

# *The Kingdoms of Old Valere*

## *History*

Over three centuries ago the last king of Valere, Mathar, ordered that his kingdom be split between his sons upon his death, each to rule a province of his kingdom but unified by the ideals of Mathar's Laws. But inevitably rivalries, old feuds and the desire for self-rule tore the old alliance apart. Eventually things settled down as new kingdoms were forged by war and diplomacy, but even to this day old enmities and territorial ambitions breed conflict amongst the new royal houses of Old Valere.

## *Invasion*

After a decade of civil war, travel to and from the Empire of Dalassa was forbidden as the Arnyek Lords consolidated their power over the fractured Empire. So the first anyone knew of an invasion was when a massive fleet of ships was sighted in the Straits of Castitus two years later. Within days it had made landfall all the way from Betheden in Dalicia to Ferruce in Urtia, unloading vast armies that quickly established themselves in their various territories.

In the first year surprise was on the side of the invaders as they overran the defending forces of Dalicia, Salav, Malidon and Urtia. As the year went on, however, they began to be pushed back as the defenders rallied. By the time winter had set in they had only retained half their initial gains. But when spring came the tide changed again as another, smaller wave of ships delivered a mass of Dalassan reinforcements and the invaders pushed onwards once more. Now much of the southern kingdoms stand in the shadow of the starred banner of the Empire of Dalassa. And once more winter passes and spring approaches...

The occupation that follows in the wake of the conquering army shows that the invaders mean business. In the cities and towns subdued by the Imperial forces their unwelcome new masters are showing every intention of being there in the long term, replacing authority figures with military governors and directing local businesses, craftsmen and farmers towards supporting the war effort. There is also evidence, judging from the reports of refugees, that the Imperials are attempting to replace Valeren religious practices with their own; Dalassan priests are taking the place of the local priesthood, often by imprisoning their predecessors, and in some cases temples are being destroyed and rebuilt.

The ongoing success of the invasion has been attributed to many things: the skill of the generals, forged in ten long years of civil war; the toughness of the veterans at the core of the armies, similarly honed; the absolute loyalty of the troops to their leaders, the Arnyek Lords; and the application of magic in ways and on a scale unimagined by the scattered mages of Old Valere. There are even rumours of the summoning of terrible beasts and horrors to support the human forces, singular monsters or entire companies of things called forth by terrible sorcery...

## *Nations*

Some nations date back to the time of the First Princes, just after the death of the king; others are much newer, achieving their current form just thirty years ago. All follow, to some degree, the Laws codified by King Mathar which form the basis of the customs and laws governing the rights, duties and responsibilities of commoners and nobles alike.

## Andea

Andea can trace its roots back to the First Princes, a direct line to a son of Mathar himself. They are immensely proud of this fact and, indeed, very proud generally. This has always put them at odds with their larger neighbour, Anglerre, who can make the same claim. This has led to a great deal of conflict over the centuries and most of it has been over the Matharwold, an area of gently rolling hills with rich soil, prime farmland. It has changed hands between the two nations many times and the people of the region have a very pragmatic outlook; after all, what may be true today may be different tomorrow, or next year. The last conflict in the Matherwold was just four years before the invasion began, but it amounted to little more than skirmishes between the garrisons across the border, near the city of Forthurd.

**Since The Invasion:** The border of Andea has remained unbroken to date, though the Imperial forces just across the River Anda remain a cause of concern. Circumstances have forced the king of Andea, Rythen, to enter into an alliance with his greatest rival, King Meridan of Anglerre, but together they may be the only hope Old Valere has. Their combined armies could drive the invaders back, but only if the bickering lords and quarrelling generals can learn to put their differences aside and cooperate.

## Anglerre

Like Andea the royal family of Anglerre can lay claim to being the oldest dynasty in Old Valere. Exactly which is the oldest is a matter of much debate, if by "debate" one means war, rivalry and distrust. Anglerre can be as proud and aggressive as its neighbour, but of the two nations it generally has a calmer head. In many ways it is the ideal of Mathar's Laws given life, remarkably stable and just with little internal discord. That is not to say it has not had its dark days, however. One of Anglerre's most famous exports is The Order Of Sperhawk, a group of Knights (though not always literally in the armour, sword and horse sense) who consider it their duty to bring justice to the world. The Order used to draw exclusively from the nobility of Anglerre but fifty years ago opened their doors to members from other nations. Entry is strictly by invitation only and the initiation is mysterious and rumoured to be potentially deadly.

**Since The Invasion:** King Meridan has done his best to forge an alliance between the nations still free of the encroaching invaders, and he has been mostly successful. There is still much to be done, much rivalry and distrust to overcome before he can organise a truly unified coalition. The famous fortress city of Antene, meanwhile, stands ready to repel the latest invaders just as it has for centuries, even before the days of Mathar.

## Dalicia

Despite being overshadowed by its grander and more assertive neighbours, Dalicia remains a significant force in its own right, partly by wisely employing the bonds of matrimony as a diplomatic tool. Some say there is Dalician blood somewhere in the family tree of every royal house of Old Valere. Its army is small but tenacious, and those attributes are generally ascribed to its people as well. Stannis, the capital, is where the largest temple to Vaydas in the kingdoms can be found.

**Since The Invasion:** Dalicia was almost completely subdued early on in the invasion, and now only a small area remains free of the invaders; only its proximity to the Andea border is believed to protect that region, at least for the time being. The occupied territory has suffered terribly under Imperial rule, and the royal family is presumed to have been imprisoned by the invaders, though no one has heard of them for more than a year.

## Kerrlund

Kerrlund used to be ruled by the Atlin family before Florian Hectar, general of the largest mercenary army in Old Valere, took the throne from the king by force about thirty years ago. His family fled but the king himself was imprisoned and died a few years later; his descendants, some of whom are members of the noble dynasties of other nations, still speak out against the usurper and his son, who succeeded Grand Duke Florian upon his death after ten years of harsh rule. The Grand Dukes were grudgingly allowed to remain in place, despite constant agitation by their more stubborn opponents, for two reasons: firstly, Kerrlund's new army, bolstered by skilled mercenary companies, remains a formidable force; secondly, no one

wanted to risk losing access to the only overland trade route with the prosperous Vasar League.

**Since The Invasion:** Grand Duke Casdon has been a more gentle ruler than his father, but he is still a skilled strategist and has been gathering his forces in preparation for the day he finally goes to war against the Dalassan invaders. In the meantime Kerrlund is the place to go to hire mercenaries for missions both on the front line and behind enemy lines, whether those missions be for military or personal gain.

## Malidon

Much of the kingdom of Malidon is farmland; its crops and livestock used to be found in every market in the kingdoms. Its people are considered practical and reliable, and the kingdom has not suffered any conflicts with its neighbours for generations; the last war it fought was to keep its best farmland out of the hands of a particularly greedy and aggressive Salav king, something neither nation has forgotten. Some consider it appropriate that Amphelice has her greatest temple in the capital, Lusida.

**Since The Invasion:** Most of Malidon has now been conquered by the invaders, its vast farmlands feeding the occupying forces and supplying the front line; what remains of the royal Gemedes family has taken refuge in an old fortress north of Olyura. However, it is widely believed that infamous Illicen, said to be the most corrupt of cities, still holds out against the Dalassan forces, protected by the ancient magic that allows the Pajkos, the ruling council, to control the surrounding marshlands and keep the invaders out.

## Pelene

Always a nation of shipbuilders and traders, their only rival on the ocean waves are the trading ships of the Vasar League. Separated from the other kingdoms by the Komorwood and the Caddun Mountains they have always managed to stay out of the various conflicts that have blighted their nearest neighbours. Odane is particularly honoured here, as is anyone who can show proficiency with a craft or art.

**Since The Invasion:** So far Pelene has remained untouched by the war, but its ships can always be seen carrying supplies and even troops to Andea via the hotly contested Andan Gulf. Everyone is sure that it can only be a matter of time before a massive fleet of Pelene warships scours the Straits of Castitus clean of Dalassan ships and opens the way for the liberation of the conquered kingdoms.

## Salav

Salav belligerence is well known, said to be a product of having to fight to make a name for themselves in the shadow of Andea and Anglerre. Certainly it has fought many times against its neighbours over territory, especially the contested Matharwold and the rich farmland of Malidon. Despite a perceived obsession with honour and martial prowess the kingdom has nonetheless produced more than its share of thinkers, artists and poets. The greatest temples dedicated to Ardas and Alend can be found in Sammaden and Morissa respectively.

**Since The Invasion:** The Salav armies proved to be the toughest opponents against the Dalassan advance, making the Imperials pay a bloody price for every mile of ground they lost. So it sits heavily on their proud souls for the Justalyne king and his family to have to ask the king of Anglerre for sanctuary after the retreat from Sammaden. Now they are the very ill-mannered guests of the king in Sinor, and becoming more and more unpopular every day.

## Urtia

Growing up in the shadow of the mighty Korlat Mountains has produced a nation of famously taciturn but dependable people with a strong sense of community; Haldei's most important temple can be found in the port of Ferruce. Regular commerce with the Korlatyn hill-men has bred a healthy respect between the neighbouring peoples; believed to be Afryan nomads that took up residence in the high mountain passes, they are tough, stubborn fighters but gentle and giving amongst their own. Urtians have always had a reputation for talking their way out of fights wherever possible, and of showing no quarter when forced into battle.

**Since The Invasion:** The city of Sanmark has been cut off for months and may soon

fall come spring. Raiding Korlatyn hill-men remain a thorn in the side of the occupying forces; some say the remains of the Urtian army are hiding in the mountains with their distant cousins and are waiting for the right moment to pour out of the passes and high valleys and drive the invaders back into the sea.

## *The Komorwood*

A forest as old and vast as history itself, the shadowed depths of the Komorwood have rarely been seen by man. The kingdoms that border it do not venture far into the forest for its timber for fear of travelling too deep beneath its branches. Their concerns are well-founded; the forest is home to many strange and dangerous creatures, and a few fey ones as well, but the Komorwood has been slowly eroded away over the centuries nonetheless. The region of forest through which runs the trade route between Duren, in Kerrlund, and Thuren, of the Vasar League, is the most heavily travelled by men but only the foolish consider it safe.

The heart of the forest is the Komor Mountains, where dragons are still said to dwell. It is told that long ago an ancient civilisation stood at the foot of the mountains and ruled the land from one side to the other; if it ever existed, its cities must now stand in ruin, home only to monsters and the shades of the previous inhabitants. Some brave or mad individuals still seek out those ruins in the hope of finding ancient treasures – few ever return, and those that do are always broken, always empty-handed.

## *The Vasar League*

North of the Komorwood lies the Vasar League, a vast trading empire formed from a union of city-states and merchant houses. It has stood as long as the kingdom of Valere and its successor states and shows no sign of flagging, both its dynamism and its wealth the product of its stranglehold on the trade routes it controls. The warmer climate around the Erius Sea that serves as the centre of the League also lends itself to a more relaxed way of living, at least amongst those the League's wealth benefits the most. But even this sun-drenched and gilded land has its dark corners; rumours of slavery, cruel despots, injustice and corruption abound.

The merchants of Vasar were a common sight in every port and many cities of Old Valere before the invasion, but now they are only seen in the harbours of Pelene and the markets of Kerrlund. Stories are still told about the riches and exotica of the shining cities of the League, but these days such tales hold more jealousy than wonder.

## *The Dalassan Empire*

Over the Straits Of Castitus lies the Empire of Dalassa, a strange and mysterious land to many in the north. This is because travel to the interior of the Empire was always forbidden to anyone without the permission of the local governors, given in the form of Documents Of Travel which were not always accepted by other governors. This procedure was established long ago by the Emperor of the time, who was concerned with the cultural purity of the Empire; the Empire should impose itself on others, he said, not the other way round. So the movements of diplomats and merchants, the only people who could regularly receive such Documents, was strictly curtailed. For a long time, the most visitors have ever seen of the Empire is the "trading cities" of Ordina, Icena, Eratha and Athela.

The civil war that threw the Empire into turmoil was caused by the sudden death of the Emperor, who had yet to name his successor. His sons and closest friends contested their claims first in the Cehat, the council of governors and lords, and then on the battlefields, as

generals joined or established their own factions. Almost seven years passed as war tore across the Empire like a plague. Some mercenary companies or armies from the northern kingdoms were permitted to participate if a particular faction allowed it, though other factions were strictly against it and treated foreign mercenaries very badly. Otherwise few had any wish to enter the Empire during this period of upheaval.

A period of bloody stalemate was broken by the appearance of a new faction: the Arnyek Lords. These mysterious individuals presented themselves as generals and leaders from time immemorial, returned to the living world from the Halls Of The Sun where they had been interceding with the gods on behalf of the Empire. Initial scepticism was soon turned to fanatic devotion as their strategies and powerful magic shattered the stalemate and quickly overcame all those that did not rally to their banner. In just three years they had gained control of the whole Empire and closed its borders to foreigners as they strengthened their position.

## *The Afrya Wasteland*

The Wasteland is a huge, mostly treeless plain of grass and rock. Home to great roaming herds of horses and wild cattle, it is also populated by nomadic tribes that follow the herds as they migrate with the turn of the seasons. By and large the tribes keep to themselves, unless there is reason for conflict, but most meet friendly neighbours regularly once or twice a year to exchange news, stories, livestock and brides and grooms. Such meetings are often a heady mix of celebration and tension.

Almost all of the commerce held with the Afryan tribes occurs yearly at big tent "cities" in the so-called 'Afryan Gateway', a particularly barren expanse of terrain between the Aeshin Mountains to the north and the Korlat Mountains to the south. It is generally believed that this location was initially chosen because it was considered worthless to everyone – little grows there and there is nothing else of interest to be found. There are many stories that tell of darker reasons, of curses and imposed commitments honoured generations after the original vow has been forgotten, but few give any credence to such tales.

Much of the day to day life of the Afryan nomads is a mystery to the people of Old Valere, but it is said that the Vasar League has trade links even with the lands far beyond the edge of the Wasteland.

## *Religion*

The gods of the Old Kingdom are still honoured as they were in the days of King Mathar. They are split into two groups; the Gods Of The Stars (or Higher Gods) and the Gods Of The Stone (or Fallen Gods). Most people are raised to respect the gods and routinely make offerings to those that they believe will help them on a day to day basis, even if it only takes the form of a muttered entreaty and promise of an offering of some kind to whoever might be listening. There are those who reject the gods, either in private or openly, and such individuals are mostly viewed with a mixture of pity and horror by the faithful.

### **The Gods Of The Stars, a.k.a. The Higher Gods**

Most worship the Higher Gods as a whole, offering prayers to different deities in different situations, and similarly most priests serve all the gods and can offer advice on how best to honour or appease any of them. Only the largest towns and cities have priests and temples devoted to particular deities; most temples are dedicated to all of the gods. Priests are also taught all the Great Tales of how the world came to be, how the gods came to hold dominion over the forces of the universe, and the ways that they have contended with each other since the First Days.

- **Amphelice** is the goddess of fertility, plants, abundance and plenty. She is the sister of *Vaydas* and *Roebas*, and the mother of *Orjon*.
- **Cerryn** is the god of lore and magic. He is the brother of *Odane*, the husband of *Haldei* and the origin of *Nyrrec, the Shadow*.
- **Vaydas** is the god of hunting and animals. He is the brother of *Amphelice* and *Roebas*.
- **Haldei** is the goddess of community. She is the wife of *Cerryn*.
- **Alend** is the goddess of honourable combat, self-sacrifice and sunlight. She is the sister of *Ardas* and *Derlyn*.
- **Ardas** is the god of physical and martial prowess. He is the brother of *Alend* and *Derlyn*.
- **Kinrith** is the god of death and renewal, who governs the afterlife in the heavens, Lathatar. He is the son of *Serinne* and *Odane*, and the twin brother of *Tayne*.
- **Serinne** is the goddess of luck and cunning. She is the wife of *Odane* and the mother of *Kinrith* and *Tayne*.
- **Odane** is the god of crafts, industry, trade and fire. He is the brother of *Cerryn*, the husband of *Serinne* and the father of *Kinrith* and *Tayne*.

### The Gods Of The Stone, a.k.a. The Fallen Gods

The Gods Of The Stone were cast down below the earth because of their evil ways – they wished to bring chaos and anarchy to the world at the expense of all that is good and right. They are worshipped by criminals, outcasts, and those of evil intent or ambition. However, many normal folk will also pay tribute to them – a sailor might make an offering to appease *Roebas* to ensure his next voyage will not be hindered by storms, and funeral rites include an appeasement offering to *Tayne*. The Fallen Gods are said to scheme against the Higher Gods, seeking to gain dominion over the hearts of men, and their followers likewise do the same against devotees of the Higher Gods and the good order of the kingdoms of the world.

- **Roebas** is the god of the destructive power of nature. He is the brother of *Amphelice* and the father of *Orjon*.
- **Orjon** is the goddess of passion driven to madness. She is the daughter of *Amphelice* and *Roebas*.
- **Tayne** is the god of death and decay, who takes souls from The House Of The Dead to suffer in the afterlife beneath the earth, Vilag, unless appeased. He is the son of *Serinne* and *Odane*, and the twin brother of *Kinrith*.
- **Derlyn** is the god of ambition and treachery over honour. He is the brother of *Alend* and *Ardas*.
- **Nyrrec, The Shadow**, is the god of dark magic and the corruption of nature. He is the literal shadow of *Cerryn*.
- **Salas** is the god of lies and deception. He is said to be somehow related to all the gods, though none knows how, and is commonly believed to be the most responsible for the casting out of the Fallen Gods.

### The Gods Of The Empire

The Dalassan Empire worships the same gods under different names (the Lords Of Harmony And Dissonance) and tells different Tales, but also venerates the greatest leaders and heroes from the past, who achieve immortality after death and intercede with the gods on the behalf of mortal supplicants. An Imperial citizen would never dream of addressing the gods directly as those of the north do, and consider doing so almost a kind of blasphemy.

The appearance of the Arnyek Lords, believed to be demi-gods returned to the world of the living, has charged the Empire with a religious fervour never seen before – and that new fanaticism seems to be driving the invasion of the north.

### The Lords Of The Netherworlds

The Netherworlds are dark places beyond the world inhabited by men, terrible realms of chaos and destruction where evil entities plot and scheme to increase their influence and

power over other beings and worlds. Only the desperate, foolish or overconfident will seek out the Dark Masters for the mystical aid they will give because it is always at a price – often innocuous at first, or to be paid by others, but it is not long before generous assistance or apparent partnership becomes terrible service or diabolical slavery. The rot spreads and soon kingdoms may fall...

## *Magic*

Magic is a mysterious force understood by very few and mistrusted by many. Only those rare few born with the Power can wield it, but only those who train and study the arts of magic can master it. Some study alone from ancient books, some apprentice themselves to master magicians, while others seek out rare and isolated centres of magical learning. Only a handful achieve true mastery.

There are many paths to Power, many ways that ritual, chants, concentration and arcane accoutrements can be used to summon, focus and direct energy and forces in accordance with the will. The existence (or lack) of true unifying principles is a matter of much debate amongst those inclined to discuss the possibility; most are content to use rather than research magic, to work with what is instead of investigate the limits of what might be.

## *Bestiary*

**Dragons** – creatures of legend, it is said that some still dwell in the mountains of the Komorwood where no sane man dares to venture.

**Erdei** – believed to be the spirits of ancient trees, these rare and fey beings are found only in the depths of the oldest forests. Peaceful and shy, they avoid direct contact but there are stories of them helping lost travellers... just as there are stories of dark and twisted Erdei slaying those who desecrate their ancient homes.

**Fenevad** – a creature like a cross between an ape and a lizard; just smaller than a man, scaly skin, long arms ending in clawed fingers, long jaws filled with teeth, fast-moving. They live in the mountains and sometimes sweep down in packs to take livestock and even people.

**Giant Spiders** – opinions are split on whether they are creatures created by dark magic or by the Fallen Gods themselves; whatever their origin, these malformed, monstrous spiders can often be found in the darkest places of the forests or in caves deep under mountains.

**Grave Worms** – strange, slimy worms a foot in length and covered in tendrils, these carrion scavengers can inhabit and animate a corpse in order to better dig into the ground... or attack still-living prey. Bad winters draw them close to graveyards and battlefields summon them in droves.

**Kolyok** – spiteful and magical mischief-makers that come out from the forests and hills and attach themselves to villages or even towns. Small and weak, they use magic to make life difficult for their victims by harming (or even killing) livestock, fouling milk and grain, and breaking tools. Larger individuals are rare but more dangerous, even going so far as to terrorise or kill people. It is not known exactly why they seem to like terrorising people so much; most just attribute it to a hateful nature.