among the commonfolk, Giles I was best known for his significant rework of the legal system in Arnesse, wherein he gave non-nobles more rights and protections, but also placed more power in the hands of local nobles. Many nobles used this newfound power wisely and a new age of justice dawned in Arnesse. The new laws also allowed for spouses to annul marriages, though this had little impact on most commonfolk, who infrequently ended unions.

Those who speak of King Giles I's reign are quick to talk of his romantic involvements and the many women in his life. While it is true that the King was a man of great passion, his desire to secure a legitimate heir drove many of his actions. When he was crowned, Giles took Lady Rosalind of House Bannon to be his queen and she bore him a son, also named Giles. Rumors of malcontent between him and Queen Rosalind become reality when he annulled their marriage. Rosalind fled to the North, taking young Giles with her. House Corveaux was quick to volunteer the beautiful and noble Lady Elysande as a new Queen. The King accepted and they were married; the union produced a child, a girl named Emma. After several years, it was tragically discovered that the Queen had been having an affair. She was found guilty of adultery and put to death. Less than a year later, the King fell in love with Lady Alice, the cousin of Queen Elysande, who sought to comfort him in his grief. It is said that the King had a love curse upon him, a fact that seemed true when his ill-fated union to Alice ended, when she and her son Kerrigan died less than a year later in childbirth.

In the later years of Giles' reign, reports begin to surface that the king had gone fully mad, declaring that he had received a vision that the Aurorym faith would bring about the end of the Kingdom of Arnesse. In response, he passed an edict placing massive restrictions on religion throughout the Kingdom. In response, unrest about his policies begins to rise in the land. Rumors ran rampant among the lower classes, spread by religious zealots and malcontents in the Midlands and Everfrost. While many accusations were made, including that Giles was a witch, little in the way of evidence was produced to support these claims. When Giles I married Lady Maeve Innis from Thornwood, this cemented people's concerns about him and what had been quiet malcontent turned into open rebellion.

When Queen Maeve was announced to be with child in 750, the fear of an Innis heir to the throne fueled the allegations that the King and Queen were both involved in witchcraft. These calls were joined by powerful voices from within the Aurorym faith who claimed that the King must be removed from power. In 751, Giles the Younger, son of the King, marched on Highcourt with a rebel army to seize the throne from his father. King Giles called his banners and Corveaux responded, sending knights to join his army. Despite countless acts of heroism and valor that day, the rightful king of Arnesse, Giles I was defeated by his son on the battlefield at Lanton. Rumors ran wild throughout the Kingdom about the Aurorym faith and how its valiant Vellatora knights carried Giles II to victory almost single-handedly. King Giles I and Queen Maeve were captured, put on trial for witchcraft, and both burned at the stake for their crimes. Giles II is crowned King of Arnesse in 752. He promptly cemented his alliance with House Blayne by marrying Aline, daughter of Lord Paragon Frederick Blayne.

## THE PRESENT

By the year 763, King Giles II had sat on the throne of Arnesse for twelve years. The King has been a positive but polarizing force in Arnesse. He is known to be a brilliant man who believes himself a visionary; a wise ruler who plans to take Arnesse to a new age of glory and greatness. Those in the Midlands often have a mixed opinion of Giles II. Of all the Kings who have sat upon the throne, he is perhaps the most moral of them all and the King seeks to bring justice and virtue to Arnesse. On the other hand, he is a follower of the Aurorym faith, which is unpopular among the peoples of the Midlands. The Midlanders want morality and justice, but too often the King ruthlessly enforces morality upon the world around him. The pious are rewarded and the profane are punished. The King often only empowers those loyal to the Aurorym faith. The unfaithful are usually disregarded or marginalized. Those he deems threats are killed or cast out. This has sent many of the rich and power scrambling to either adopt the Aurorym faith or find other ways to gain the King's favor.

But despite Giles II's proclivities and failings, the Corveaux and the Midlands have a complicated and involved history with House Bannon. They have the longest standing alliance in Arnesse that has survived the test of centuries of war and political rivalry. The blue blood of House Corveaux runs through the red veins of Bannon's nobles. Many Midlanders accept the Bannon kings, regardless of their flaws, confident that Corveaux rulers will keep their worst urges in check. In return, the Bannon monarchies have treated the Midlands very well. It is one of the mildest and fairest places to live in Arnesse, even for the lower classes. Rarely do any who live there want for much. Their rulers are, on a whole, just, wise, and fair. This state of peace and prosperity has led many Midlanders to not be concerned with what goes on outside their borders. It is a prevalent illusion that if one stays in the Midlands, no harm can come to them and their family.

But in the last decade things have begun to change in the wider world. Since King Giles II has taken the throne, the Aurorym faith has grown stronger than ever. The faith is unpopular in the Midlands for many reasons, not the least of which is the tumultuous history with its primary patron, House Blayne. House Corveaux and its vassals have a long-standing rivalry that dates back centuries with the Blayne family. The Midlanders regard most Hearthfolk as zealots, radicals, and troublemakers, easily swayed to give away their freedom to the first higher cause they find. This rivalry was only made worse when King Giles II took the throne and awarded a massive swath of the Northern Midlands known as the Troth to House Blayne as a wedding gift to Aline Blayne. The marriage was extremely unpopular among the people and to this day, many Midlanders are deeply upset about the loss of their ancestral land to people they see as completely inferior.

The second major obstacle the faith presents to the Midlanders is that many feel that the religion itself attempts to place a very heavy level of control on its adherents. The concept of

freedom is valued in the Midlands more deeply than perhaps anyplace else in Arnesse. While the virtue and valor of the faith appeal to the Midlanders, there is far too much structure and restriction for it to have broad appeal. This sentiment was only exacerbated when in 760 the King passed a decree that made certain morality transgressions illegal and punishable. Many Midlanders felt such a decree was unnecessary, given their already high moral standards. The Corveaux lords have since faithfully enforced those laws, creating an almost oppressive environment in some places that has seen otherwise innocent and good people caught up with the law and punished harshly.

Giles II tested the tolerance of the Corveaux once again in 764, when he decreed that all of House Bannon must convert to the Aurorym faith. While this did not apply to nobles outside the Sovereignlands, it seems like only a matter of time before the King expands his mandate to all parts of the Kingdom, forcing the Midlands to welcome the Aurorym with open arms. The resulting civil war between Bannon houses clearly shows that the King is willing to force the issue, and has created yet another difficult situation for the Midlands as they struggle to balance their obligations to the warring houses. Even before the war broke out, Giles II had ignored the Midland's issues with Aurorym crossing over from the Hearthlands to proselytize, and now it seems he is more interested in serving his faith than serving the safety of his kingdom.

After the appearance of the Annwyn in 763 the Corveaux have become more involved in affairs outside the Midlands than at any time in recent memory. A force of Corveaux knights was responsible for the Mistguard keeping the peace in Gateway, the town that rose up at the entrance of the Annwyn, for as long as possible. When the Richters seized Gateway in violation of their agreement with the Bannons and Corveaux, it was the Corveaux who formed the heart of the counterattack – and the Corveaux who took heavy losses ensuring that rule of law won out in the resulting Battle of the Vale. While few in the Midlands would ever consider something as obscene as open rebellion, the Ordo du Lac (Order of the Lake) flew their banner, the legendary Golden Blade of the True King known as Auranthis, at the head of an assembly of Knights marching from the Midlands to the Vale of Shadow. Whether or not this was meant as an attack on the King, it was certainly a condemnation of the chaos breaking out under his reign. The Corveaux place a premium on their loyalty, but in the face of war the people of the Midlands find themselves with difficult choices to make regarding the future of both their homes and wider Arnesse.

# CORVEAUX HIGH HOUSES

## HOUSE CORVEAUX OF KING'S CROSSING

**Castle:** King's Crossing

**Rulers:** Garamond and Jocelyn Corveaux, Lord and Lady of King's Crossing

**Knighthood:** Vermilion Order



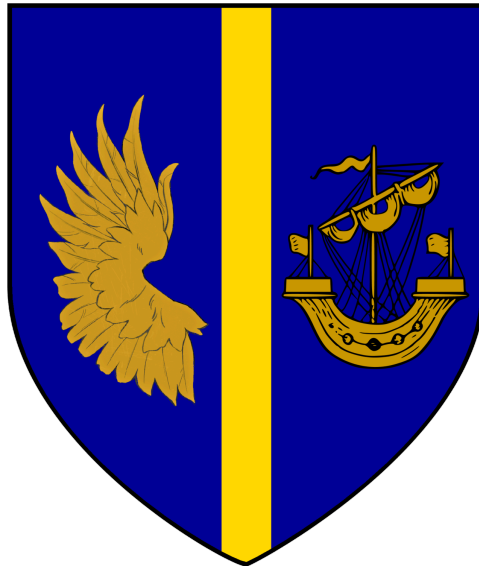
The Corveaux line of King's Crossing has commanded the city and the surrounding region for nearly three hundred years. They have always had their work cut out for them, overseeing the huge influx of people and trade that floods the city. The current ruler, Lord Garamond Corveaux, is not a particularly politically inclined man and so spends most of his energy acting as Knight Commander of the Vermilion Order stationed in the city. His laws are fair and his justice is swift. King's Crossing has seen a period of relative peace and low crime thanks to Garamond. His wife, Lady Jocelyn Corveaux, previously Lady Jocelyn Bannon, took control of the King's Crossing court the moment she stepped foot in the city. Some think Lady Jocelyn cruel and there doesn't seem to be much love between her and Garamond. But one cannot deny that as a couple, they have secured prosperity for King's Crossing.

# HOUSE CORVEAUX OF SUTHWATER

**Castle:** Orgonne Castle

**Ruler:** Jeanne Corveaux, Lady of Suthwater

**Knighthood:** Vermilion Order



Long ago, the city of Orgonne was in decline. The residents were constantly harried by pirates and brigands and they were struggling to even produce enough food to survive on, let alone export. In 604 Lord Trystane Corveaux, brother to the Lady Paragon Isolde Corveaux, arrived with a contingent of Vermilion Order knights and secured the area, routing out the criminal element. In the generations since, Orgonne has grown into a flourishing, prosperous port city. Orgonne is ruled by Lady Jeanne Corveaux of Suthwater. She continues to follow the command that Lady Isolde gave Lord Trystane nearly one hundred sixty years ago and makes the region's safety and security her highest priority. Jeanne commands not only Vermilion Order knights, but a naval fleet. Orgonne is in a prime location for trade and the Cirque frequents the city.

## THE VERMILION ORDER



If there is a knight order in Arnesse that is considered the pinnacle of valor, honor, and chivalry, it is the one in direct service to House Corveaux – the legendary Vermilion Order. Where the order originated is a matter of some conjecture, but tales say that the order was founded by a knight of old – Arlin the Red. Ser Arlin was the sole survivor of a valorous last stand to defend a town against an overwhelmingly superior force who would have put all of them to the sword. Arlin returned, grieving for his slain comrades, his armor covered in their blood. Thus, he became known as ‘the Red’ and the order he founded to honor the slain became known as the Vermillion Order. While the Vermilion Knights are known to be masters of combat, it is their virtue and honor which make them without parallel in the Kingdom. The concept that a member of the Vermilion Order would ever lie, cheat, murder, or commit any unlawful act is nearly beyond comprehension by many. They are the first into a fight and the last to leave, even if that means their death. Their commitment to selfless acts has made them paragons of many communities and it is to them that many look in times of trouble. These knights often have a great deal of sway over others because of their reputation and many see them as the embodiment of heroism.

# HOUSE PERRYN

**Castle:** Avalen Keep

**Ruler:** Etienne Perryn, Lord of Avalen

**Knighthood:** Ordo Erdani



Amid the rolling plains of northern Corsicana lies the mighty keep of Avalen, home of the horse lords of House Perryn. The Perryn are known for breeding some of the finest warhorses in all Arnesse and the people who make these lands home regard horses as a sacred animal. The Perryn have fostered a culture that centers around the virtues of freedom and movement. Life in the lands of House Perryn is more rural than in many places of the Midlands, with family groups often living an almost nomadic lifestyle on the plains. Almost all who live in these lands are capable riders and many are acquainted with animal husbandry. While in most places, a horse is a very costly luxury usually only available for the wealthy, here it is not all that uncommon for those of even lower castes to own one or more horses.

Lord Etienne Perryn rules Avalen Keep and has been the lord of these lands [narrow it down to a specific year]. He is known to be a man of great mercy and kindness, who barely lives as a nobleman. Instead, he often lives among his people, eats with them, rides with them, and fights with them. He is a master horseman, said to be the finest in all Arnesse.

## HOUSE PERRYN OF THE GREEN

**Castle:** Windsong Keep

**Ruler:** Sherwyn of Redwick, Lord of Windsong

**Knighthood:** Ordo Erdani

House Perryn's secondary seat is located southeast of Avalen, where the Mercy River breaks away from the great Gryphon River. Ser Sherwyn of Redwick earned his position as Lord of Windsong by delivering more messages in the first ten years of his knighthood than fifty Ordo Erdani knights combined. His speed and efficiency earned him the title Sherwyn the Swift. Lord Etienne Perryn recognized his service by granting him lordship of Windsong Keep at the young age of twenty-eight and the Lord Sherwyn has translated his productivity as a messenger into the governing of a keep quite well. He also has the distinction of being one of the few High Lords who is not born of noble blood, but promoted from the lower castes.

### ORDO ERDANI

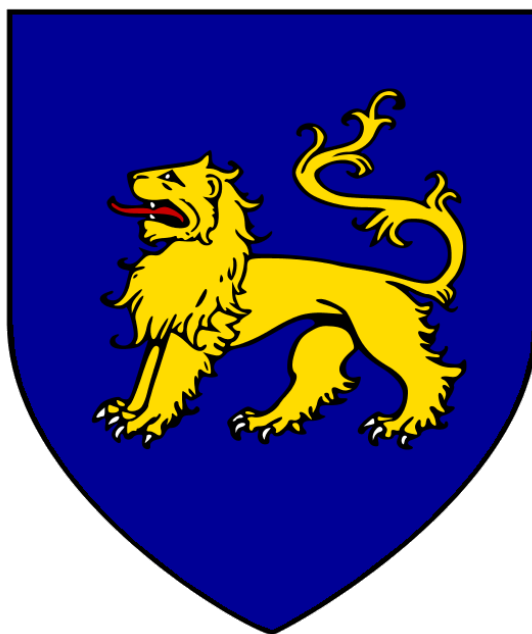
The Knights sworn to House Perryn are the Ordo Erdani, a group of mounted warriors who are without peer in the saddle. The Ordo Erdani are known for two things: their expertise at horsemanship and their courier service, which has become a primary means of communication in the Kingdom. The Ordo Erdani are also unique in that they have many knights who come from lowborn backgrounds. House Perryn, almost by necessity, is one of the most progressive houses when it comes to promoting from among the ranks of the common people and as a result, the Ordo Erdani draw most of their squires from among the commonfolk. The leader of the Ordo Erdani is Knight Master Evelyn of Fairwater, a lowborn most renowned for her tournament victory over the famous knight Ser Lorence Corveaux of the Order of the Lion. Since then, Ser Evelyn has risen quickly through the ranks of knighthood in House Perryn and now runs all the Erdani's operations from their chapterhouse in the King's Crossing.

## HOUSE VALEWOOD

**Castle:** Lionguard Keep

**Ruler:** Dominique and Alexandrine Valewood, Lord and Lady of the Lionguard

**Knighthood:** Order of the Lion



The lady and knight master of the order is Alexandrine Valewood. The Valewoods have held southern Orgonne for centuries. They have worked to ensure their House's martial supremacy over all others through sending their offspring to be taught in all manner of martial styles and in the advanced academic pursuits. Her castle, Lionguard, sits to the south in the lush coastal region of Orgonne. It is one of the oldest keeps in the Midlands, having been built as a bastion against an incursion into Corveaux lands by sea. Integral to its defenses are the four heavily fortified stone towers along the coast which, along with the keep, makes up the Lion's Paw.

## ORDER OF THE LION

Perhaps no other knight order embodies the ceremony, pomp, and Corveaux martial tradition quite like the Order of the Lion. They have a well-established reputation as being some of the best tournament knights in the lists and mounted fighters in all the Midlands. Their knack for showmanship has garnered them an air of arrogance, yet true to the knights of Corveaux they are largely humble in all that they do. Like most other Corveaux orders, the Order of the Lion holds

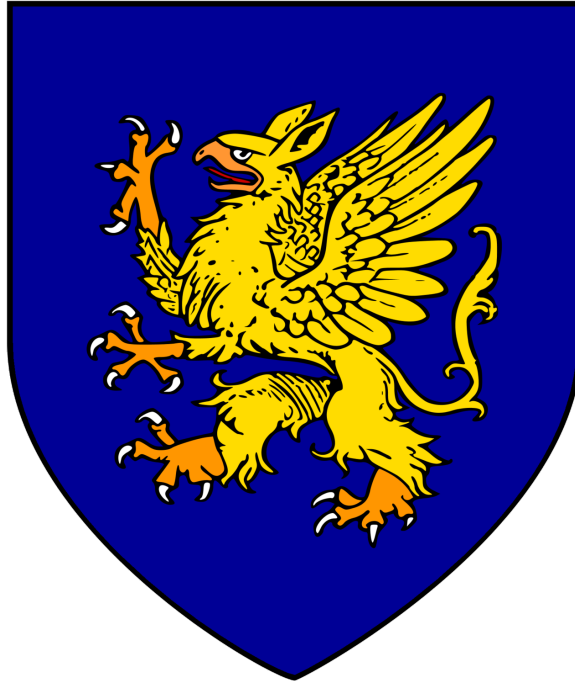
honor in deed above all. They are often sent as guards to the Corveaux emissaries on diplomatic missions abroad. They speak plainly and without embellishment, seeking to amass a wealth of honorable acts to build their reputations among their own order and the other Corveaux knighthoods.

## HOUSE FALCONER

**Castle:** The Aviary

**Ruler:** Renaud Falconer, Lord of the Spires

**Knighthood:** Order of the Gryphon



House Falconer was said to ride atop large gryphons in the days of old, charging into enemy lines with their great silver lances, wearing shining, winged helmets. The Falconers of today may not keep any fabled gryphons among their stables, they are renowned among the Midlands for training large golden eagles that are used to both hunt and terrorize the battlefield, tearing into the enemy with razor sharp beaks and talons.

## ORDER OF THE GRYPHON

True to their namesake, House Falconer commands the Order of the Gryphon, and at their head is Ser Alain Falconer. Many say he is one of the finest swordsmen in the Midlands, and it would seem so given his win record at the tournaments of the kingdom. Among the tenants of the Order of the Gryphon knights is the belief that all shall be shown mercy that should desire it, although the deceptions of evil warrant a swift and harsh retribution: the judgement of the gryphon. Though the other knight orders of Corveaux may be flashy and maintain an air of pomp,

the Order of the Gryphon espouses the beliefs of modesty, integrity, and unbreakable spirit of the mountains.

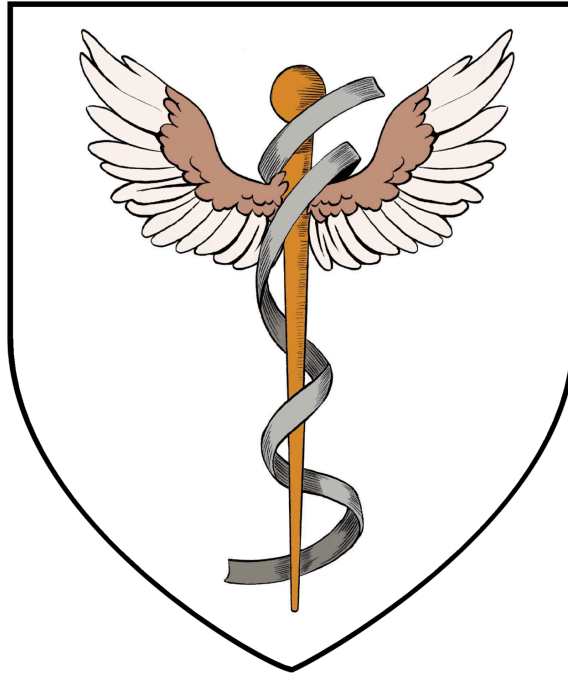
Their keep, the Aviary, is in the southern region of Corsicana abutting the mighty Spires of Castellan. The white keep and its surrounding village winds high up the north face of Gryphon's Peak, a snowy summit stretching high into the clouds. The knights here train high upon the summit, conditioning their constitutions through breathing the thin air and climbing the treacherous cliff sides of the mountain. Would-be inductees to the order of the Gryphon seek to test their mettle upon the sheer, south face of the peak, many of whom have lost their lives when missing a hand or foothold.

## HOUSE PENROSE

**Castle:** Esslyn Castle

**Ruler:** Judoc Penrose and Lady Abella Penrose, Lord and Lady of Mercy

**Knighthood:** Order of Mercy



## HOUSE PENROSE OF WELLS

**Castle:** Keep of the Ninewells

**Ruler:** Lady Felice Penrose, Keeper of the Wells

**Knighthood:** Order of Mercy

At the fork of the Gryphon River sits the Keep of Ninewells. Its protector is Lady Felice Penrose, first-born daughter of Knight Master Augustin Penrose. The city has the cleanest water in all Arnesse. There are eight wells scattered within the walls of the keep. One in the courtyard, two in the gardens, another in the vast kitchen. A ninth well is rumored to be hidden in the keep somewhere, its water said to restore life to a person on their deathbed, no matter their ailment. This rumor brings flocks of ill pilgrims to the area, all hoping to find and drink from the well. Lady

Felice can't provide them exactly what they seek, but she welcomes them into the keep's infirmary and the Order of Mercy treats their ailments.

## ORDER OF MERCY

Not all knights are sworn to be masters of warcraft or seek to excel on the tournament field. Some, like the Order of Mercy, seek to aid the wounded and bring comfort to those who are afflicted by the horrors of conflict. It is said that the Order of Mercy is one of the oldest and longest lasting knight orders in all Arnesse and that while they may serve House Penrose today, they have served many great noble houses before them.

The Order of Mercy knights are widely regarded as expert caduceans and it is not uncommon for knights from all over the Kingdom to come and seek instruction in the arts of healing with them at Esslyn Castle in the Midlands. It is not uncommon to see their banners on battlefields throughout the Kingdom. This fact has made House Penrose very wealthy, for healing services do not come cheaply. The leader of the Order of Mercy is Knight Master Augustin Penrose. Ser Augustin has been the leader of the Order of Mercy for the better part of thirty years and he is now well into his sixties. Ser Augustin has worked tirelessly to maintain the neutrality and impartiality of the Order of Mercy and they are well known for treating the injuries of both friends and foes alike in wart. This has made them well-loved among the fighting men of the Kingdom and its people.

## HOUSE URQHART

**Castle:** Stag's Leap

**Ruler:** Torr and Katarin Urqhart, Lord and Lady of the Hunt

**Knighthood:** Knights of the Black Watch



The Midlands are a place that serfs and even freemen from other Protectorates wish to live and thus, immigration is a common problem that House Corveaux faces. Stationed on the border of the Northern Corsicana region, House Urqhart is charged as protectors of the Midlands' borders and to ensure that no one enters the Midlands illegally. Though many of the Corveaux houses and their vassals are well loved by the lower castes, House Urqhart is reviled and feared. They are known for being particularly brutal on those they capture, said to treat their prisoners as little more than animals in a cage. Even among some of the other Knight Houses, they are disfavored. Given House Perryn's somewhat liberal stance toward the commonfolk and the fact that they share a border, House Urqhart's knights frequently clash with their outriders.

## THE BLACK WATCH

The knights charged with guarding the border became known as the Black Knights, supposedly because of their black hearts but more likely because they are often soot-stained; they

burn grasses along the border to force anyone crossing into the open. House Urqhart adopted the name, calling them The Knights of the Black Watch. Outside of their duty, the Black Watch is known for exhibiting exceptional hunting skills. Every knight is an expert in the use of bows, knives, and short swords. Being as spread out across the borders as they are, the knights often live at their posts with limited resources and none of the creature comforts that city-dwelling knights have access to.

Known for their sober composure and dark humor, a stark contrast to most other Corveaux Houses, they accept their challenges, and victories, with a quiet air of superiority. For their task is one of sacrifice and duty, and the only people they truly need to prove themselves to are their brothers and sisters in arms. While many knight orders in the Midlands will recruit lower castes into their ranks, the Knights of the Black Watch refuse to permit any commoners, claiming they don't want to risk sympathizers.

## THE TRADITIONS OF THE MIDLANDS

The people of the Midlands largely celebrate the King's Holidays and practice common traditions, which are ubiquitous across most of the civilized lands of Arnesse. However, the region is home to a few unique, regional customs as well.

### TOURNAMENTS

First and foremost are the extravagant tournaments that are frequently staged in major cities of the Midlands. Of course, tournaments are held in other parts of Arnesse as well, but they hold a special place in the heart of every Midlander. Most tournaments are open to all and fighters from across the region gather to compete. It is the best way for knights to prove their mettle and for their names to be spoken in every household. For the Commonfolk who aspire to a greater lot in life, competing in a tournament is one of the quickest ways to earn the respect of a noble lord or lady and receive an offer of knighthood. For all, they are times of festival, good food, and companionship which celebrate the life all Midlanders enjoy.

### RAGS TO RICHES

Serfs have not existed in the Midlands for over four hundred years now. Nowhere else in Arnesse can a Freeman rise so far above their station and become the head of a noble house. However, while it is possible, it isn't exactly frequent. Some Knight Houses are worse than others, but nepotism is a common theme. The desire to pass one's legacy on to their children is strong, and difficult to give up. To qualify to become the heir of a house, a knight must participate in the House's proving, just like any others being considered for the role. What challenges that proving consists of, and when the proving is scheduled, is entirely up to the head of the house.

Typically, if a lord or lady has children, they will train and groom them starting at a young age for their specific proving. When their children are ready, they announce the event. By law, the lords and ladies must allow any knights from within their respective knight orders to attempt their proving. Some houses have been rumored to use under-the-table tactics to disqualify other participants, to ensure that their child or chosen heir are the champion.

One might think that this doesn't exemplify the values that the Corveaux uphold. But when a father, a mother, or even a friend, truly believes that their candidate is the perfect successor, many will do whatever it takes to ensure succession. The Corveaux and their Knight Houses believe that while it may not seem fair in the short term, it ensures that well-groomed leaders who defend

the ideals of the Midlands become sovereigns, and therefore continue to protect equality and freedom for all.

## SKY BURIALS

In Arnesse, burials are the most common type of funeral. And for most of the Midlands, that is the case as well. But the southern lords on the edges of the Spires of Castellan opt instead for sky burials. To them, nothing is more freeing than becoming one with the sky, so the Corveaux and the Falconers carry their dead to high peaks and allow the eagles to feast on their bodies. Some members of the Corveaux cadet houses on the western and eastern borders of the Midlands request that they too, be given sky burials, and so their bodies are transported to the Spires upon permanent death. It is largely just the nobles who participate in this custom; for the Freemen, it can be too expensive and difficult to carry a body so far into the mountains. As a substitute, cremation is sometimes practiced, as it is similarly seen as carrying the dead skyward.

## LEGENDS OF THE MIDLANDS

### CORVUS THE WINDLORD

Long ago, Corvus the Windlord was a hero to man. Ancient rulers once tried to chain him and imprison him under a mountain, but he managed to break free from his cell and waged a terrible war against his captors. When they were defeated, he led his people to a beautiful land where they could spread their wings and be free. He did not stay long; he imparted his wisdom upon the settlers, then took flight, constantly moving from one place to the next. One day, Corvus had taken the form of a crow and was resting in a tree.

Suddenly overhead he saw Golden Eagle soaring. Corvus took flight and followed him to a cow carcass where Golden Eagle was now feeding. Realizing he was hungry, Corvus approached the carcass and asked Golden Eagle if he could share in the bounty. Golden Eagle screeched and attacked Corvus, using his talons to remove one of the crow's eyes. Angered, and still hungry, Corvus flew to Golden Eagle's nest and consumed his young. This he did, year after year. He would return to Golden Eagle's home to break his mate's eggs or kill his fledglings. Until one year, before Golden Eagle's mate was about to lay another clutch, he sought out Corvus. Golden Eagle begged the crow to leave his young alive this year, for he was getting old and it was his last chance to ensure the survival of his kind. Corvus agreed, but not before he banished Golden Eagle to the mountains, forcing him to make his nests on sheer, cold cliffs and travel far to find prey.

To this day, the Golden Eagle and the Crow maintain a deep rivalry. The Crow keeps to his lowland forest, and the Golden Eagle is bound to the mountain. If the Golden Eagle strays too close to the forest, the Crow will swarm him and remind him of the great injustice he inflicted upon Corvus the Windlord.

### KNIGHTS OF RENOWN

Some of the greatest knights in the history of Arnesse have hailed from the Midlands Protectorate. There was the mighty Sir Lachland Falconer of the Order of the Gryphon, Warden of the West; Ser Lena of Dunwillow, founder of the Ordo Erdani; and Ser Arlin the Red, founder of the Vermilion Order, to name a few. Some of the famous knights that are alive today include Knight Master Augustin Penrose of the Order of Mercy, Knight Master Evelyn of Fairwater of the Ordo Erdani, and Lord Tomas Corveaux, who is praised for his strict adherence to his Vermilion Order knightly vows.

## THE FAIR LADY

A bawdy tale heard in taverns across the Midlands portrays a marriage proposal given by a Blayne lord to a Corveaux lady. The Blayne lord had just ascended to his father's seat as ruler and was looking for a fine noble woman to thicken his family's weak bloodline. He looked to the Midlands for such a prize. Now, the Blayne lord had preferences for whose family his new wife would hail from. First, he sought the hand of a beautiful lady from the Corveauxs of Vairsing and received a letter in return stating she was already betrothed. He then looked to King's Crossing and Orgonne, both of which left him empty handed. Yet undeterred, the Blayne lord travelled to the keeps of Falconer, Valewood, Penrose, and Urqhart. Everyone denied him a wife. If the Blayne lord had any redeeming quality in the eyes of the Knight Houses, it was that he made Lord Urqhart smile at his proposition.

Defeated, the Blayne lord rode to Avalen, his last hope being a Perryn lady. By the time he had arrived, the Perryns had of course heard of his travels across the Midlands. And they knew that they were his last choice. The Blayne lord approached the fair, redheaded daughter of Lord Perryn and asked for her hand. She smiled sweetly at him and accepted, stating that the ceremony would be held at once. Elated, the Blayne lord cleaned himself up, as best as a Blayne can, and awaited his betrothed. After some time, and the Blayne lord beginning to wonder if something had happened to her, the door opened and in walked a brown horse, led by a page. The Blayne lord assumed that maybe the horse was just part of the wedding ceremony, it being Perryn marriage and all. But the page led the horse right up to the altar and handed the reins to the Blayne lord. The officiate asked if the Blayne lord was ready to begin the marriage ceremony. Realizing he had been duped, yet desperate, the Blayne lord simply asked how much the horse's dowry was.

## INDUSTRY OF THE MIDLANDS

House Corveaux of the Midlands is above all, an elite cavalry force. They can levy, equip, train, and utilize calvary troops with terrifying efficiency and speed. Of course, people from across the land see the fierce horses that these troops are mounted upon and demand for them inflates. The Corveaux reserve the finest equine bloodlines for themselves, but they breed and export horses for all uses to other regions. Most of these horses come from the lands of House Perryn and House Urqhart, who are collectively known as the Horse Lords.

Agriculture is certainly common in the lands of the Horse Lords, but production and quality pick up the closer one gets to the safety of the core Midlands and the powerful families who live in them. The Castle Lords of House Corveaux (House Corveaux, House Falconer, House Valewood, and House Penrose) offer protection for vast stretches of land that provide an agricultural breadbasket, supporting a great and prosperous kingdom. Individually, a single house can produce and store more cereals, grains, vegetables, and animals than most other protectorates can produce in any given harvest. The surplus goods are sold to the Cirque and distributed to the rest of Arnesse or used as a political tool in negotiations.

Food must be paired with fine wine, and none are so fine as the Midland vintages. Hills are topped with family-run wood and stone wine presses, dwarfed by the rows upon rows of grape vines that line the land around them. Much like their famous destriers, the Midlanders covet their favorite wines, and some vineyards send their product only to Vairsing Keep. The rest export their desired goods across the Midlands and beyond.

## THE MIDLANDS PROTECTORATE

The Midlands Protectorate lies in the central region of Arnesse, to the east of the Sovereignlands. They are bordered to the north by the Hearthlands and to the south by Tarkath. Most of their southern and eastern border is met by the Soundless Sea. The geography of the Midlands is ideal for farming and husbandry. Most of the land is made up of plains, with a few pockets of forest. The most striking features are in the south and east: on the southern border lies the Spires of Castellan, the extreme mountain range that seems to pierce the sky, and on much of the eastern coast the land suddenly drops into the sea, creating cliffs where only birds can find ground.

The Midlands weather remains fairly mild year round. The plains go through a yearly dry season and rainy season cycle, but rarely does the area become unbearably hot or cold. Irrigation is a must for the farmlands and the Gryphon River in the Orgonne region, Kallean Lake near Vairsing, Talon Lake in the northern Coriscana region, and Lake Emmeline in western Corsicana are all reliable sources of water. Year-round rainfall is more common in the southern region of the Midlands, where the winds carry clouds south and the Spires of Castellan stop them from travelling further. Thunderstorms are frequent in the Spring and Fall when warm winds from Tarkath in the south meet the cold breezes from the north.

The people of the Midlands are generally welcoming of outsiders. With the combination of the Midlands' central location, trade being common throughout the region, and frequent tournaments that draw large crowds, most folks are accustomed to seeing other people from all walks of life.

## VAIRSING

The grandiose city of Vairsing is nestled at the base of the Spires of Castellan in the southern Midlands. It mimics the Spires and is built upwards rather than out, on the side of Eagle's Nest Mountain. At the top of the city is Vairsing Keep, the seat of power of Lord Paragon Desmond Corveaux and Lady Amelie Corveaux of Suthwater. This keep is famous in many parts of Arnesse. The Corveauxs have ensured that the building has remained in pristine condition with yearly restoration projects. Even in other parts of the city, they commission sculptors to carve marble murals of horses, gryphons, and eagles on the sides of buildings and walls. The city, and the surrounding farms and hamlets, is home to eighty thousand people. With the high population, goods must flow out of necessity, but Vairsing isn't known as a major trade city because of its relative distance from the Vermilion Road.

## KING'S CROSSING

In the West, the Corsicana region is a bustling hub of trade, farming, and martial tradition. On the western border of the Midlands lies King's Crossing, one of the largest trade centers in Arnesse. It is larger than Vairsing, with a population of approximately one hundred twenty thousand and an extensive city layout. It is House Corveaux's secondary seat of power in the Midlands and is ruled by Lord Garamond Corveaux. Placed at the intersection of the Vermillion Road and the Aurean Road, travelers cannot avoid passing through the sprawling city unless they spend a day travelling around it. Like many of the ancient, permanent structures found across the Midlands, King's Crossing was built by prestigious architects of yore. Even the most mundane constructions on the edges of the urban expanse are wrought of finely hewn stone, and the closer you get to the keep at the epicenter, the more grandiose the scene becomes. With the constant influx of travellers and traders, King's Crossing is the most diverse city under the rule of House Corveaux. Unfortunately, this also makes its alleys and side streets some of the most dangerous. Lord Garamond is known as a strict man who works hard to keep the peace and enforce the law in his city.

## ORGONNE

To the East of Vairsing, at the end of the Vermilion Road lies Orgonne, the City of the Sea. It sits atop a cliff overlooking the Soundless Sea, another sparkling example of the ancient world's architecture in all its grandeur. It is home to about thirty thousand people. The third seat of power for the Corveauxs, it is commanded by Lady Jeanne Corveaux of Suthwater, cousin of Lady Amelie Corveaux. She has ruled the port city for fifteen years and is recognized for both fairness and justice. She has been instrumental in maintaining the relations between the Cirque guild and House Corveaux.

## LIONGUARD KEEP

On the southern edge of the lush Orgonne region, to the east of the Spires of Castellan, lies Lionguard Keep. Originally built as a protective structure against southern incursions of the Midlands, Lionguard is one of the oldest keeps in the Protectorate. Four heavily fortified stone towers were built along the coast in front of the keep, and together, the structures are referred to as the Lion's Paw. The city has a population of about twenty thousand and is ruled by Lady Alexandrine Valewood, Knight Master of the Order of the Lion, and her husband, Lord Dominique. Lady Alexandrine is largely preoccupied with her role as Knight Master and running her order, so it is Lord Dominique who deals with the day to day business of running the house. The couple is

well-known for showing off their personal flair, and the entire keep is decorated in brightly colored tapestries, pennants, and rugs.

## THE ROOST

**Motto:** *“Defend the Defenseless”*

The Roost is a Vigil schola found on the isle of Asterlan, south of the Lionsguard keep. It was built around an ancient keep constructed of pure white stone, topped with a beacon meant to keep ships from running aground on the island. The Roost is an extremely old school, finished during the reign of the first Queen of Arnesse, and ever since its founding it has been known for producing the best Sentinels in the Kingdom. Today it is headed by Arch Warden Harlow Corveaux, once the personal bodyguard of King Giles I, and its graduates are in-demand among the wealthy across Arnesse.

## ESSLYN CASTLE

On the northeastern tip of the Midlands lies Esslyn, the home of House Penrose and the Order of Mercy. It is ruled by Lord Judoc and Lady Abella Penrose and is home to about twenty-five thousand people. Unlike Orgonne, Esslyn lies on a flat, sandy beach, with miles of beach grass spreading out in both directions along the coast. The castle sticks out of the landscape like a beacon and can be seen from quite a distance. Most of the Lord and Lady's efforts are focused on training knights and trading with House Innis. As the headquarters for the Order of Mercy, Esslyn is the main distribution point for rare herbs and flowers from the forests of the Innis. These supplies are used to make the poultices and potions that the Order of Mercy has been permitted to make by the Apotheca.

## KEEP OF NINEWELLS

South of Esslyn, where the Gryphon River splits into the Soaring Gryphon Fork and the Rushing Gryphon Fork, is the fabled Keep of Ninewells. The keep is incorporated into the lands of House Penrose and acts as their second seat of power. Commanded by the first-born daughter of Knight Master Augustin Penrose, Lady Felice Penrose, the city has the cleanest water in all Arnesse. There are eight wells scattered within the walls of the keep. One in the courtyard, two in the gardens, another in the vast kitchens. A ninth well is rumored to be hidden in the keep somewhere, its water said to restore life to a person on their deathbed no matter their ailment. This rumor brings flocks of ill pilgrims to the area, all hoping to find and drink from the well. With the pilgrims, the population of the city can be anywhere between twenty and thirty thousand at any given time.

Lady Felice can't provide them exactly what they seek, but she welcomes them into the keep's infirmary and the Order of Mercy treats their ailments.

## THE AVIARY

The Aviary is located in the southern region of Corsicana abutting the Spires of Castellan, southwest of Vairsing. The white keep and its surrounding village winds high up the north face of Gryphon's Peak, a snowy summit stretching high into the clouds. In its remote location, the Aviary and its city doesn't usually hold more than ten thousand people. The knights here train high upon the summit, conditioning their constitutions through breathing the thin air and climbing the treacherous cliff sides of the mountain. Would-be inductees to the order often seek to test their mettle upon the sheer, south face of the peak, many of whom have lost their lives when missing a small hand or foothold. It isn't just young knights looking to prove themselves who climb the treacherous cliffs, though. The great war eagles of Corveaux are never bred in captivity and members of the Order of the Gryphon must capture their own Golden Eagle fledglings from Gryphon Peak and the surrounding Spires. The Aviary is ruled by Lord Renaud Falconer, a widower of forty-six. He took to depression after the death of his wife, Lady Ophelia Perryn, and the Aviary has been a quiet and reclusive place since.

## AVALEN KEEP

To the north of Talon Lake in Corsicana sits the wood and stone keep of Avalen. Built on a prairie bluff, the keep has sweeping views of the plains around it, making it nigh impossible to catch the Ordo Erdani knights by surprise. Built by the Perryns, it is a simple structure, in stark contrast to the imposing castles of the south. The surrounding city is utilitarian and well organized with a population of about five thousand. This is the home of the Ordo Erdani, where there are more horses than there are people. Horse breeding and farming are the two main purposes of this area. Despite the practical nature of the city, gorgeous artwork of galloping horses and gliding hawks adorn the sides of buildings. Most of the Ordo Erdani is spread out across all Arnesse; there are only slightly more Ordo Erdani knights in Avalen than you might find in any other city. Lord Etienne Perryn is the ruler here; he recently ascended to the position after his uncle passed in a horse riding accident in the Whispering Wood.

## WINDSONG KEEP

To the southeast of Avalen lies Windsong, where the Mercy River breaks away from the great Gryphon River. Windsong Keep was built by House Perryn, but its foundation is upon more

ancient ruins. Its population is almost equivalent to that of Avalen; the city is located near a bog and the main exports are peat and, once again, horses. Windsong produces sturdy horses that are better suited for working in fields and on farms. The ruler of Windsong is Lord Sherwyn the Swift, famous among the Ordo Erdani for his speed and efficiency.

## STAG'S LEAP

In the northwestern corner of Corsicana lies Stag's Leap, home of House Urqhart. Adopting the practical tradition of burning swaths of prairie away from their watchtowers, a large circle of blackened earth exists around the city and the keep. As an auxiliary impact of this, no buildings in Stag's Leap have ever fallen due to prairie fire. The city is home to about seven thousand people, most of them farmers. Most of the Knights of the Black Watch are spread thin across the borders of western and northern Corsicana. They travel in small groups with their horses and hunting dogs, surviving on the prairie until they reach the next watchtower and resupply. Their home base of Stag's Leap is ruled by Lord Torr Urqhart and Lady Katarin. Lord Torr is the picture of a member of House Urqhart: stoic and serious. However, he is also known for his outbursts, which happen often during noble council meetings.

## HOUSE & GUILD RELATIONSHIPS

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

### HOUSE ARAGON

The Midlands and Tarkath share a common border and have seen a great deal of tension between their peoples over the centuries. Even though both the Tarkathi and the Midlanders feel strongly about many of the same issues, including honor, freedom, and good treatment of their people, their moral disagreements have been enough to significantly impede a true alliance or friendship. If you ask a Midlanders about a Tarkathi, they will be quick to tell you that while they may have once been a good and moral people, they have been misguided by grief and taken a turn down a dark road of immorality and the cold comfort of drugs. Midlanders are quick to judge the Tarkathi from a moral high ground, saying that their sexual promiscuity is an embarrassment to nobility and that their regular use of substances impairs their ability to make good decisions. In addition, the Tarkathi's penchant for clandestine operations, secrecy, and plots is seen as dishonorable by a people who are used to clearly seeing their threats coming at them from across a field of battle. While these divides exist, there is a temptation among the relatively conservative Midlanders to be drawn into the hedonistic lifestyle pursued by the Tarkathi. It is not uncommon for Midlanders to take pity on a Tarkathi and attempt to 'redeem' them of their debauched ways, but those efforts are rarely successful – and sometimes redemption turns into a seduction.

### HOUSE BANNON

The Midlands have a long history of being very loyal to House Bannon and much of the Corveaux bloodline is entwined with theirs. Like any family, the Bannons and the Corveauxs have had disagreements and even battles over the years, but few groups of commoners have stood by the House of Kings more than the Midlanders. But this is no accident. The Midlands is a place where legendary knights still ride free across the plains and those warriors of old require kings of equal renown to follow. A powerful, pervasive mythology exists within the Midlands. Bannon and Corveaux knights, nobles, and sovereigns are always the heroes of both epic tale and ballad, typically victorious, and rarely of profound moral failing. These stories are taken by the Midlanders to be fact, and many of the negative things that are said about either house, their lords, or retainers are disregarded as untruth – merely the chatter of enemies who want to lay low those nobles with rumors. The Bannons were born the rightful kings in the eyes of most Midlanders, ordained by myth and legend to rule. Even if given irrefutable proof of wrongdoing, most Midlanders will

disregard that event, claiming that even if what was said was true, a Corveaux noble or knight was surely close at hand to set the wrong to right. Given some of House Bannon's more radical decisions and scandals over the years, this has placed many Midlanders in awkward positions. Still, like an ever-loyal sibling, the people of the Midlands stand by their rulers, lest it shatter the mythology that forms the basis of their worldview.

## HOUSE BLAYNE

House Blayne is perhaps the strongest rival of the Corveaux family and the two noble houses have a long history together. Many of the people who call the Hearthlands home were Midlander Freefolk a little more than a decade ago. When King Giles II gave the northern part of the Midlands to House Blayne in 751, some within the newly created Hearthlands were happy to go and others very much wanted to remain as Midlanders. Not a few of them lost their Freeman status in the transition of power. While more Hearthlanders have accepted their lot in the years since, quite a few still long to return to Lord Paragon Desmond Corveaux's rule. If one asked a Midlander what they thought of the Blaynes they would certainly be happy to tell the person they were troublemakers, rabble-rousers, and zealots. For centuries the Troth, the region that is now the Hearthlands, has been a hot-bed of religious fervor and heavily prone to rebellions and revolts. The Midlanders also look down on the Blaynes because they seem so quick and willing to give away their freedoms blindly to a faith that ultimately only encourages them to die. Tales of the Hearthlands among the Midlanders generally involve depictions of them as brainless dolts, willing to be slaves to their cruel Blayne masters – themselves morally corrupt despite their adherence to a faith that holds virtue as one of its core tenants. While there are frequent tensions along the Midlands' northern border, the Corveauxs have been lawful enough to respect the King's grant – but talk is frequent in taverns that some manner of liberation effort is secretly underway, or should be. Not a small portion of the Midlanders are happy to rid of the Blaynes and those who sympathize with them, but everyone can agree they want the land back.

## HOUSE HALE

A land of blizzard-blown tundras and ice seems to be a world apart from the warm, green hills of the temperate Midlands. Most Midlanders have never even seen snow in their lifetime, save on the tops of the distant Spires of Castellan. That any people could exist in such a harsh environment seems unfathomable to most in the Midlands and the tales that are told are ones of a harsh, savage way of life in which the key element is man's struggle against nature itself. The Northmen, particularly the native Clans, are considered by many Midlanders to be little more than savages: uneducated, cruel, and primitive. The Winter Lords, those of Southern blood who travelled

north centuries ago, are thought of as heroes who have braved the dangers of the Everfrost to bring civilization to an uncivilized land. The few times Northmen have made appearances in the Midlands, the towering men wearing the furs of animals and hardened by life in the North are a source of great curiosity and no small amount of fear among the Midlanders. Many Midlanders take comfort in the fact that the Everfrost is so remote, but the Northmen that invaded the south and fought at Lanton only a decade ago reminded many that this potential threat may not be as far away as they think.

## HOUSE INNIS

House Innis' lands lie to the North of the Midlands and if one asked the Midlanders what they thought of the Woodfolk most would say they have never met one. Only those within the lands of House Penrose have any kind of regular contact with the Thornwood and even then, it is limited only to trading. As a result, most of the Midlander opinions are formed by stories from other sources. Fantastic tales abound of woodland archers who zealously guard their hidden wooden paths and rarely let any within their sacred forests. Given the Midlanders's great love of animals and general fascination with fantastic beasts, the great creatures of the Thornwood have captured the imagination and curiosity of many. From massive stags to savage wolves the size of warhorses, many tales are told of these great beasts and the Midlanders see the forests of the Innis as an almost mythical place that harkens back to the occluded ages of the past. Midlanders are very curious about the people of the wood and see them as an inherently good people who have been embittered by the suffering endured at the hands of others.

## HOUSE RICHTER

Before the eruption of the Shardmount, the Richters were one of the most powerful and stable houses in the Arnesse. Their military prowess and craftsmanship were the envy of other realms and their allegiance to the throne was beyond question. This made House Corveaux and House Richter natural allies. Since the eruption, the house has fallen on hard times and during the years immediately following the devastation, it was largely Corveaux-sourced food that kept vast swaths of the Dusklands from starving. Since then, many Dusklanders have struggled to survive in their homeland, some losing their lives to famine and disease, while others have left to find homes in other Protectorates. Dusklanders are not an uncommon sight in the Midlands, but given their dour, serious, and melancholy natures, they are generally unpopular given the pleasant, mirthful, and carefree outlook of the Midlanders.

There are whispers aplenty in the taverns and town squares that the Ironfolk who visit foreign lands are scouts that are looking for new territories for the still-powerful Richter armies to

conquer. Reports from the North speak of Richter aggression against the Western Thornwood and House Innis, and not a few commonfolk worry how long it will be before the green fields of the Midlands become a target. So, while the Ironfolk are not treated with disrespect, some have begun to question their motives and old alliances have begun to falter. The strong economic ties between the Dusklands and the Midlands may not be enough to preserve their relationship after the Richter ploy to seize Gateway despite their prior agreement with the Corveaux and Bannons alike, and only time will tell whether the two can reach an agreement or if their recent trading of blows rather than goods devolves into further warfare.

## HOUSE ROURKE

Given the high level of morality and adherence to the law, House Rourke and the Seaborn are almost universally seen as brigands, thieves, and cutthroats. Most nobles do not casually allow the Rourkes or their representatives in their lands unless under a flag of truce – and even then under heavy guard. For centuries, the eastern shores near Orgonne have been plagued by raids by the Rourkes and their vassals. In the Midlands, the Rourkes and their ilk are usually portrayed as villains in stories and rarely, if ever, does a tale highlight them as heroes or of any mortal virtue. Parents often say that if a Midlanders child acts wickedly and does not listen to their parents, that a Rourke ship will come and steal them away in the night, forcing them into a life of crime and ill-repute. Still, there are some among the Midlanders who harbor a guilty fascination with the Seaborn life. While many in the Midlands value the freedoms they are granted, there is a powerful and seductive allure to a world that is bound by no lord, no land, and no law.

## THE APOTHECA

Given the long history of conflict and bodily injury, Magisters and the Apotheca are mostly well regarded in the Midlands. The Apotheca has few major towers in the Midlands, but they are regular sights within the courts of the Corveauxs and their vassals. The Magisters have a particularly close relationship with the Knights of Mercy, and its well known that the two often operate in concert to ensure that the sick and injured are tended to. One trend that has not caught on in the Midlands is the brewing of potions, elixirs, tonics, and decoctions. While those substances exist, the very law abiding rulers of the Midlands closely regulate their use for fear that the Apotheca may take to brewing poisons and drugs, which are highly restricted by many nobles. Most Magisters in the Midlands tend to stay more focused on lores and learning or the healing aspects of their studies. If they do perform alchemy, it is quietly and with the understanding that to be caught with substances that are deemed illegal will likely result in their expulsion from the protectorate. Most Midlanders have a very positive opinion of Magisters as they have a surprisingly good

understanding of their arts and what good they can do for a community. Given the relative safety and acceptance they enjoy in the Midlands, a surprising number of Magisters take up an almost nomadic lifestyle, travelling from community to community, doing good works and gathering their local lore.

## THE AURORYM

The Aurorym faith promises a glorious afterlife through service and sacrifice. It appeals strongly in places that are beset by tyranny, oppression, desperation, and lack of opportunity. In the Midlands, there is not an abundance of unhappy peasantry. Serfdom has been abolished for hundreds of years, Freemen have opportunities for promotion and fame, and the majority have jobs and are well fed. In addition, the commonfolk feel just as much desire to fulfill their own destinies as the nobles do. They trust their tools, swords, horses, and their own physical and mental abilities to carry them to glory. As such, after the death of the Old Gods people of the Midlands have not turned to religion for solace, but instead learned to create and manage their own destinies and many will not easily give up control of their own fate. This has made it difficult for the Aurorym religion to make any headway in the Midlands.

Attitudes about the Aurorym run from indifference to open mockery and fear-mongering. The religion and its members are not banned from the Midlands and the presence of the Aurorym faith is tolerated, but few actively encourage it. There are no shrines or other holy sites within the major cities of the Midlands. But the adherents of the faith have proven surprisingly tenacious, and the religion has managed to gain some traction in the smaller villages of the northern Midlands, where it is closest to Blayne's lands.

## THE CIRQUE

Given the prevalence of trade in the Midlands and the number of goods moving in and out of the protectorate, the Cirque guild are a regular sight in most of the major trade hubs. They have a primary guildhall in King's Crossing, but maintain smaller halls in Orgonne, Belburn, Kettering, Redwick, and Holbeach. To most Midlanders, they are honest and upstanding merchants and craftsmen who buy and sell goods at fair prices. The Cirque are the economic backbone of the Midlands, working tirelessly to move massive amounts of goods and materials that are generated to markets both within the protectorate and far beyond. There are rumors, mostly brought in from outside the Midlands, that the Cirque are involved in dealings which are dishonest and less than legal. Few Midlanders give these tales any credence. The Cirque has done nothing but be a loyal business partner to the Midland nobles and, though it is needed less than in some other protectorates, they are strong supporters of the common people, especially those who are less

fortunate. As a result, the Cirque are highly respected and while many Midlanders seek martial pursuits to find status and wealth, joining the Cirque is seen as another viable way for those who do not wish to fight.

## THE VIGIL

In the Midlands, the Vigil are second in esteem only to Knights, and those among the gentry whose ambitions hew more to law and service than battle and glory may even prefer to pursue a life with the Vigil. One of the four Vigil Schola, the Roost, is seated in the Midlands under the command of Harlow Corveaux, and the call of its motto to “Defend the Defenseless” resonates readily with the ethos of the Midlands. The Vigil are called upon to embody the virtues of fairness and justice, and their skill in doing so means that they are by and large seen as noble folk doing essential work to preserve the rule of law without falling to petty ambitions or, worse, corruption. The intrepid Vigil seeking the truth behind a crime is a popular tale in the Midlands, if not as popular as a valorous knight righting any wrongs done to the people.

As the King’s reputation in the Midlands has soured somewhat in recent years, the Vigil have fallen slightly by proxy. While most Vigil working in the Midlands are born and trained there, and so largely considered above suspicion by commonfolk, gentry, and nobility alike, the King’s establishment of the White Ravens as enforcers for his morality laws means that Vigil from elsewhere are looked at with both respect and a small dose of wariness. Moreover, a foreign Vigil sent to the Midlands can be taken as a galling sign of distrust, indicating that the Order, the King, or both does not believe his most loyal subjects capable of handling their own affairs.