

Handbook of Esterna

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Preface

Esterna is a long-standing project of mine: the development of a fantasy world for me to work with, be it writing for gaming or other endeavours. It's still far from done, but the enough of the skeleton is there to start displaying it.

Start with what it isn't: it's not a Tolkien knock-off. This whole thing started years ago out of disgust with some unremembered fourth-generation ripoff of *Lord of the Rings*. I set about to find another well-spring of inspiration, eventually settling on the quasi-historical, gothic fantasies of Clark Ashton Smith, C.L. Moore, and Manly Wade Wellman. The stories of Guy Gavriel Kay and a couple of non-urban fantasies by Charles De Lint came to my attention too and struck me as modern-day takes on this type of fantasy, which had lain mostly dormant since Professor Tolkien dropped his bombshell.

That led to several negative decisions:

- **Stories, not epics.** Tolkien set out to create myth, which is a very particular (and *constraining*) type of story. Little stories need not apply. Epics need Bad with a capital B and Good with a capital G. Big world-threatening storylines became *de rigueur* after a certain short hairy-footed character destroyed a certain magical McGuffin in the fires of a certain volcano. After encountering, oh...my ten-thousandth or so Big Bad with a vaguely sinister name (usually spelled with a couple of K's and Z's), I started to get a little sick of it, and wanted to see what could be done after reducing the scope a little.
- **No elves, no dwarfs.** Actually, few intelligent beings other than human beings. In my experience, other races were shorthand excuses for certain bundles of behavior that substituted for motivation. Quick: how do dwarfs and elves feel about one another. "Well, they don't get along: dwarfs are miners and 'industrial', and elves are granola-loving tree freaks."

No. Tolkien invented this, and it's just been ripped off a thousand times since. Boring now; I changed it. With few exceptions, everyone in Esterna is mundanely human, which means I need to actually sit down and think about what drives them as individuals, instead of just handing out nametags.

- **Magic isn't cheap.** This was one of *Lord of the Rings'* main themes, and the first one chucked in all its imitators. Unfortunately, I think, because it's fairly interesting. In recent times, fantasy role-playing games exacerbated this with their wizard characters available to all, especially as scientifically minded players started to think through the logical consequences of widely available magic. In my opinion, the less-interesting choice was the one generally made, to lose the medieval flavour of the period and turn it into something like the technology of *The Flintstones*.

The only way I could avoid this that I could see would be to make magic *cost*. Your soul, your sanity, the consequences. Something. Magic, as portrayed in many fantasy novels and games, is too obviously useful not to be widespread, and if it's widespread you lose its, er, "magic".

- **Ditch Middle Ages England.** Knights and castles and Arthurian inspiration were just oozing out all over the place when I started this, so I needed something different. For a while this was Celtic mythology, but events overtook me and everyone else had the same idea. Now that's as badly clichéd as England. With the inspiration provided by Guy Gavriel Kay, I started exploring slightly different times and places, and eventually settled on France, and the late 14th century.

This meant re-introducing England, as at the time France was joined to the hip with its neighbour across the Channel (Hundred Years War and all that), but now as a part rather than the stifling

whole. Moving the time period up a couple of centuries added some interesting wrinkles too, like early cannons, the first glimmerings of the Age of Exploration (the Portuguese discovered the Azores no later than the 1420s), and the first blows for the little people after a few centuries of everything being about kings and queens and God.

- **Don't keep it simple.** This one grew out of the other ones. Most fantasy novels are stripped down to the minimum number of countries, towns, and places that are needed to drive the story forward. Fair enough. But I felt that, with the afore-mentioned vows to stick to small stories and real motivations, it would help to build a setting with some of the geographic, historical, and political complexity of the real world. With magic largely going out the window, it was becoming apparent that any writing here was going to be historical fiction that just happened to be set on an imaginary continent. Alright, one imaginary continent, with many nations and how they all interrelate to one another, coming right up.

That killed most of a year.

What ultimately has come out of this all is Esterna, and this high-level cut at explaining it all for anyone who doesn't live inside my head with all the as-yet unwritten detail. For now, Esterna is available at a 1000-yard bird's eye view, with only one country, Irvisa, approaching the next level of detail. When it will be done, if ever, remains to be seen. But the place keeps pulling me back to it, and I've got this far. Stay tuned.

— Paul Drye
January 2003

Peoples and Languages of Esterna

Altveg: These people hail from Notberen, in the far north-east of the Eastlands. They are tall, and very fair, usually with blond hair and blue or grey eyes.

Some two hundred years ago the Altveg were collectively seized by a spirit of wanderlust, and began raiding the more civilized lands, trading instead where resistance was too strong. Eventually the raids escalated into full-blown invasions, and lands such as Angelsol, Gedestrom, Trienne and Bassispear were taken (Untell was conquered under slightly different circumstances at the same time). Most are still ruled by Altveg, but of a strain that has changed after two centuries of contact with the Rhérionese.

In Notberen and Untell, the language known as Alt is spoken. Altveg in Angelsol and Gedestrom once spoke the same, but now use new languages that cross Alt and Rhérionese.

Emeb: The Emeb live in the lands to the south and east of the Toufelerne Mountains. They are a nomadic people, little impacting on the civilized nations of the East, except in the south where they touch the former southern regions of the Empire of Rhérion.

The Emeb are also noted as horse breeders, and the best lines of horses in the Eastern lands are based on prized studs from Emeb herds.

Emeb are generally small people, dark of skin, hair and eye. Their language (Emeb) is liquid and musical, suited to subtle song or poetry.

Firin: The Firin are the last of the people remaining in the South who inhabited that area before the Rhérionese came. They are somewhat related to the Yronse, who have roots in this region as well. They are found in Firincor proper, and in some surrounding areas.

Firin are tall, hairy, and of belligerent spirit. A feud between two Firin clans can stretch on for decades. Red or light brown hair and blue eyes are common characteristics of the Firin.

These people are masters of the spear, as well as truly enormous two-handed swords that most people find difficult to lift, let alone wield.

Firin have their own language, Firinese, but most can speak at least a smattering of Rhérionese. Whether one will admit to doing so or not is another matter.

Hollensmen: These people have inhabited the region known as Verroll, on the west coast of the Sarenic Sea, since before the Rhérionese came to the East.

They speak their own language, Verollen, which has two dialects. High Verollen is spoken in the hills and mountains of Upper Verroll, while Low Verollen can be heard in the plains of the south.

The Hollensmen are proverbially good traders, and can be found in ports and trade towns throughout Esterna. They tend to dress in dark, sombre clothes that reflect their reticent natures.

The inhabitants of Verroll are generally black- or brown-haired, and have eyes that could be of any colour. Verroll is prone to fogs and overcast skies, so the Hollensmen tend to have very pale skin.

Hollensmen are noted for fighting in groups. A Hollensman uses a long spear or pike, then forms up with his companions to make infantry squares that are nearly impervious to cavalry. The Irvisans sometimes use Hollensman squares to protect their archers, while the unit known as *Les Chauves Souris* have rightly gained much glory in the Emperor of Rhérion's service.

Idorjan: To the west of the Felsens lie the lands of the Idorjan, also known as the Wagon-riders, a strange people that ply the hills and light woods to the north of the Emeb lands in their brightly colored, wooden wagons.

Some of these wandering people have entered Esterna over the northern passes where the Felsens and the Kaltuell Mountains meet, and they can be found along the roads of any land, North or South.

They make their living with minor skills like tinkering, healing or distilling (an art they introduced to the East some one hundred years ago). They also strain their relationships with local authorities by being master poachers, petty thieves and knife fighters. When a crackdown comes, they also have a knack for packing up their wagons and moving on in the night.

These people are also known as the Wanderers, or the Tinkers.

Irvisan: Irvisans are a new ethnic group found in the Prenniam, where the Yronse, Rhérionese and Altveg crossed paths. This amalgam has boiled down into a new people with their own language and way of life.

Irvisans are generally pale of skin, but otherwise have no definable hair or eye colours. They speak Irvisan, which is primarily related to Alt, but has heavy strains of Rhérionese and Yronse in it.

Irvisans are decent horse-fighters, using swords, lances or bludgeoning weapons as circumstances require. Infantry sees heavy use too. Their primary area of expertise is with the longbow, however. Its use has won more than a few battles against heavier and more numerous forces.

The Irvisans are gradually transforming themselves into master sailors, and it is they who have introduced the compass and the deep rudder into the sea.

Rhérionese: The Rhérionese come from west of the Toufelerne Mountains, from lands that are now under the control of the Emeb. After the Revelation of the Four they were brought to this world and became the first farmers, iron-workers, ship-builders and magic-users, having received this knowledge from their gods. Wandering east at the bidding of the Four, they moved into the area of Lake Navère.

Using their superior knowledge they quickly subdued the multitude of tribes wandering the woods of the South, either assimilating or exterminating them.

Peoples of Rhérionese extraction now populate almost the entire South. Rhérionese is the name given to the language they speak. A Rhérionese man is typically brown-eyed, with black, straight hair, and light brown skin.

Yronse: As the rise of Rhérion gradually drove the native tribes of Prionnerre to extinction, dribs and drabs of refugees fled north across the Sarenic Sea to settle in what would become known as Yroddyn. These remnants of the ancient culture gradually settled down into a recognizable group known as the Yronse.

The Yronse live in partially civilized circumstances, farming and fishing in small villages, but with little in the way of literacy, and with no cities, or even large towns. A typical Yron is brown or red-haired, with

a light complexion tending towards freckles. Horse-riding is a skill unknown to the Yronse, and fighting is done on foot with small swords, wooden shields, and leather armour.

These people speak Carinnyn, a mish-mash of a language with connections to Firinese (the Firin being distant relations).

Religion in Esterna

By far and away the most common religion in the East is worship of the Four. Each of these deities control one of the four elements and have multiple *aspects*, good and evil, reflecting the states in which this element may be encountered. These elemental gods control all parts of the universe through their aspects. These aspects may have different epithets, and certainly have different natures; some are beneficent, some are deadly.

Most of what is known about the Four comes from the *Elencias*, a holy book given to the first Rherionése through Orlacard, the first Rhérionese emperor, when they were brought to Esterna. It details the bargain between the Four and the Rhérionese, who were rescued from the ruins of a wrecked world and brought here by the power of the gods. The *Victolas*, though not holy in the strictest sense, then tells the story of the Four teaching the Rherionése the skills of civilization while they wandered east, following Prionnerre (see below) before they came to the shores of Lake Navère.

Ordimmon is the elemental deity of Earth. Most of his aspects are male, so Ordimmon is referred to as *He*. He is responsible for growth, mining, mountains, nature, and wine and beer. In His negative aspects he is associated with decay, death and plague, and earthquakes. It was He who taught men farming.

Ibelird is the other predominantly male deity. His area of concern is Fire. In His positive aspects He is the god of metalworking, civilization, of war and the Sun. In his negative aspects He is the god of destruction, of drought, and of anger and revenge. Ibelird taught the Rhérionese how to make weapons of iron.

Laucan is the goddess of Water. She is the patron of the sea, sailors, trade, exploration and discovery, and of the moon and stars. In Her negative aspect, She is the god of floods and storms, of insanity, of chance, and of the embodied undead. Laucan's gift was the knowledge needed to build ships and to sail them.

Finally, *Astardonnor* is the goddess of Air. As such She is the god of wind, music, and magic. In Her negative aspect, she is the god of lies, storms, and the spectral undead. Her gift to the Rhérionese was the greatest mystery of all: magic.

Each of the Four has a variety of supernatural companions that serve the Gods in a particular aspect, often acting as their agents. The most famous of these is Prionne, the White Crane, who flew ahead of the wandering Rhérionese and led them to Lake Navère. Its image appears on the crest of Oberèsse, the lands of the Four Pontiffs.

There are also well over a hundred official saints of the Church, and more are being added all the time. They are often prayed to for intercession in specific cases.

There are two primary strains in worship of the Four. *Observants* believe that the good and evil aspects of the Four are caused by the behaviour of their worshippers. If people were all good, the best aspects of the Four would rule triumphant, and a golden age would begin. Observants are, theoretically, always striving for good in an effort to defeat evil. This has numerous positive aspects, but Observants also have a nasty tendency to find scapegoats when something bad happens. Educated Observants do not believe in this basic cause and effect, and blame the effect on more general evils.

Diarchites, on the other hand, believe that the good and evil aspects of the Four are in balance, and must always remain in balance. This form is far less active, and placation of evil is the only way to mitigate its effects. Some twisted souls go so far as to actively promote evil, picturing themselves as serving a useful function in maintaining the Balance.

Diarchites are generally found in the South, excepting the ever-contrary Firin. Diarchites also make up the portion of those in Notberen who worship the Four. Observants are otherwise more common in Merucan, to the extent that Irvisa and Eintwarr are almost entirely Observant, as is Firincor.

Relations between Observants and Diarchites are cordial, if strained. Persecution of the minority sect in a given region happens now and again, but the worst is avoided because the Four Pontiffs that head the Church of the Four are often split evenly between the two sects. To date at least one voice has always remained to speak for the minority belief.

One tiny sect, the *Malefics*, contends that the evil aspects of the Four must ultimately be triumphant, resulting in the destruction of the flawed world and its replacement with Paradise. This view is considered anathema by both Observants and Diarchites, and this branch of Four worship is actively persecuted throughout Esterna.

Other religions in the East are relatively minor. The Idorjan worship Djolan the Whirling Singer, who is represented by a spinning swarm of gems that created the world with its song then dispersed, with some of its parts coming to rest in the ground and the rest becoming the stars. Idorjan tradition has it that the stars still watch over them to this day.

The Altveg are partially converted to worship of the Four, particularly in Angelsol, but many still worship their old gods. Chief of these is the Frost Man, a frightening, ice-clad being who holds the power of life and death over his people.

The Emeb worship a wide variety of spirits, which constrain every action of their people. A complex system of taboos and inter-relationships has sprung up, and define most of the Emeb's religious life.

Geography of Esterna

Arriceron, Gulf of: The southern coast of the Prionnerre has many harbours and coves. The largest of these stretches some seventy miles from the open ocean to the northeast, and is known as the Gulf of Arriceron. The free city of Trienne is located at its northern terminus.

Ayldis, The: A short, marshy river in Irvisa. The city of Fallris, seat of the Earl of Sundrene, is about 50 miles from its mouth.

Bassispear Island: A large island to the south of the Prenniam. Strategically, the island is like a cork in the mouth of the Sarenic Sea.

Bassispear Island is the main part of the County of Bassispear, which is part of the Kingdom of Irvisa.

Burga River: A river in the southern Prenniam, draining the southwest portion of Irvisa. The main portion of the earldom of Calimere is between the Burga in the west, and the Hedriat in the east.

Curyn Wood: The large forest that covers almost all of Yroddyn north of the river Lyssa.

Deorin: The hilly, uninhabited land between Yroddyn and Notberen, north of Irvisa. Often called “The Hinterlands” by Irvisans.

Engemian River: A 200-mile river flowing out of the foot of the Veridge Hills in eastern Agard, southeast into the Mitianic Ocean.

Espier, The: A river flowing from Lake Navère to the South Gate. Two of the great cities of the East are along its length: Alourie, where the river begins on the shores of Lake Navère, and Robancré at its mouth on the Sarenic Sea.

The Espier is the main artery into the centre of the South, and large amounts of river traffic can be found along it.

Felsens, The: The Eastlands are isolated from the rest of the continent by a great range of mountains that cover nearly all its western borders. In the south they are known as the Toufelerne Mountains (*cf.*), but in their northern reaches these mountains are called the Felsens.

In the south (the border between the Felsens and the Toufelerne is the hills between Eintwarr and Oberèsse), the Felsens are quite tall, over ten thousand feet on average. As they range north, they become lower and lower, until they are only about five thousand feet tall in the far north. Numerous passes cross them in this area.

As the Felsens become lower, they push out more and more hills in the direction of the coast, and the landscape of Upper Verroll is dominated by these. Hundreds of tiny villages can be found in the valleys between these hills and mountains, for the Felsens act as a trap for moist air blowing off the Sarenic and make the soil quite fertile.

Fuer Hills: These hills are located in north-western Rhérior. Their edge is considered to be the border between Oberèsse and Rhérior. The hills were once divided between the two nations, but in 1001 the Rhériorians invaded and conquered the portion that belonged to Oberèsse.

The Fuers are the site of mines of some importance. Copper can be found in the northernmost stretches.

Hedriat, The: A river in southeastern Irvisa, draining the eastern portion of Calimerse.

Hinterlands, The: (see *Deorin*)

Immerai, The: A river rising in the hills to the west of the city of Oberèsse, and flowing southeast to Lake Navère.

Infigalis River: A river in the southwest. Its headwaters are near the northern border of Malishas, and as it flows north it marks the border between Cologleuse and Romierve. It joins with the Meriat at Limorde.

Inverfel River: Rising in central Emblane, the Inverfel is a short river (some 120 miles) that is most notable for being the body of water on which sits the Irvisan capital on Arnsley. It is navigable for most of its length, and the power base of the old kings of Emblane was the taxes on goods passing in and out of the Inverfel's mouth.

Kaltuell Mountains, The: The Kaltuells are a major chain of mountains in the far north of Merucan. They stretch across all of Esterna from east to west. In the east their terminus forms Notberen, and gives that region its rugged character.

Very little can be said about these mountains, so far are they from any civilization.

Ledus, The: A river in central-eastern Agard. South of it, the land is relatively civilized, but to the north the region is generally uninhabited.

Meavyan, Lake: The second largest lake in Esterna (after Lake Navère), and the largest in Merucan. It can be found in northern Yroddyn, just south of the Kaltuell Mountains. The lands around the lake are completely uncivilized, and the only settlements are some fishing villages along the southern coast. Legends abound nevertheless, including those of a great serpent that lives in the waters.

Meriat, The: The Meriat is the longest river in Esterna, running some eight hundred miles from the foothills of the southern Toufelerne Mountains to Lake Navère.

The lower reaches of the river bear much traffic, and the capital of Romierve, Limorde, depends on it for its livelihood.

On the other hand, the upper reaches of the river are less-traveled, and fell creatures have occasionally been seen roaming its shores.

Merucan: "The North". The collective name for the lands north of the Sarenic Sea (*cf* Prionnerre). Specifically, these are Untell, Irvisa, Seodry, and the unorganized lands of Upper Verroll, Yroddyn, Deorin and Notberen. The League of Eintwarr (Lower Verroll) is also included, though it is not geographically part of the North.

Mitianic Ocean: The great ocean to the east and south of Esterna. Its extent is unknown.

In the north the Mitianic is not to be trifled with: great storms can blow up, particularly in the winter months, and sink any vessel. The south is more peaceful, but is known to house great sea serpents, which can sometimes be seen off the coast of Gedestrom.

Navère, Lake: This large freshwater lake dominates the central regions of the South, and three important nations surround it.

Rhérion controls the eastern half of the lake, and at the height of the Empire the lake was sometimes known as the Sea of Rhérion. These days Cologleuse dominates most of the remaining half, with Hieraud controlling a length of shore in the north-west. In times of war, naval units of Cologleuse and Rhérion have clashed over these waters.

The great city of Alourie is at the eastern end of the lake. Two great rivers, the Meriat and the Immerai, drain into it and one (the Espier) drains out.

Notberen: The Kaltuell mountains cause two fingers of land to jut out into the frigid Northern Mitianic Ocean. Inhabited by the fierce Altveg, these are known together as Notberen.

The southern finger is relatively populous, with several dozen tiny villages and smallholdings ruled by petty lords and jarls. The northern is nearly uninhabited, and is covered with wolf- and witch-infested woods. Only a few fishing villages manage to hang onto its southern coast.

Nysiane River: The longest river in Irvisa, running some 300 miles from its source deep in the Veridge Hills to the Sarenic Ocean. Until the middle of the last century, the river was something of a no-man's-land, with the lands to the north thinly settled by Irvisans due to constant raids from Yronse woodrunners. After Hildric's Rebellion, the Irvisan border was pushed further north, and the Nysiane became safe enough to carry traders into the center of Irvisa. The port of Ossa is at its mouth, and the city of Brintee lies in the Veridge Hills where the Nysiane meets the Taunis.

Oseburn: The river forming the nominal northeastern border of Irvisa, with Untell on the other side. In practice, the hundred or more miles of coast from the mouth of the Oseburn south to the mouth of the Ledus are uninhabited, as is the adjoining hinterland.

Parguerie, La: (see *South Gate, The*)

Prenniam, The: A large peninsula in Merucan, near the mouth of the Sarenic Sea. It makes up the bulk of the Kingdom of Irvisa.

Prionnerre: "The South". The collective name of Esterna south of the Sarenic Sea. Included are Oberèsse, Hieraud, Romierve, Cologleuse, Trienne, Angelsol, Rhérion, Robancre, Firincor, Locitagne and Gedestrom.

This area is almost coterminous with the lands once under control of the Rhérionese Empire; only Malishas is not considered to be in Prionnerre.

Named after Prionne, the mystical White Crane, who led the Rhérionese to Lake Navère.

Rani Forest: A large, heavily wooded area in central and western Romierve. It covers much of the central plain between the Meriat and the Infigalis, as well as the lower foothills of the Toufelerne Mountains.

Rydoc, The: A river in Yroddyn, flowing south from Lake Meavyan before turning west and meeting the Sarenic Sea.

Sarenic Sea: The convoluted, shallow sea between Merucan and Prionnerre.

South Gate, The: The strait between the Prenniam in the north and the lands of Robancre in the south. These waters must be traversed by anyone sailing from the Sarenic Sea to the Mitianic Ocean and vice versa. Known as *la Parguerie* in Rhérionese.

Taunis, The: A river in the Veridge Hills, in the northern Irvisan earldom of Agard. It is fast-running, and navigable for only about 15 miles upstream towards its source from the point at which it joins the larger Nysiane River. However, this short length of boat-worthy water leads into the richest mining territories in Irvisa. Considerable traffic runs up and down it from the mines to the city of Brintee, and back.

Toufelerne Mountains: The southern part of the mountain range which defines the western border of Esterna (*cf* Felsens, The). These are the tallest mountains known, reaching as high as thirteen thousand feet in a few places.

Many say that the Toufelernes are a fell place, especially where they touch Romierve "The Haunted Land". North of the Meriat River these tales carry less weight.

Veridge Hills: Just before the western end of the Kaltuell Mountains reaches Notberen it throws off a thick line of hills that heads nearly due south. These are known as the Veridge Hills.

At their south end these hills are low and forested, and cross the northern border of Irvisa into the Earldom of Agard. Some mining and stone quarrying takes place here.

Verroll: In the angle between The Felsens and the Kaltuell Mountains the land is hilly but fertile. People have settled here since time immemorial, though the area is not conducive to much more than isolated villages. In recent times this region is known as Verroll, or sometimes Upper Verroll (to distinguish it from the plains of Lower Verroll, where the League of Eintwarr can be found).

Wirtnaul, The: Formerly the northwestern border of Irvisa, after Hildric's Rebellion and conquest of the Browark this river serves as the border between the Irvisan earldoms of Agard and the Browark. To the south the lands are relatively civilized, while to the north the shores are almost entirely forested. In a few places, these marchlands are being tamed by Irvisan colonists, notably around the Browark's sole large town, Fentonbrech.

Yroddyn: This area consists of all the lands northwest of Irvisa, south of Lake Meavyan and west of the Veridge Hills. It is inhabited by the remnants of the primitive tribes who lived in the Eastlands over a thousand years ago.

As such it is still a wild land, with only tiny farming villages to be found anywhere. Many of the inhabitants forgo even that and subsist primarily on hunting.

Yroddyn south of the River Lyssa has been organized recently into the Kingdom of Seodry. In the past, Yroddyn has supported such rude kingdoms, but none has ever lasted.

Gazetteer of Esterna

Acherend (City)

Population: 48,000

A city in central Locitagne. Acherend is most famous for being the city in which the knowledge first laid down by the Four was systematized and extended.

In many ways, Acherend is a city of culture and learning, being home to the oldest university in the world (even older than that of Alourie), and the birthplace of many of the Eastlands' greatest philosophers.

Adelton (City)

Population: 9,100

The capital of the Earldom of Agard, and its second largest town. Located at the highest navigable point on the Engemian River, it grew to support the wood and mineral wealth being shipped out of the Veridge Hills. It cemented its position in the 700s by building the first major bridge across the Engemian.

Agard (Earldom)

Population: 150,000

Capital: Adelton

Other Major Cities: Brintee

Ethnicity: Irvisan (90%), Altveg (10%)

A large but sparsely-populated earldom in the north of Irvisa. Large swaths of virgin forest cover the earldom, and woodcutting and lumbering is the occupation of many. The southern Veridge Hills are found in the north of the Earldom, and some mining and stone quarrying happens there.

Allissante

(see Malishas)

Alourie (City)

Population: 71,000

The capital of Rhérion, located at the headwaters of the river Espier where it meets Lake Navère. Alourie is one of the largest cities in the world, though it is smaller and less important than it was three hundred years ago at the height of the Empire. The Emperor of Rhérion lives in this city for most of the year.

Alourie is a port, and makes much of its living on that basis; ships of ocean-going size can sail down the Espier then head east into the Sarenic Sea or west into the Mitianic Ocean. The same ships can also sail across Lake Navère, while smaller ships can travel up the Meriat as far as Limorde, or up the Immerai for some distance.

The city does not feed itself entirely from its hinterland; many barges cross from Hieraud carrying grain. This is an obvious weakness in times of war, so it is no surprise that naval units from Alourie control the eastern half of the Lake, and are prepared to try to control the rest if Cologleuse were one of the belligerents. These units are never seen in the Sarenic or Mitianic, however, as Robancre sits at the mouth of the Espier and refuses them passage. Rhérion has gone to war to remove this barrier, but has yet to succeed.

Angelsol (County)

Population: 1,100,000

Capital:

Other Major Cities:

Ethnicity: Rhérionese (65%), Altveg (34%), Idorjan (1%)



The County of Angelsol is theoretically held in fief to the Four Pontiffs in Oberèsse, but this is essentially a fiction, and the count is his own man. The Altveg became familiar with the region after serving as mercenaries in the wars between Rhérion and Oberèsse, and began settling here in the 880's. By 900 the Pontiffs had lost control of the region entirely. In return for an acknowledgment of Altveg control of the land, the Pontiffs negotiated an oath of fealty from the main Altveg contender to the "throne" of Angelsol, and a conversion to worship of the Four from his northern paganism. An annual gift of monies from Oberèsse was given in return. This arrangement has continued even after the Pontiffs' candidate won the field.

Since that time, Angelsol has become the most civilized of the Altveg nations, tightly organized and militarily powerful. Mercenaries and castle-builders from this land are in high demand.

Arnsley (City)

Population: 30,000

The main city of Emblane, and most populous in the Kingdom of Irvisa. Located at the mouth of the Inverfel River, on the east coast of the Prenniam.

Bassispear (County)

Population: 290,000

Capital: Conatry

Other Major Cities: None

Ethnicity: Rhérionese (60%), Altveg (30%), Irvisan (10%)

County Bassispear consists of Bassispear Island and its few small, outlying neighbours. It is ruled directly by King Perin II of Irvisa, under his title of Count Bassispear.

Bassispear was first colonized by the Rhérionese in the 150s as part of their program to dominate the Sarenic Sea. Apart from naval forces stationed on the south coast, Bassispear remained a backwater of fishing villages and fog during its time in the Empire.

Raids on Bassispear Island by Altveg began in the 810s, making the island one of the first lands to encounter them. By mid-century this had escalated to the point of colonization, with Altveg steadings cropping up all along the island's shore. Civil war in the South prevented much of a response, and by 841 the Altveg had extended their control over the whole island.

Most Altveg continued on to Angelsol or Gedestrom, however, and Bassispear Island once again dropped back into the second rank of importance. Only the occasional pirate staging his attacks from it reminded anyone of its existence.

In 993-4, one series of these attacks along the east coast of the Prenniam provoked the King of Irvisa to retaliate. Long a land power, Irvisa had been dragged into the sea by Perin I, and he perceived the island as the key to their future freedom of action between the Sarenic Sea and the Mitianic Ocean. Now he

struck to take it.

A series of lightning campaigns mopped up the divided and poorly equipped Altveg forces, and Bassispear became a county in the Kingdom of Irvisa.

The king's armies were based on and supplied through Conatry, a small fishing village on a wonderful bay on the south-west coast. They remained there for several years before the island was sufficiently subdued from them to leave. In that time, Conatry grew several-fold in size. The building of Conatry Castle has amplified this effect, as has the staging of several warships here to defend the waters between the island and Robancree.

Brintee (City)

Population: 11,000

The main town of Agard, located in the Veridge Hills at the confluence of the Nysiane and Taunis rivers. Rough-hewn and new, having been a tiny village not even 100 years ago, the city had grown rapidly since the conquest of the Browark opened the Nysiane for safe navigation. Prospectors have turned up silver and other valuable finds in the heavily wooded hills around the town, and Hollensmen traders have poured in considerable investment. The harbours of Ossa at the mouth of the Nysiane teem with goods from Brintee and surroundings, en route to lands all around the Sarenic Sea.

Browark, The (County Palatinate)

Population: 440,000

Capital: Fentonbrech

Other Major Cities: None

Ethnicity: Irvisan (63%), Yronse (35%), Idorjan (2%)

In 940, Adery I of Irvisa died and, his eldest son having predeceased him by several years, the crown fell to twelve-year-old Irvis II. An abortive rebellion by one of his uncles, Hildric, was crushed within a few weeks of Adery's death, but Hildric escaped to Yroddyn.

By mid-summer of that year he had convinced the woods runners of Yroddyn that the time was ripe for a wholesale invasion of Irvisa. Not incidentally, the confusion engendered by the war would also give Hildric the opportunity to seize the throne.

Irvis II showed himself to be made of sterner stuff than his uncle imagined, however, for by the coming of winter the invasion had been thrown back, and by the fall of 943 he had hunted Hildric down in the depths of Yroddyn. To do so he had had to subjugate a large section of eastern Yroddyn, almost to the headwaters of the river Lyssa. Having gone to the trouble of doing so, Irvis II annexed the lands and gave them in fief to various generals, kinsmen, and heroic troops. Eighty years of development have only begun to tame the Browark, but they are now an inseparable part of Irvisa.

The Browark is traditionally ruled by the Crown Prince of Irvisa in the name of the King. The King rules directly when the Crown Prince is not of age.

Burgamouth (City)

Population: 13,000

A small city at the outlet of the Burga River in Irvisa.

Calimerse (Earldom)

Population: 790,000

Capital: Glasdan

Other Major Cities: Burgamouth, Charcote

Ethnicity: Irvisan (95%), Altveg (4%), Idorjan (1%)

Calimerse was the largest and most important of the petty kingdoms that ruled in the Prenniam before Irvis the Great. During the turbulent times of the Altveg invasions it lost its pre-eminence to Emblane and was subsumed into the Kingdom of Irvisa. Calimerse was the last and most difficult of Irvis the Great's conquests and, after it was taken in 899, Irvis declared his Kingdom.

To this day, Calimerse remains the most restive of Irvisa's lands, and rebellions tend to break out every generation. Despite their land's size and population, the Earls of Calimerse remain out of the circles of government, for the king never quite has the power to clean out the earldom's nobility, and can't trust them until he does.

The earldom is located in the south of the Prenniam, and controls the west coast as far as Sundrene.

Calimerse has the best soil of any land in Irvisa. If peace could come for any length of time, it would probably be completely cleared for farmland, but the periodic warfare has kept a few areas wooded and unused. Fishing is also important, as the shallow waters of the South Gate are conducive to sea creatures.

Charcote: (Town)

Population: 5,100

A small city in southern Irvisa, Charcote owes its existence to sitting in the middle of some of the best agricultural land in Merucan. The surrounding countryside feeds many in Irvisa and—perhaps related—the men and women of the region are proverbially handsome and beautiful.

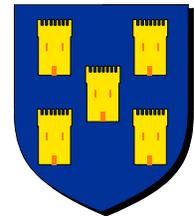
Cologleuse (Kingdom)

Population: 6,300,000

Capital:

Other Major Cities:

Ethnicity: Rhérionese (99%), Idorjan (1%)



This land was once a pastoral province of the Empire of Rhérion. During Almancaris' War, however, it was on the front-lines after Allissante fell in 756.

For most of the next ten years Cologleuse was in chaos, with the upper hand belonging to whichever faction had troops in any given area, the Emeb or the Empire. In 766 a desperate attack on Almancaris by rag-tag local militia led to his death and the end of the war, but not before the Empire's hold on the region was lost. Preoccupied with civil war in and around Alourie itself, Rhérion left Cologleuse to its own devices.

Cologleuse is intrinsically a rich land and, in the few years of breathing space it received while the Emeb sorted out their succession and the Empire fought itself in the east, it recovered enough to support a large force of battle-trying veterans in a strongly feudal framework.

The nation's borders with the Emeb and with Rhérion are dotted with strong fortresses, heavily garrisoned, which have proven sufficient to throw back an invasion from any direction, and even one set of

attacks from both major fronts simultaneously. The Altveg, to their sorrow, have found the fighting men of Cologleuse can give as good as they get during sea-borne raids too.

Many of these fighting men belong to militaristic religious orders. Having nearly been converted to Emeb pasturelands by main force, Cologleuse takes civilization and the worship of the Four very seriously, and many missionaries in Yroddyn, Untell and Notberen are from here.

Conatry (Town)

Population: 3,100

Once a small fishing village, Conatry has grown in importance in the last twenty years. Situated at the base of a fine harbour on Bassispear Island, the town is a natural port-of-call for ships coming from all points of the compass. A good day will see the docking of a half-dozen cogs, barques and caravels from as far away as Wechtenstell, Trienne and the ports of Lake Navère.

There is a strong military presence in Conatry between the Irvisan garrison living in Conatry Castle and a force of warships that are based in the harbour and patrol the waters between Bassispear Island and Robancre.

Cormorant Islands(Barony)

Population: 400

Capital: Newbury

Other Major Cities: None

Ethnicity: Irvisan (100%)

In 996 the *Coronet*, a ship out of Arnsley headed for Trienne, was caught in a storm north of Gedestrom and was blown for several days east-south-east. Once the wind subsided she began working her way back to the coast and came across a group of uninhabited islands some three hundred nautical miles off the mainland.

The *Coronet* re-watered and re-supplied, completed its trading run, then reported the landing to the Mariner's College in Arnsley on their return. King Perin I, always interested in the sea, soon got wind of the discovery and sponsored an expedition to the islands, which were named the Cormorants, for the tremendous number of sea-birds that could be found there.

After successfully mapping the islands, the expedition returned. The King claimed the lands, and arranged for a barony to be given to one of the more valourous knights of the Bassispear Campaign, based on the islands.

In the quarter-century since then these outlying lands have fared well with farming, fishing, and harvesting the exotic products of the islands. Rumour has it that King Perin II, continuing his father's work, will be using these islands as a base for exploration of the Southern Seas.

Cyard

(see Obersey and Cyard)

Eintwarr, League of (Plutocracy)

Population: 1,800,000

Capital: Wechtenstell

Other Major Cities: Lebecht, Nordhar

Ethnicity: Hollensman (85%), Yronse (12%), Idorjan (3%)

The southern part of the region known as Verroll is flat, adequately watered, and well-suited to farming. It is not surprising, then, that a multitude of tiny hamlets, small villages, and medium-sized towns has sprung up here. Protected from the Altveg by distance, and from the Emeb by the Toufelerne Mountains, little in the way of a feudal structure developed here. Instead, each town—or small group of towns—tended to its own affairs through common consent, councils of elders, and what have you.

As advanced knowledge gradually trickled its way north from the ship-building centres of the South, it was natural for the coastal fishing villages to start trading along the western edge of the Sarenic Sea. The interior towns, already used to trafficking in the salted fish the sea villages had produced for centuries, began circulating the new goods that found their way here from Irvisa and the South. Each year the trade grew more important, and the distances traveled grew longer.

Before long, great trading houses had sprung up, and these naturally moved to control the flow of goods through the towns they were based in. Political control came not long after that.

The houses then went through a period of intense competition, but as fewer and fewer (and larger and larger) were left, alliances were forged and pacts signed.

One of these, the League of Eintwarr, eventually expanded to cover the entire coast of the region, and a large chunk of the interior. At the present time some twenty major towns and one hundred smaller villages are part of the League. In each of these, guilds and unions control the economic life of all.

The entire system of governing councils and guild masters is almost too complex to believe, but it works well. Eintwarr is the most prosperous region of Esterna.

Emblane (Earldom)

Population: 610,000

Capital: Arnsley

Other Major Cities: Farhaugh, Wolling

Ethnicity: Irvisan (95%), Altveg (4%), Idorjan (1%)

Emblane was the kingdom of Irvis I and the base of his power as he conquered the rest of the lands that were to be named for him. After his conquests and the declaration of the kingdom (900), Emblane became an Earldom, with the King of Irvisa also being the Earl of Emblane.

The earldom is situated in the eastern half of the Prenniam, between Calimerse in the south and Agard in the north.

It is populous for its size, so most of the land that can be used for farming is under the plow. Most forests are carefully managed by the King's sheriffs, for the purposes of woodcutting, hunting, and charcoal making.

The east coast itself is somewhat windblown, mostly consisting of heath, with cliffs dominating the northern half. Arnsley is situated on one of the few large harbours along the coast, at the mouth of the

Inverfel River (which reaches some fifty miles inland). A myriad of little nooks shelter the fishing boats of dozens of villages up and down the shore.

Fallris (City)

Population: 16,000

The capital of Sundrene Earldom in Irvisa, Fallris is a poor city with a bad reputation for lawlessness. Its main reason for existence is its defensible position in the swampy ground along the Ayldis River.

Fentonbrech: (Town)

Population: 1,300

The sole settlement of any great size in the Browark, this is the starting point for Irvisan colonization of the new earldom. Nominally ruled by the Crown Prince of Irvisa, the town is usually given to some skilled military administrator who can keep the Yronse barbarians in check.

The sole bridge across the River Wirtnaul is here, at the easily defensible loop in the river that holds the town, and about twenty miles upstream from the supply that can be offered by the sea. Grants of virgin land within twenty miles are often given to knights worthy of promotion to baron, in return for their carving new settlements out of the woods.

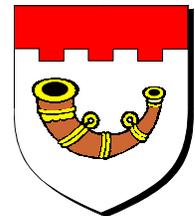
Firincor(Kingdom)

Population: 170,000

Capital:

Other Major Cities:

Ethnicity: Firin (87%), Rhérionese (10%), Idorjan (3%)



As Rhérion extended its reach around the shores of Lake Navère and beyond, they usually pushed the wandering, primitive tribes of the South out of the region entirely.

The people of Firincor, right next to Alourie but protected by the hills they call home, were an exception to this. Rhérion's superiority came from the skills they were taught by the Four, but the Firin quickly learned how to work metal and to farm, and for a time were able to hold on to their mountain fortresses.

By 300 the amount of force the Alourians could bring to bear on Firincor was too great, and after the Battle of Aimery Hill, the lords of Firincor submitted to the Empire.

For the next three hundred and fifty years, Firincor's craggy landscape (and the lack of decent ports along the coast) served to keep it isolated from the mainstream of Rhérionese society. Few of Rhérionese extraction could be persuaded to settle here. Most of the interaction between Rhérion and its fractious province came in the form of taxes going one way and punitive expeditions going the other when the taxes didn't.

When the Altveg invasions came in the 800's, Firincor was once again nearly untouched (excepting a raid that moved east after sailing up the Espier, and was promptly decimated). As Alourie's control slipped, Firincor rose up in revolt yet again, and this time established its independence.

The heroic Gareic clan was declared royal, and a new, belligerent kingdom declared in 868.

Firhaugh (Town)

Population: 6,700

A small city in wooded western Emblane, in central Irvisa. Once the source of Emblane's ship timber and masts, the surrounding region has long since been logged out and turned to farms. Untell supplies most ship materials these days.

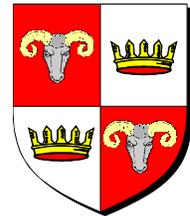
Gedestrom (Kingdom)

Population: 130,000

Capital: Jedungsborg

Other Major Cities:

Ethnicity: Altveg (50%), Rhérionese (50%)



This island was once the Barony of Manderne, subordinate to the Duke of Locitagne until 860. In that year, Altveg raiders landed in force and quickly took over the entire island. This led to a crisis in Rhérion itself, which led to the secession of Locitagne from the Empire, and prevented any concerted counter-attack. The raiders soon established a small kingdom in the land, Gedestrom.

Gedestrom is a hot land, and dry, with stony soils and large, bare outcroppings of rock in the centre of the island. Most of the farmable land is in a stretch along the south coast, but smallholdings dot the remainder of the island.

One notable feature of the island is Jedungsborg, a fortified castle-town that has never been taken by force. Only treachery led to its capture in 860.

Glasdan (City)

Population: 22,000

The main city of Calimerse, formerly the seat of the Kings of Calimerse, and now the home of the region's earl.

Hieraud (Kingdom)

Population: 3,700,000

Capital:

Other Major Cities:

Ethnicity: Rhérionese (96%), Idorjan (4%)



Hieraud is another former duchy of the Rhérionese Empire. It occupies all the lands between the Meriat and Immerai rivers. This is the best farmland in the South, extending west to the foothills of the Toufel-erne Mountains.

Hieraud is weakly ruled and teeters on the verge of chaos at most times. The region is a breadbasket for the countries around it, and only an interest in keeping the balance of power has kept it from being carved up by its more powerful neighbours.

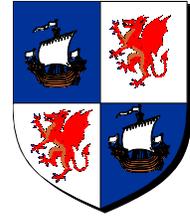
Irvisa(Kingdom)

Population: 2,330,000

Capital: Arnsley

Other Major Cities: Brintee, Glasdan, Fallris, Burgamouth, Sarnere

Ethnicity: Irvisan (79%), Yronse (7%), Rhérionese (7%), Altveg (6%), Idorjan (1%)



A kingdom in the east of the continent. It is composed of the Prenniam, the island of Bassispear, and sundry islands scattered throughout the Mitianic Ocean.

The Kingdom consists of five earldoms (still referred to, anachronistically, as the Five Kingdoms): Agard, Calimere, Emblane, Obersey and Cyard, and Sundrene . Each was once a petty kingdom, but in the chaos engendered by the Altveg invasions during the ninth century, Irvis of Emblane managed to conquer them all and drive the Altveg back into the sea. Since then the “kingdoms” have been ruled by Earls instead, a title peculiar to Irvisa (and reckoned by heralds as the equivalent of, but slightly inferior to, a Duke). All owe fealty to Irvis and his heirs. Emblane is the core of the kingdom, and is ruled by the King directly, under his title as the Earl Emblane. The king also rules Bassispear and the Browark, which are not counted among the Five Kingdoms.

Jedungsborg (Town)

Population: 1,100

A fortified town in Gedestrom, immensely strong. Whoever controls this keep will find Gedestrom easy to defend, or conquer.

Lebecht (City)

Population: 21,000

A rising commercial city in Eintwarr, growing quickly and taking business from Nordhar and nearby Wechtenstell (much to their chagrin).

Limorde (City)

Population: 51,000

Capital city of the Kingdom of Romierve. It is located at the confluence of the Infigalis River and the Meriat. It is a rich town, as it is the natural point for shipments of rich metals and minerals from the southern Toufelerne Mountains. It is also along the natural trade route between the Eastlands and the lands of the Emeb.

Locitagne (Kingdom)

Population: 7,700,000

Capital: Navien

Other Major Cities: Acherend

Ethnicity: Rhérionese (85%), Altveg (10%) Firin (3%), Idorjan (2%)

Until 861 a province of Rhérion, but now independent.

In 860, Altveg raiders took Manderne, an island barony that was part of Locitagne, aided by treachery from the Emperor’s seneschal. A crisis precipitated that saw Locitagne secede from the Empire and, with the aid of Cologleuse, transform itself into an independent kingdom with Acherend as the capital. Further invasions into the south around Navien planted several Altveg colonies that were only reconquered

with difficulty through the remainder of the ninth century and into the early tenth; Trienne remains in Altveg hands to this day. The king's court was moved to Navien in 920 after the reconquest was essentially complete.

Found in the far southeast, Locitagne is pleasant and warm. Not surprisingly, the region is known for its wines, olives and citrus fruits.

This is the most populous and urban of the many lands once under the control of Rhérion.

Malishas (Emirate)

Population:

Capital:

Other Major Cities:

Ethnicity: Emeb (95%), Rhérionese (5%)

Malishas was once the south-westernmost of Rhérion's provinces, at which time it was known as Allissante. When the Empire struck at Almancaris' growing nation (further still to the south and east) and failed, Emeb armies poured into Allissante, subjugated it, and used it as a base for further attacks against the Empire.

Eventually Almancaris' death ended the war, but Allissante was never recovered. Almost entirely depopulated by the fighting, Allissante was settled by the Emeb, who called the area Malishas.

Malishas is very distant from the centres of Emeb power, and the Emir rules as he wishes, with only nominal tribute heading south. The Emirate grows rich off the exotic goods which pass through it on their way to the East, including mercury, spices and paper.

Manderne

(see Gedestrom)

Navien (City)

Population: 68,000

The most populous city of Locitagne. This is the seat of the king, and the site of a strong castle. It was under the control of the Altveg for a short time in the late ninth century.

Nordhar (City)

Population: 27,000

The second most populous city in the League of Eintwarr, and Wechtenstell's primary competition in the west of the Sarenic Sea.

Oberèsse, Pontifacy of (Duchy)

Population: 2,200,000

Capital: Oberèsse

Other Major Cities:

Ethnicity: Rhérionese (90%), Hollensman (10%)



The Four Pontiffs have had their residences in the city of Oberèsse since the early 300s. At first their lands were tiny, little more than the city itself and some surrounding hinterland. Through donations from pious Rhérionese and (after the collapse of the Empire) outright conquest, the Pontifacy has since extended its temporal sway over a considerable area. The Duchy is technically in fief to the Emperor, but since 770 Rhérion has had no say in Oberèsse's affairs that it hasn't imposed by force.

That said, in recent times Rhérion has been making inroads into the Pontiffs' sovereignty. Oberèsse was severely weakened when Angelsol—all of Oberèsse's coast—was taken by Altveg. Eintwarr has since successfully resisted their efforts to expand into the Gap (the lands between Eintwarr and Angelsol along the Sarenic Sea). This weakness was exploited by Alourie just twenty years ago when it went to war to wrest the Fuer Hills from Oberèsse's control.

Obersey and Cyard (Earldom)

Population: 80,000

Capital: Sarnere

Other Major Cities: None

Ethnicity: Irvisan (95%), Yronse (5%)

The smallest earldom of Irvisa, composed of two islands of the same names, which can be found to the immediate west of the Prenniam. Obersey is the smaller and more southerly of the two, but more populous. Cyard is mostly forested, but maintains a population of fishermen and woodcutters.

Unlike the other three earldoms that were taken by Irvis I, Obersey and Cyard submitted peacefully to Emblane when the young queen of the land married Crown Prince Adery, son of Irvis I and the future second King of Irvisa. The blood of Obersey's royal family still runs strong in the Irvisan royal family.

Ossa (Town)

Population: 4,400

A godforsaken fishing village until 943, when the Browark was subjugated by King Adery of Irvisa, Ossa is now a small but rapidly growing city on the shores of the Sarenic Sea. Situated at the mouth of the Nysiane river, which drains much of central Irvisa, it is the trans-shipment point for goods coming out of the Prenniam, or going in.

As a result, Ossa is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Irvisa, with the Irvisan population heavily salted by traders from the League of Eintwarr, Altveg *en route* from the north to the south, and Yronse mercenaries headed for wherever they may be needed.

Rhérion (Empire)

Population: 7,200,000

Capital: Alourie

Other Major Cities:

Ethnicity: Rhérionese (96%), Firin (3%), Idorjan (1%)



This land, once the most important and expansive in the world, is much diminished in modern times. Now only the lands to the north-east and immediate south-east of Lake Navère swear allegiance to the Emperor in Alourie. This area is the former core of the Empire, however, and still has great strength.

The southern part of the land is pastoral, with low rolling ridges leading up to the border with Locitagne harboring sheep herds, the wool of which is famous throughout Esterna. The north is more suited to farming, and the north-west is rich in ores and metals.

The river Espier divides the land in two, running from Lake Navère to the border with Firincor and Robancre. Much traffic plies up and down its course, enriching the coffers of the Emperor. This is also true for the eastern reaches of Lake Navère itself, which are a natural highway into the centre of the South. Alourie dominates the point at which the river and lake meet.

Robancre (Republic)

Population: 900,000

Capital: Robancre

Other Major Cities: None

Ethnicity: Rhérionese (90%), Firin (4%), Altveg (4%), Idorjan (2%)

The Robancrese Republic was born out of the chaos of the late ninth century. As Rhérion seethed with civil war, Robancre “The Second City of the Empire” rose in revolt. The taxes levied by Alourie had become far too heavy for the liking of Robancre’s elite, and after a sharp series of campaigns, it secured its independence.

Over the last one hundred and fifty years a succession of governments has come and gone through the city, including outright autocracies, military insurrections, and guild-backed oligarchies. The current government came to power after the fiasco of the Short War of 1012 against Irvisa over Bassispear Island. Now any native Robancrese of “notability” (a characteristic decided by those already within the government) can meet and discuss the issues at the Assembly of Notables. The Notables are generally the likes of major traders, sages, doctors and magicians. At the moment they number some 300 out of the city’s population of 54,000.

The city is at the mouth of the Espier River, and as such can (and has) cut off Alourie’s access to the coast. Several wars have been fought between the Empire and Robancre, but the Robancrese can put together a formidable group of allies (often including the likes of Firincor, Irvisa and the League of Eintwarr) who are interested in limiting Rhérionese power at the head of the Sarenic Sea.

Robancre controls a considerable area around the city, including some coast along the Mitianic Ocean.

One area of concern is the growing port of Conatry on Bassispear Island. It competes directly for ships running through the South Gate, and its success is starting to impact on Robancrese revenues.

Romierve (Kingdom)

Population: 1,500,000

Capital: Limorde

Other Major Cities:

Ethnicity: Rhérionese (90%), Idorjan (10%)

Giant stone constructions dot the landscape of the East, the only remnants of peoples who lived in this area even before the tribes that were displaced by the Rhérionese. Romierve has a higher concentration of these than anyplace else, and this may be why it is sometimes referred to as “The Haunted Land”.

The people that live here are odd, and in a way that is hard to pin down. It may be simple isolation—Romierve has never really recovered from the depredations of the Emeb, and the area is underpopulated for its size—or it may be something more. Rumours are heard on occasion of ancient rituals taking place in nearly forgotten villages in the foothills of the Toufelerne Mountains. Weres and undead are known to have roamed the fens to the south of the upper reaches of the Meriat in years past, and may still do so to this day.

Even Limorde, in the far north-east corner of Romierve, is a touch strange, built as it is from the sombre grey stone and the dark wood of the area. Ships sailing from Lake Navère will almost never go further up the Meriat than here, for most sailors have a superstitious fear of doing so.

The Idorjan have made Romierve something of a second homeland, and they are found here in greater concentration than anyplace else east of the mountains.

Sarnere (City)

Population: 14,000

The sole city of note in the Irvisan earldom of Obersey and Cyard, Sarnere is a port on the second island's southern coast. In general, Obersey and Cyard lacks useful harbours, but Sarnere is protected by a sandbank, Pernarin Island, three miles long and about a half mile off the coast.

The earldom is rather poor, even by northern standards, so the Sarnere have turned to the sea, fishing the shallows around their island, and trading with mainland Irvisa and points more distant. A disproportionate fraction of the crews for Irvisan naval and merchant vessels hail from here.

Seodry (Kingdom)

Population: 110,000

Capital:

Other Major Cities:

Ethnicity: Yronse (97%), Idorjan (3%)

This is the newest kingdom of the east, having been founded by King Lor in 1001. Lor still sits on the throne, but he is becoming an old man. Whether or not the kingdom can survive his death remains to be seen. He has three sons.

Seodry is found in Yroddyn, south of the River Lyssa. It touches the Browark on its eastern edge.

The kingdom runs almost entirely on the amber trade, with the funds from that being used to pay King Lor's army. As long as the money continues to come in, the people of this land will have an advantage over their more primitive cousins elsewhere in Yroddyn.

Sundrene (Earldom)

Population: 120,000

Capital: Fallris

Other Major Cities: Ossa

Ethnicity: Irvisan (98%), Yronse (1%), Idorjan (1%)

The smallest of the mainland earldoms of Irvisa, Sundrene is wedged between Agard and Calimerse on the west coast of the Prenniam. Until the conquest of the Browark, northern Sundrene was subject to raids by Yronse tribesmen, but now that that border is better secured, the region is growing fast. The new town of Ossa, at the mouth of the Nysiane river, is the most important port on the west coast of the Prenniam.

Trienne (Duchy)

Population: 120,000

Capital: Trienne

Other Major Cities:

Ethnicity:

Until the mid-800's, Trienne was a sleepy fishing village located at the head of the Gulf of Arriceron. Around that time, the Altveg of Gedestrom became aware of the rich cities of the Emeb down the coast south-west of Cologleuse. Always ones for making a profit, they seized Trienne as a good stop-over spot for expeditions to the south.

Trienne was one of only a half-dozen towns taken along the south coast of Locitagne, but all the rest have since been re-taken. One effect of this is that Trienne is the last remaining Duchy in fief to Gedestrom, but this is in name only: Trienne and surrounding area are nearly as populous as all of Gedestrom (Trienne proper has a population of some 30,000). Undoubtedly the Duke of Trienne has considered trying to invade Gedestrom and reverse the situation, but the stronghold of Jedungsborg makes this idea iffy.

Untell (Kingdom)

Population: 250,000

Capital:

Other Major Cities:

Ethnicity: Altveg (95%), Rhérionese (5%)

Untell was, until 838, almost completely uninhabited. Heavily forested, it had been passed over by the many peoples that have washed over Esterna.

In that year an expedition from Rhérion, charged with ending Altveg raids from nearby Notberen, landed on its shores and began the process of setting up a long-term base from which to choke off the raiders' sea routed.

Before the project could really get underway, however, the Northmen got wind of the settlements and swooped down on them. They fell easily and more than a few Altveg decided to stay, partly to prevent any recurrence of the threat and partly because the Rhérionese had done most of the grunt work of clearing some of the forests for farmland.

Untell remains relatively unaffected by civilization. Settlement is almost entirely along the coast, with a few villages being found further inland along the rivers that wend their way down from the Veridge Hills.

The trees of Untell's forests are particularly tall and well suited for making ship's masts. Most ships in Irvisa have one for their main mast.

Usül (Town)

Population: 2,600

The lands of Notberen are divided into literally dozens of smallholdings and petty kingdoms. Usül commands the largest of these.

The buildings in Usül are low-lying and large, with thatched roofs. The town itself is surrounded by a wooden stockade, which has a deep ditch dug around its entire length.

Wechtenstell (City)

Population: 33,000

The League of Eintwarr contains dozens of semi-independent cities and towns. Wechtenstell is the most important of these, having been one of the main architects of the entire league.

Wechtenstell is found in the southern part of the League, where the land is fairly flat. It is a port of the Sarenic Sea, and the main port of call on its west coast. From here, goods travel into all the lands between Oberèsse and where civilization finally peters out north of Verroll.

Wolling (Town)

Population: 3,800

The largest settlement on the old trading road between Glasdan and Arnsley in Irvisa.

Culture of Esterna

Arra: A silver coin minted in Irvisa. Currently slightly more valuable than the Rhérionese regnier by about 11 to 10.

Damask Rose, Order of: This is an order of cloistered monks originally devoted to extending the knowledge given to the Rhérionese by the Four. Since their foundation they have branched out into understanding all aspects of the world. Aspirants are taught logic and literacy, then move on to some field of study.

The order is named for the greatest accomplishment of their founder Giautir, a monk devoted to the horticultural knowledge passed down by Ordimmmon.

Elencias: The holy book of the Four, miraculously given word-for-word to Saint Orlacard in the first days of the Rhérionese in this world. It outlines the laws of the Four, and the knowledge they gave to their people. It is supplemented by the *Victolas*.

Haldis: The most valuable silver coin in Esterna, minted by a variety of cities in the League of Eintwarr. The Hollensmen have a reputation for honesty and stable currency, so the haldis is worth about half again as much than an arra, a bit more still than a post-Imperial regnier, and about equal to an old Imperial regnier (not that there are very many of these left in circulation).

King's Ride: A game, originally invented by the Altveg, which has become common throughout Esterna. It requires two players, and a nine-by-nine board.

			R	R	R			
				R				
				W				
R				W				R
R	R	W	W	K	W	W	R	R
R				W				R
				W				
				R				
			R	R	R			

Pieces are white and red, with the King piece belonging to the white player. The pieces are arranged as shown at left. The object of the game for the red player is to capture the King; the object for the white player is to move the King off the board.

All pieces move horizontally or vertically as far as the player wishes to move them, unless there is another piece (of any colour) in the way. Only the King may occupy the central square. The central square is usually coloured differently or ornamented in some fashion to remind the players of this.

A piece is captured by placing two pieces of opposing colour on either side of it, either horizontally or vertically. The King may not assist in a capture, and a piece may move to a square that has two opposing pieces on either side of it (i.e., one of the two pieces has to be moved into place by the capturing player for the capture to take place). The exception to this rule is the King, which must be surrounded on all four sides for it to be captured and for red to win the game.

Orlacard, Saint: The first emperor of the Rhérionese, who ruled a thousand years ago in the first days after that tribe was brought to the world.

As part of the bargain with the Four that saved them, the Rhérionese had their memories blanked: the knowledge that ruined their former world was removed from them. Orlacard was given the *Elencias*, the holy book of the Four, in his mind so that he could teach his bereft people. Eventually he wrote it down, as he also penned the *Victolas*, the tale of the Rhérionese putting the teachings of the Four to work, their wanderings to the shores of Lake Navère, and the founding of Alourie.

He eventually died in the year 78, as much as a hundred years old depending on his age when his memories were taken and he was transported with his people to this world. Since then he has been canonized, and is a popular saint in the prayers of the Rhérionese.

Regnier: The silver coin of the old empire of Rhérion, and the name now used for the the main silver coin in most countries of the south. The exact value of each depends on which country's it is, as varying amounts of silver are used. Each is usually stamped with the face of the ruler, at the time, of the country that minted it; this is also important knowledge for silver content has varied over time as well as place.

Tiercet: A copper coin used throughout the South, equal to one thirtieth of a regnier.

Victolas: The second of the two books that outline worship of the Four. It is not technically holy like its senior book, the *Elencias*, as it was not revealed by the gods but rather consists of the tales and thoughts of Saint Orlacard from he days the Rherionése followed the White Crane from west of the Toufelerne Mountains to the shores of Lake Navère. Still, the words of the first Emperor of Rhérion carry great weight, even 1000 years after his death.

The Kings of Irvisa

Irvis I “The Great” (884-919): Irvis I was king of Emblane from 884 onwards. At that time the Prenniam was reeling under the attacks of the Altveg. Altveg villages were popping up all along the east coast, and it would presumably only be a matter of time before the whole region became like Gedestrom or Untell: an Altveg colony.

It was Irvis who changed this. Going on the offensive, he first expanded his then-landlocked kingdom to the east coast. Others had tried to defend against the Altveg, but Irvis’ innovation was to quickly construct a series of strongpoints along the coast to defend against the sea-borne Altveg, and to cut their supply lines if they tried to move inland. These strongpoints were little more than small wooden towers atop man-made hills, which in turn were surrounded by a wooden palisade, but this let them be thrown up in next to no time, and were sufficient to stymie any raiders. Invasions strong enough to overcome the defenses would hopefully be held long enough for Irvis’ army to amass and fight back.

By 889 he had secured Emblane, and the southeastern third of Agard (which was necessary to cut off the Altveg land route from Untell). The threat of raids was effectively quelled. At this point, Irvis seemed to change his goals, and he began adding the other lands of the Prenniam to his crown. Sundrene fell quickly in 891, which made the rest of Agard easy to take the next season. Obersey and Cyard submitted peacefully in 894 when the Crown Prince Adery of Emblane was married to the young queen of that kingdom. It then took another five years to completely subdue the last of the remaining kingdoms, Calimere, but by the fall of 899 this was done.

On the first day of 900, immediately after the winter solstice, Irvis declared the Kingdom of Irvisa. The kingdom was to contain five earldoms, each corresponding approximately to the Five Kingdoms.

Irvis spent the next two decades securing his kingdom. He promulgated the first written code of law in all of Merucan, and built roads and solid castles throughout the peninsula.

Adery (919-940): The twenty-one years of Adery’s reign were relatively uneventful. He quelled a rebellion in Calimere during 926-7, and worked to secure the frontier with Yroddyn from incursions by Yronse warriors.

Irvis II (940-984): Adery I’s eldest son died in 938, so when the old king died in 940, the crown of Irvisa passed to his grandson, who was proclaimed Irvis II. Young Irvis was only twelve years old at the time, and had to fight off a rebellion by his uncle Hildric and an invasion by Yronse from the north-west to secure his throne. See the entry on the Browark in the Gazetteer of Esterna for more details.

This war added the Browark to his lands, which was just as well, for shortly thereafter the Calimere Rebellion of 944 broke out. Again Irvis II was to be victorious.

Finally, he was to fight a war on the north-east frontier against Untell. His victory at the Battle of Dolmen Burn ended Altveg incursions into Agard from that direction.

During Irvis II’s reign, the King’s Army—a standing force of longbowmen, armoured cavalry and Holensman pike squares—was organized.

Trimbond (984-986): The eldest son of Irvis II, he died in the plague of 986.

Perin I “The Mariner” (986-1019): Trimbond died childless, so the crown of Irvisa passed to Irvis II’s second son. Perin had become interested in the sea before he became king, and his obsession came with

him to the throne. It was he that set up the Mariner's College in Arnsley. Studies of the problems of sea-going vessels led to the addition of deep tillers to ships, and the discovery of the compass. Irvisan ships were soon seen in ports as far away as Trienne.

Meanwhile, Altveg raids (though far less troublesome than before), continued along the east coast of the Prenniam. Perin I eventually used his burgeoning sea power to crush the Altveg settlements on Bassispear Island, and added those lands to his crown in 994.

Perin I successfully defended these new lands from Robancrese invasion in 1012, destroying the Robancrese fleet in the South Gate shortly before they were to disembark their land forces. Those few Robancrese military men who made it to land were rapidly mopped up by the garrison from Conatry Castle.

The Cormorant Islands were also discovered and claimed during Perin I's reign.

Perin II (1020-): Perin I died two days before the winter solstice between 1019 and 1020. He is now succeeded by his son, Perin II. The few months of his reign have not given us much to judge him on.



Kaltuell Mountains

Lands of the Wagon-Riders

Emeb Lands

The Felsens
Toufelerne Mountains

Verrolli

Eintwarr

Wechtenstell

Angelsol

Obèresse

Hieraud

Romierve

Cogleuse

Trienne

Lake Meavyan

Yroddyn

Lyssa

Seodry

Cyard

Obersey

Fuer Hills

Alouric

Lake Navère

Rherion

Locitagne

Navien

Veridge Hills

Irvisa

Arnsley

Bassispear Island

The South Gate

Robancre

Espir

Firincor

Acherend

Notberen

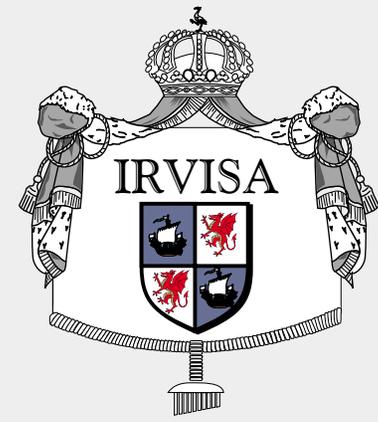
Sohn Bay

Ustil

Mitianic Ocean

Gedestrom

Gulf of Arriceron



As prepared by the Mariners College of Arnsley, 1020
 1 inch to 50 miles