

# ATLAS OF THE INNER SEA

## INTRODUCTION

The Inner Sea is the local name for a large, northern bay, surrounded by plains, mountains, and woods that are home to an unusually diverse collection of cultures.

The dominant political powers of the Inner Sea are the Free Cities, a trio independent city-states that have little in common but their commitment to remaining free of outside influence and, more importantly, to trading freely with whomever they please.

However, the Free Cities are not the only major powers in the area. In the chilly far north, the proud herdsman and raiders of the Skraling peoples maintain three large settlements (cities in population, if not organization), and numerous smaller villages. Their settlements have a complicated, tumultuous relationship with the Orcish tribes that abut and overlap with their territory, often warring against each other but sometimes cooperating against common foes.

The eastern shores of the Inner Sea are dominated by the kingdom of Wenland, which has established the city of Woldham and several smaller towns there.

Two ancient dwarf holds are carved deep into the mountains, while the tinker gnomes of Mount Illidor (which they call by a rather less dignified name) have built all manner of strange machinery into their home. Meanwhile, the mysterious forests of Blightwood and the Shrouded Isle are home to unknown civilizations, so hostile to outsiders that few who visit them live to tell of it.

## FREE CITIES

### Haven

Built on a sliver of land between mountain and inland sea, extended by numerous bridges onto the nearby islands, is the Free City of Haven. Haven is an ancient, mad sprawl, inhabited by characters of all kinds, living together in peace if not necessarily comfort.

Around a hundred years ago, rule over Haven passed from the long-ruling McGregor family to the Council of Masters, a loose association of powerful tradesmen. The last scion of the McGregors, Lord Brannart McGregor, still lives in his family's ancestral castle overlooking the city. Lord Brannart is officially the Lord Regent of Haven, but in actuality his influence extends only as far as the walls of his castle.

Haven has been known since time immemorial as a safe place for the lost and the displaced to find refuge and, if they're willing to work hard, rebuild their lives. The reputation is only partly true; a rigid class system enforced by the Masters results in little actual mobility between social strata.

Thanks to the proximity of Steelfist Hold, Haven has a large dwarven minority which is deeply entrenched in the city's power structure. Indeed, over the years, almost as many Steelfist dwarves have come to live in Haven as in the Hold itself.

Haven relies on fishing and on trade with other cities (especially Breakwater) for food; it has almost no arable land of its own.

Population: 95,000. 65% human, 20% dwarven, 10% gnome, 5% other. Dominant alignment: True Neutral. Dominant languages: Common, dwarven.

## Breakwater

The smallest and sleepest of the Free Cities, Breakwater is built among the ruins of a much older, marcher larger settlement, and named after the jutting remains of a string of maritime fortresses that line its coast and make docking hazardous.

Owing to prevailing winds that blow across the bay from the warmer south, Breakwater has a relatively mild climate compared to other settlements in the area, and is surrounded by farms that feed not only its own people but those of Haven as well.

Breakwater is home to a large population of halflings, immigrants from Wenland who fled that kingdom to escape prejudice but found conditions to be little better in their new home. Most of the halflings work on human-owned farms, although a few have managed to acquire their own.

Population: 13,500. 80% human, 15% halfling, 3% dwarven, 2% other. Dominant alignment: True Neutral. Dominant language: Common.

## Tystath

With its mix of the independent-minded attitude of the Free Cities and the more refined culture of the old kingdoms to its east and south, Tystath (pronounced too-STAHT) is the odd one out among the Free Cities. Even the language spoken there is different; while the Common tongue is spoken in Haven and Breakwater, the people of Tystath speak their own native tongue, Dilense (pronounced dil-EN-suh). Most Tystathers have at best a rudimentary understanding of Common, if any at all.

This unusual situation is the result of Tystath's status as the last remnant of a larger kingdom; two centuries ago, it was the gleaming capital city of a nation that stretched from Mount Illidor

to the great ocean to the east, but invasions, rebellions, and the gradual encroachment of the Blightwood wore it down over time, and all that now remains is a single city, its grand palaces and monumental architecture the only evidence of its onetime glory.

Tystath is ruled by the Merchant Princes, a coalition of great merchant houses that come together into a loose government. Each house rules over its own section of the city, and by and large they do an effective job of maintaining cleanliness and order. Crime is relatively rare (indeed, visitors from Haven in particular find Tystath shockingly clean and friendly), and the harshest punishment exacted by the Merchant Princes is permanent exile—a significant threat to most of the residents, considering Tystath's linguistic isolation.

Population: 51,000. 90% human, 6% gnome, 2% elf, 2% other. Dominant alignment: Lawful Good. Dominant language: Dilense (Common not widely spoken).

## DWARF HOLDS

### Steelfist Hold

A dwarven stronghold carved into the mountains not far from Haven, Steelfist Hold is long past its glory days, and many of its once-teeming halls now stand empty. Its mines mostly dried up, much of its population has left to seek new riches either in Haven to the south or in the mountain ranges to the north and west.

Population: 22,000. 99% dwarven, 1% other. Dominant alignment: Lawful Good. Dominant language: dwarven (most residents bilingual with Common).

### Grimjaw Hold

Built into a large, barren outcrop of mountains and isolated from the rest of the world by the Inner Sea, Grimjaw Hold is home to the largest single concentration of dwarves in the known world, and also the most reclusive. Outsiders are not welcome here; Grimjaw dwarves will proudly point out that their hold has not a single permanent resident of a non-dwarven race (which isn't strictly true, as they do host a small diplomatic delegation from the nearby Wenlands).

Population: 34,000. 100% dwarven. Dominant alignment: Lawful Neutral. Dominant language: dwarven (very few Common speakers).

## WENLAND

Wenland is a mid-sized kingdom, the quiet, relatively sparsely populated western reaches of which adjoin the Inner Sea. The Wens believe themselves to be descended from the same ancestral stock as the Skralings, although the Skralings vigorously disagree, considering the Wennish culture weak and gentle. Indeed, until just a few decades ago, Skraling raiding parties still regularly pillaged coastal Wennish settlements, until the rapid growth of Woldham and the increasing presence of the well-organized Wennish military in the area put a stop to it.

The Wens have two main loves: nature and bureaucracy, and they enjoy both in equal measure. Getting anything done in a Wennish city requires numerous permissions and agreements and the navigation of constantly-changing rules that not even the Wens themselves seem to fully understand.

Wennish cities, however, tend to be startlingly beautiful to outsiders, especially those used to the overcrowding and squalor of the Free Cities; broad, tree-lined lanes weave through town centers dotted with numerous parks and elaborately landscaped gardens.

Wenland is ruled by Her Exalted Majesty Queen Isabeau II, who ascended to the throne a mere two years ago after her elder brother, King Richaud, was killed in a skirmish with an orcish tribe. Isabeau's first act as Queen was to personally lead a force into the woods to exact revenge for her brother's death, a task she carried out with brutal efficiency.

The Wennish peoples have their own language, Old Wennish, but it has largely been overtaken by Common in day-to-day life. Only about a quarter of Wens speak Wennish natively, mostly in rural areas and among the nobility.

### **Wenwood**

This large forest covers most of central Wenland. It's an airy, widely spaced, sun-dappled wood, beautiful and relatively tame. Wenwood is safe compared to the other major woodlands of the Inner Sea region, although it still hides a few remaining tribes of evil humanoids and the odd monster, away from the major roads.

### **Woldham**

A relatively new but large and rapidly growing port city, Woldham is capitol of western Wenland. It was founded less than a hundred years ago to solidify the Wens' claims on the eastern shores of the Inner Sea and fend off potential incursions by the Skralings or the Free Peoples.

Woldham also serves as the main entry point for eastern goods into the Wenlands, as it guards the only safe passage, the Hull Road that runs between the Wenwood to the south and the monster-infested mountains to the north.

Population: 51,000. 90% human, 5% halfling, 3% elven, 2% other. Dominant alignment: Lawful Neutral. Dominant language: Common.

### **Dewfirth**

A small town founded hundreds of years ago on the site of an already-ancient settlement founded by the pre-Wennish tribes that once lived in the area, Dewfirth is unremarkable but for its history. Just outside town, two concentric rings of standing stones, their original purpose unknown, stand on a hilltop.

Population: 1,200. 85% human, 15% halfling. Dominant alignment: Neutral Good. Dominant language: Old Wennish (few Common speakers).

### **Finnay**

Finnay is the name of both a small, craggy island and the Wennish settlement atop it. Isle Finnay

is surrounded on all sides by rugged cliffs; only two narrow paths lead up to the central plateau, making it a naturally defensible location for the Wens' westernmost outpost.

Population: 650. 90% human, 10% halfling. Dominant alignment: Lawful Neutral. Dominant language: Common.

### **Indhow**

Indhow is a small, quiet city on the Inusk Peninsula, the southernmost point of the Wennish kingdom. It is walled—a very unusual trait in a usually peaceful kingdom—and is home to the beautiful Royal Summer Palace and its extensive grounds, where the Queen is known to reside with some regularity.

Indhow is also the most diverse city in Wenland, with a particularly large halfling population, numbering in the thousands.

Population: 14,500. 60% human, 30% halfling, 10% other. Dominant alignment: Lawful Good. Dominant language: Common.

## SKRALING TERRITORIES

The Skralings are warriors and herders; in times past, they relied on raiding settlements to the south for their livelihoods (while themselves being raided frequently by the nearby orc tribes). In the past century or so, however, as the peoples who were once the Skralings' prey have become stronger and better-defended, they've largely settled down into pastoral lifestyles.

Most of the Skralings live in small villages of fifty to several hundred, which they move occasionally to find fresh lands to graze their livestock. They do have a few larger settlements, however, which serve as centers for traders and craftspeople, as well as places to retreat to for safety in numbers during orc attacks.

Despite frequent conflicts, the Skralings are much more tolerant of orcs than any other human culture; orcs often live among them, especially in the northern and western reaches of the Skraling homeland, and trade is as common as war between the two groups.

### Myrdal

The southernmost Skraling city, Myrdal has also been the most influenced by other human cultures, and is thus relatively well-organized and permanent.

Myrdal is ruled by a hereditary jarl from the powerful Halldor clan; the current ruler is Fritha Hakonsdotr, who recently ascended to the throne after her father disappeared at sea.

The Wens and the people of the Free Cities tend to consider Myrdal to be the representative of all Skralings, largely because it's easy to deal with. This suits neither the people of Myrdal—who'd rather not be held responsible for the actions of their northern cousins—nor the other Skralings, who barely consider Myrdal a legitimate member of their culture.

Population: 4,500. 80% human, 10% dwarven, 5% gnome, 3% orc and half-orc, 2% other. Dominant alignment: Chaotic Good. Dominant languages: Common, Skral.

### Reykhol

The Skralings of Reykhol consider themselves the most faithful to the traditions of their people—more traditional and less accepting of other lifestyles than the more cosmopolitan people of Myrdal but less bloodthirsty and greedy than the residents of Dalvik.

Many Reykhol Skralings still conduct raids on settlements along the coast of the Inner Sea, although they are increasingly disapproved of even in this very conservative settlement because of their tendency to draw retaliation from the better-armed and organized armies of the south. Others have turned to raiding the orcs to the west, leading to rapidly escalating violence between the two groups.

In traditional Skraling fashion, Reykhol has no official rulers or laws—when an issue comes up that affects the entire city, a moot is called to bring together the leaders of the most powerful local clans to come up with a resolution.

Population: 8,500. 90% human, 5% dwarven, 3% orc and half-orc, 2% other. Dominant alignment: Chaotic Neutral. Dominant language: Skral (many are bilingual with Common).

### Dalvik

The northernmost settlement of the Skralings, Dalvik is as much an orcish city as a human one. It's a grim, brutal place where crime is abundant and power is held by whoever commands the most thugs and brutes. Right now, that's a charismatic half-orc war priest named Therada Bloodpike, who came to power after a brutal civil war and has brought together a ragged alliance of orc and human with the promise of battlefield

glory and easy riches. Her dominance has made the human-dominated Skraling settlements to the south increasingly nervous; many consider a war inevitable. Even the orcs of Dorak's Maw to the west are more peaceful (and have taken in many of the refugees from Dalvik's civil war).

Population: 5,500. 55% human, 40% orc and half-orc, 5% other. Dominant alignment: Chaotic Evil. Dominant languages: Skral, Orcish (few Common speakers).

## **ORC HOLDS**

### **Dorak's Maw**

The mirror image of Dalvik, Dorak's Maw (named after the local orcish god Dorak) is dominated by orcs but, surprisingly, has a large human population—Skralings who fled their own homelands after a civil war two decades ago and settled with the orcs.

The human minority has had a moderating influence on the already relatively peaceful orcs here over the years, making it the friendliest and least chaotic of the orc holds—admittedly a low bar. It's ruled by a council of elders rather than by force, and is relatively safe and organized.

The leader of the council is currently the mononymic Urug, an old warlock who commands a considerable amount of respect among both orc and human.

Population: 8,500. 75% orc, 10% goblin, 10% human, 5% half-orc. Dominant alignment: Chaotic Neutral. Dominant language: Orcish (very few Common speakers, but a fair number of speakers of Skral).

### **Goretooth**

Goretooth, named after the venerable orc warboss that founded it half a century ago—ancient times by orc reckoning—is the largest of the numerous orcish settlements nestled among Marr's Bones.

The city is ruled by, and named after, whatever orc happens to be the largest and angriest, currently the venerable warboss Lurg Goretooth, who has now ruled for an entire decade (an eternity by orc standards) and is ripe for a challenge.

Population: 13,000. 65% orc, 20% goblin, 15% other humanoids. Dominant alignment: Chaotic Evil. Dominant language: Orcish.

## MOUNTAINS AND WOODLANDS

### Marr's Bones

The towering mountain range on the west side of the Inner Sea, home to Steelfist Hold and a huge number of orcish tribes, is named after the dwarven creator god Marr.

### Mt. Demonsnort / Mt. Illidor

This long-dormant volcano is home to a vast tinker gnome colony. The gnome's mythology has it that the mountain, incongruously situated on an otherwise flat stretch of coastland, was formed when an underground-dwelling demon sneezed. (The other races are skeptical, though, and everyone but the gnomes calls it Mount Illidor.) Generations upon generations of gnomes have hollowed out a vast, chaotic network of tunnels, chambers, and galleries throughout the mountain, as meandering and chaotic as dwarf holds are regimented and orderly. Several railways circulate throughout the mountain and a number of steam-powered elevators take inhabitants up and down through its various tiers—when they're not broken down.

Yet, despite their considerable extent, the gnome tunnels don't make up even half of the total space in and under the mountain. Various other creatures have inhabited Mount Illidor since long before the gnomes; in particular, the gnomes are in a near-constant state of war with the large number of kobold and hobgoblin tribes that reside in the mountain's deeper reaches. On occasion, they also encounter Drow scout parties, which has led some of the gnomes to believe that their mountain is connected somehow to the Underdark, although so far none of them have discovered where the hypothetical connection might be.

Population: 7,500. 95% gnome, 3% dwarf, 2% halfling, 1% other. Dominant alignment: Chaotic

Good. Dominant language: Gnomish (most residents multilingual).

### Blightwood

Cold, dark, and staggeringly vast, the Blightwood is the northernmost of all forests, clinging somehow to the frozen earth well past the point where the rest of the world has only tundra. The outer reaches of the forest are wandered by gnolls, owlbears, and worse, while deeper in the woods there lurk terrors beyond imagining—if the tales told in the longhouses of the Skralings have any truth to them, anyway.

One thing is certain—the large cove on the southern end of the wood is inhabited by a mysterious, unfriendly elven civilization, expert archers clad in grays and dusky blues and known to kill or chase away any intruders to their territory. Nowhere else in the known world do elves live in such a cold, unforgiving climate. Some eleven scholars theorize that they are an ancient remnant of a more primitive race, but no one knows for sure since the Blightwood elves speak only their own undeciphered tongue and seem unable or unwilling to speak either Common or standard Elvish. Thus almost nothing is known by outsiders about their customs, their lifestyle, or even their numbers.

Even the elves don't seem to venture into the forest's chilly interior, about which nothing is known.



## MYSTERIES

### The Shrouded Isle

Little is known about the inhabitants of this long, narrow strip of land in the northern Inner Sea. A thick forest of vast, ancient trees grows right to the water's edge, and from the sea appears to be perpetually cloaked in a heavy fog. Anyone who sails too close to the shore begins to feel a sense of vague unease that rapidly escalates into a formless, all-consuming terror as they continue to approach.

It is widely believed that the island is inhabited by an ancient elven civilization, but no one outside of the isle itself seems to know for sure and various other theories—about demons, the undead, or even ancient buried gods—are whispered throughout the Inner Sea.

### The Dread Gate

The Steelfist dwarves tell stories of a mysterious gate deep in the mountains, thirty feet tall and made of a hard, glittering black material that none of their weapons or tools can mar. An inscription is carved above the massive double doors in an unknown language.

The dwarves have many theories about the nature of the door; most believe either that it is an old, sealed entrance to the Underdark, but some are convinced it's a gateway to Hell itself, ready to open at the Twilight of the Dwarves, the end times in their mythology. Others still claim that it was built by a forgotten race of dwarves, and that an ancient, abandoned dwarf hold lies beyond, filled with unimaginable riches.

As the Dread Gate lies several week's arduous journey into a dangerous, orc- and monster-infested area of the mountain range, few have seen it and none have managed to open it, but every now and then a brave and curious party sets out to find it.

### The Far North

What lies even further north than the Blightwood and the Skraling lands, where the ground is permanently frozen and no plants grow? Everyone tells stories, but most who claim to have seen firsthand are lying. Some rumors that have been passed around for years—almost certainly untrue—include:

- There is a great northern sea beyond the tundra, warm year-round, and just beyond it another continent full of strange nations and unknown animals.
- Nestled in a distant northern mountain range there is a secret, verdant valley, maintained by an unknown magic. At its center sits a gleaming city of mysterious origin.
- Once, millennia in the past, the northlands were warmer, and a great empire, wealthy in gold and magic, flourished there. Their ruins dot the landscape beyond the Blightwood, and great fortunes and powerful magic await anyone who would brave the cold to explore them.
- An entirely frozen continent, covered with snow year-round and crisscrossed by literal rivers of ice, lies to the north; it is populated entirely by strange birds that live in huge communities and walk like men.