

## Introduction

Based on background elements received thus far, these are some useful details about Drakaris, the land the PC's originate from. More details will be added as submitted backgrounds require them, so don't feel prevented from what you want to do. If you need a nation of roving barbarian warlords who ride elephants to exist, rest assured, it shall spring into existence. Most of this is background material, the actual Campaign opens somewhere else entirely, on the other side of Hashsah claiming what he is owed.

## Darkness and Obscurity

Large swaths of Drakaris are shrouded in darkness, supernatural and otherwise. In the farthest north the sun is hidden half the year in the natural progression of seasons. It's no surprise, either, that the deep halls of the dwarves are plunged in darkness. But the darkness shrouding the land of Wisteria is more sinister and magical in origin, and in the forests of the Khalivack, the dense mist that covers the land is the work of benign spirits—or at least spirits that bend to the will of mortals, for good and evil. The people of all these lands have adapted to a hostile environment. Punishing storms are frequent across the land, foreshadowed by howling winds and then drenching rain. Where the sun never dries the ground, mud is a constant fact of life. The crops that grow are strange and bitter. For most people, there is no safety outside the radius of a torch's glow.

## The Land is Dangerous

Civilization dots through the land as islands of light surrounded by the unforgiving terrain of shadowy forests, rough mountainscapes, and sinking bogs. Travelers are often met with suspicious gazes by locals who have never left the isolation of their home village.

Relentless threats assault humanity. Vicious creatures hunt wandering children and armed travelers alike, many of whom are never heard from again. Sinister forces seek to twist mankind's nature to their whims, leaving them forever changed.

Travel is a perilous endeavor, especially at night (in lands fortunate enough to enjoy a sunlit day). Armored columns of merchant caravans transport goods, nervously guarded by mercenaries who refuse to deviate from known roadways. Travelers caught in the dark are forced to lodge at the remote roadside inns for extortionate prices. Local guards are quick to leave them in the dark if they do not have the coin to pay.

## Fear of the Arcane

Superstition and prejudice run deep. In most towns and villages across Drakaris, magic is seen

as both wondrous and frightening. Whether understood or not, the arcane is mistrusted and often blamed for problems ranging from the failure of a season's crops to the success of a rival's business. Many innocent people have been caught on the wrong end of superstition.

The fear of magic runs deeper in some parts of Drakaris than others. In the eastern nation of Wisteria, this fear has manifested into an organized crusade against the arcane: the Arcanist Inquisition. The inquisitors are dedicated to destroying the arcane and anyone who stands to defend it.

Not all of Drakaris despises spellcasters. Many cities house great colleges dedicated to the art of magic. Within these cities' walls, spellcasters can apply for a permit to practice. These permits dictate where a mage can cast spells, what type of spells they can cast, and other specifics. The process to apply for such a permit is often frighteningly bureaucratic, and many spellcasters choose to hide their abilities instead.

## Endless Warfare

Two great nations command a large portion of the land of Drakaris, with a third player rearing its head recently. To the west, the baroque nobility of Khalivack work to prop up a crumbling Empire that thrives on conquest. To the east, the theocratic nation of Wisteria enforces their ancient religion, by the sword not merely if necessary, but by preference. To the north, dark whispers stir in Salamance, a land of twisting root and beguiling enchantment. Between them any number of tiny city-states rise and fall, are conquered or lost, or crumble under internal pressures.

## The Khalivack Empire

The Red and Gold of the Khalivack Empire flutters atop flags over many an unnecessary battlefield. The Empire must survive, and to survive, it must claim what it needs. Often this is territory, and the city-states between Khalivack and Wisteria are the usual battlefield. In the area of warfare, at least, the Khalivack Empire is more adaptive and pragmatic than its rival, being the first army to embrace Blackpowder Firearms, and the first army to assemble organized squads of Battle Mages. Most notably, they have recently deployed a frightful new innovation, the infamous 'Siege Breakers', squads of elite cavalry mounted on Giant Spider mounts, climbing and vaulting over traditional defenses, rendering sieges that were once army destroying morasses of months into the work of days.

The nobility of Khalivack are a decadent lot, holding themselves aloof from the common folk and enforcing the differences in station. Persistent rumor holds that their leeching on the blood of the common people is not metaphorical, and in fact, that the nobility is laced with vampires. No doubt this vile slander is the work of Wisterian agents, trying to stir dissent.

Khalivack has the dubious honor of being the homeland of the Weeping Pox, a terrible plague that burns through the populace. Many Plague Doctors offer miracle cures, some of which even work, but often at a terrible price. The relative lack of Divine Casters in Khalivack only renders the situation worse. Thus far, the Nobility have only issued statements regretting the suffering the people endure, but are unable to divert resources from all-important matters of war.

## The Grand Duchy of Salamance

A hundred years ago Salamance was a nothing, one of the Border States among countless others, of little tactical significance and no apparent threat to the great powers. So nobody was really paying attention when it quietly conquered and gobbled up its nearest neighbor, using primal powers and enchanting magic to undermine their nobility and grind their army into mulch. By the third time this happened, it became harder to miss.

If one were to list the Border States, Salamance would be at the top, but most agree it is no longer accurate to refer to it as one at all. An up and comer, the country truly rose to notice when it did the unprecedented and parried an attack by Khalivack, engaging their superior military in a thick forest where they became disoriented and ground down by constant guerilla attacks.

While Salamance is still not powerful enough to pose any true threat to Khalivack or Wisteria, its Border States neighbors watch it fretfully, wondering who will be next to be gobbled up. Rumors speak of nontraditional military power consisting of skilled forest rangers, frost wielding wizards, warlocks with strange plant and emotion manipulating abilities, and mighty Druids turning the land itself against foes.

People wonder at what is going on with the frightful little (and steadily less little) nation. All but the little Wechselkind. They know, and avoid the place with all their ability. The signs of the Prince of Frost are everywhere, the marks of the Queen of Air and Darkness quite visible to those who know how to look.

The Gloaming Court of the Feywild has decided to back a player, and to what end, none can know. Far worse things than mere Hags lurk in the shadows of dreams.

## Wisteria

Shrouded in the mists of its great forests, Wisteria's ancient history is of a people fleeing persecution for their religious beliefs. It is a sad irony then that it has since become a paranoid land crushing any religious descent. In Wisteria worship of the High Lord is mandatory, with the Old Faith pushed out into fringes at the point of a sword. An open theocracy, the ruler of the nation and the head of the church are one in the same, with the mechanisms of church and state intertwined at every level. The bureaucracy is composed of priests and monks, and Inquisitors prosecute heresy and lawbreaking as one in the same. The armies of Wisteria are as conservative as its governance, eschewing modern innovations like firearms in favor of tried and true tactics and organization. If this makes them less efficient on the battlefield, raw zeal and divine power make up for quite a bit.

In the dark woods things are a bit different however. Those unwilling, or unable, to follow the High Lord take refuge amongst the spirits and old powers of the shadowed boughs. The shelter they find is conditional however, as the Fae are common here, often kidnapping children and replacing them with living dolls. Worst of all are the Hags, ever eager to exploit the fear and spite of those abused by the powers that be, laying Curses and offering deals so twisted and cruel that the straightforward bargains of Hashsah seem amazingly fair by comparison.

Wisteria suffers endlessly from the Saprophytic Plague, a fungal infection that melts people and foodstuffs into puddles of ooze, and renders once healthy men and women into shambling

zombie-like carriers for its spores. Only the prevalence of Priests and Paladins holds its spread at bay, sometimes with spells to cure disease and purify foodstuffs, but more often by burning infected communities to ash.

## The Snakebite Peninsula

The most recent conquest by Wisteria, a thousand years ago the 'Snakebite Peninsula', known at the time as the lost nation of Gran Serpiente, was the home of a powerful empire of the serpentine Yuan-Ti. Their Empire collapsed due to civil war and religious strife, leaving a lawless region of snake folk living in various villages and crumbling ancient temples. The organized religious Templars of Wisteria swept through it like a hot knife through butter a mere century ago, sharp-eyed Inquisitors following in their wake to sift the wreckage.

Today the powerful Yuan-Ti Abominations and Malisons are extinct, leaving only the relatively humanlike Purebloods to carry forward the Yuan-Ti bloodlines. The young grow up in carefully watched villages, where Priests with the favor of the Inquisition methodically and sternly instruct the youth in obedience to the High Lord and the heresy of demonic Snake Gods.

Some outsiders might ask why Wisteria would go to all this trouble, when in other similar cases they have simply burned out heretical species root and branch.

The answer is obvious to those who watch with a cynical eye tuned to pragmatism, as over the years, fervent serpent-eyed recruits to the wizard-hunting Arcanist Inquisition have been appearing. Inquisitors with an inherent resistance to magic and a great facility with poison.

## The Border States

Caught between these two great powers are the 'Border States', dozens of small nations that rise and fall so quickly that few keep track of them for long. One state might conquer and absorb another, only to break apart under internal pressures a few years later. The few that manage to pull themselves together towards becoming a true nation face a grimmer fate, often smashed by Wisteria or the Kalivack Empire to avoid allowing them to become a threat. Often these little nations find themselves forcefully 'allied' with one or another great nation, to end up serving as a battlefield for a war in which they have no stakes.

Greatest of the City States was once the City of Avalava, whose ancient flag of the Blue Wyvern flew over a community grander than any other city in the land. A promised utopia whose tales grew in the telling, whatever grand doom befell them depends on the teller. In Wisteria they speak of divine judgment destroying Avalava for the sin of Pride, in Khalivack they speak of their foolish notions of Democracy and Equality leading to a complete social collapse. In the Border States it is implied Avalava was wiped out by an alliance between Khalivack and Wisteria, something that had never occurred before nor has happened since, to eliminate an intolerable rival. Whatever the case, none can speak to having found the ruins of this once great land, no doubt rich with treasure and secrets. Many have died trying, and none can even agree where it once stood.

# Terrible Sickness

Horrible diseases afflict many of the common folk in Drakaris. Nobles generally have the wealth and influence to receive magical healing and protection, which only makes most of them even less urgent to take action to protect their people.

These are the two most common and likely the most severe.

## The Saprophytic Plague

A deadly fungal infection called the saprophytic plague is ravaging the common folk of Drakaris, most commonly in Wisteria. The plague not only targets beasts and humanoids but also destroys crops and stored foodstuffs, causing famine and sickness. Although magic has proven effective at ridding individuals of the spore infection, the plague spreads too quickly to contain. Creatures that become infected fall ill with a fever and sprout disgusting, gooey, fungal growths before losing their autonomy, acting like zombies. They also release spores that infect other beasts and humanoids. Eventually, the plague reduces all infected creatures and foodstuffs to puddles of ooze.

## The Weeping Pox

It is said that this terrible sickness, most common in Khalivack, is the result of an oath broken with a foul creature, making the disease effectively the result of a curse. Who broke the pact, and with what, varies based on the storyteller, some blaming a Hag, others a Fiend, and some theories even suggesting the curse of a God.

The symptoms of the Weeping Pox have a certain grim trajectory to them, reinforcing the idea that the disease is actually a curse. At first a sick person will be subject to fever causing sharpened senses, overexcitement, and a sense of wellbeing. But soon these symptoms will transition to delirium, burning fever, insatiable thirst, and weltering lesions that have given the illness its name. Beyond this, nearly all who contract the disease die shortly after. Most people succumb to the pox in a few days while the most resilient may hold on for almost two weeks.

## The Miasma and Lands Beyond

But what lies to the West of the mountains bordering Khalivack? What lands exist to the East of the forests and plains of Wisteria? None can say, for beyond those borders lie the Miasma.

Travel out a day and you'll venture into thickening fog, disorienting and oppressive. Travel out three days and you'll find the fog turning strange colors, lurid reds and sickly greens, with breathing becoming more difficult. Travel out a week and the air will be poisonous, with only magical protection allowing survival. Nobody can truly say what happens if you venture out further than that into the Miasma, for there are no reliable reports of anyone returning.

Apocryphal tales speak of monsters horrific even by the standards of Drakaris, sickening radiations, strange mutations, but none can apply a reliable source to such stories.

It was not always so. Go back far enough in old libraries and there will be tales of foreign lands, stories of adventure, trade and diplomacy, all the evils of colonization and exploitation of native peoples, and all the wonders of ancient empires with strange architecture and traditions. The nobility of Salamance had ancestors with a slightly different human appearance, darker of skin, eye, and hair, their records speak of being refugees from some foreign land, but that was a long time ago. Only a handful of them retain books and tales of those days, written in a language only the privileged can read and even fewer speak, lost Citlanes. The Yuan-Ti of the Snakebite Peninsula, being more rooted in the past and slower to change, have stronger memories of their lost homeland of Tletepec, and retain their tongue of Tletlahtolli, but even those vestiges of foreign culture are being steadily eradicated under Wisterian rule, sure to be lost within a few generations. What /is/ the Miasma, and why does it seem to border the known world? Is it simply a barrier to these 'other' countries, or has it washed over and eradicated them? None can say for certain. In Khalivack, it is assumed to simply be a natural geographic feature of the world, heavier than air and thus held at bay by the mountains. In Wisteria, predictably, it is viewed as a judgment of the gods, kept away by the grace of the High Lord alone, and if people turn from him, it will wash across the land and slay all. If the folks of Salamance have any insight about it, they keep it to themselves.

## Glimmers of Hope

Drakaris is not meant to be relentlessly bleak and depressing, or to wallow in cruelty for its own sake. Small victories become heroic when they take heroic effort to achieve. No one in Drakaris is safe by default, so any safety the characters won or gave to others was a true blessing. No one in Drakaris is good by default, so moments of genuine grace are worth celebrating – and can come from unexpected places. Amid profound darkness, even the smallest lights have value.