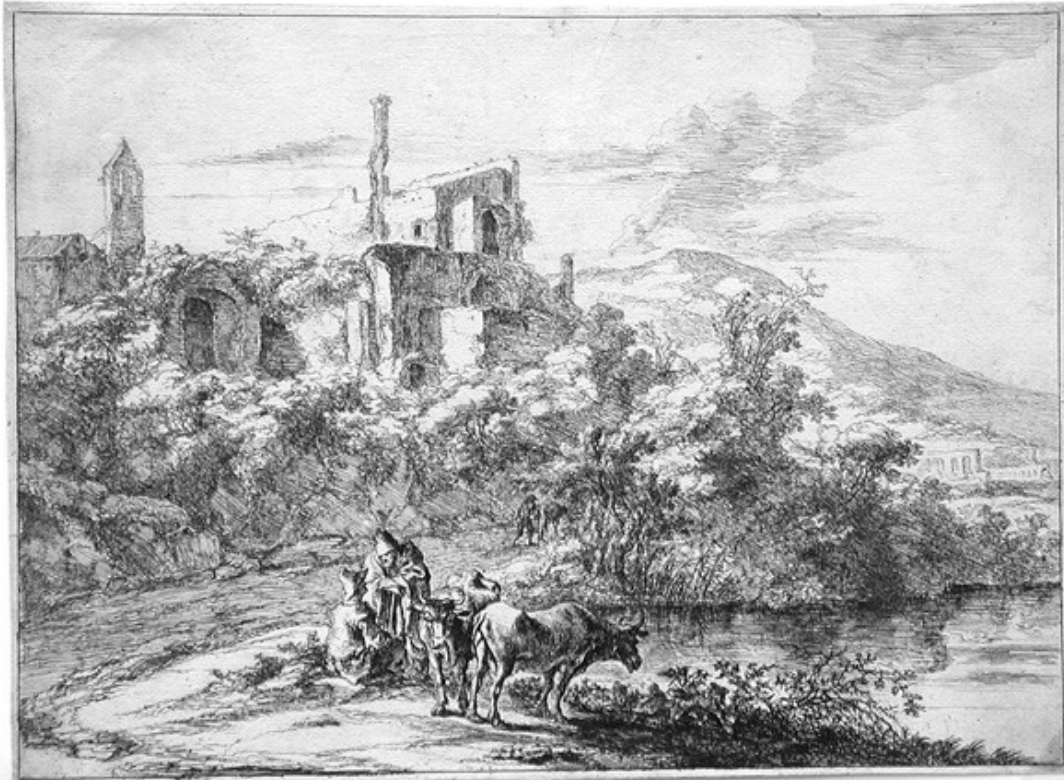


Broken Kingdoms

Player's Primer and Reference



Once, a man bargained with a god. The result was mankind bound into an Empire of slavery.

Another bargain was struck, and this time the result was a divinely wrought war which not only shattered the empire, but the very land itself.

Generations later civilisation is beginning to reappear. Surviving settlements have grown large enough to be called towns, separated by a hostile wilderness which has grown over the ruins and battlefields of the *Broken Kingdoms*.

It is a time for exploration and discovery. Some brave the wilderness to chart new trade routes or delve into ancient ruins in search of lost knowledge and wealth. Others look to carve new kingdoms from the remnants of the old, or act to prevent the same. Many are just concerned with protecting what they already have.

But hopefully no-one is going to strike another divine bargain anytime soon...

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History commonly told

Two men walked on the beach in the sun.

One left footprints, the other left none.

One was a man who no man obeys;

The other a god from the ancient days.

"Look," said the man, "how my kind make war.

I summoned you here to ask what for."

"For wealth or land," the god replies,

"For life, or freedom, or some king's lies."

CHORUS:

"The sun is also a warrior.

Knowledge can also destroy.

Nor can the kindest will,

Preserve you from the kill.

Not all of wisdom brings joy."

"Four of those five," the first one said,

Are not enough to appease the dead.

To save my world all this strife must cease,

So now I bid you to conjure peace."

The god said "Yes. Though it grieves me sore,

For I was also a god of war,

And I remember what you forget,

Four of those five you may still regret."

CHORUS

He raised his voice and he raised his hand.

All strife stopped at the god's command.

No voice ventured an angry word,

No hand struck and no weapon stirred.

In time, the man called the old god back.

"Look," he cried, "what my people lack!

One lord rules over all the earth,

And we're all his slaves from the hour of birth."

CHORUS

"Look, he owns all wealth, and he owns all land,

We starve and die under his command.

He speaks the truth and he gives us peace,

But all that I hope for is our release."

The old god said, "This is what you willed.

For only thus is your wish fulfilled.

War's five sources I took away,

Yet I will give four of them back today."

CHORUS

He raised his hand and his voice once more,

And all the world overturned in war.

And when the last of those fires let fall,

There was no lord in the world at all.

"Go rebuild now," the old god said,

"Feed the living and bury the dead,

And remember this when you speak of war,

And think upon what is worth fighting for."

CHORUS

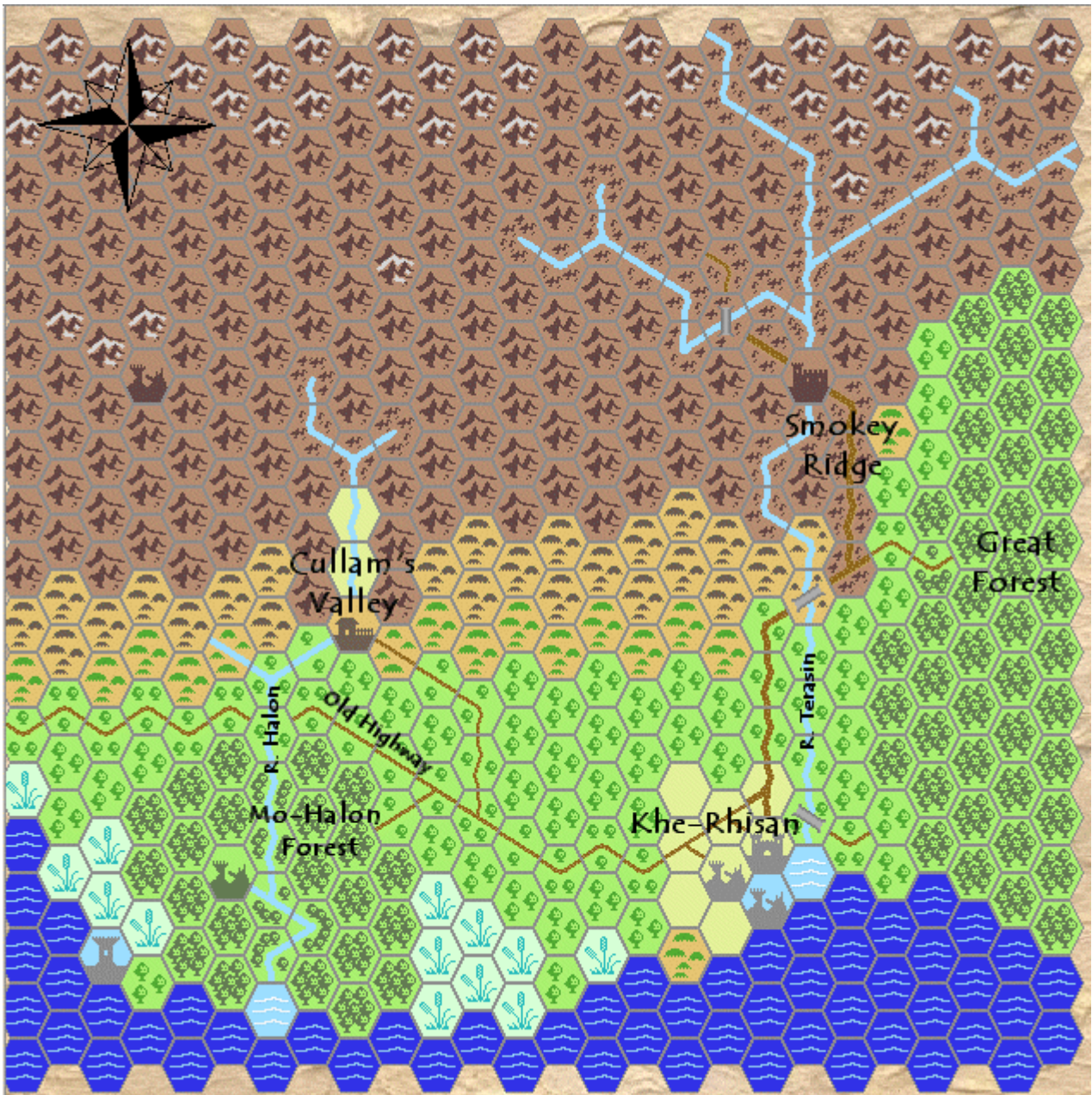
(© Leslie Fish 1986)

This popular song contains the common understanding of events surrounding what is known as the Godwar. As well as being staple in any musical performer's repertoire it is frequently used as a reference in discussions of history, philosophy and morality.

A recent map of Lands surrounding the harbour town of Khe-Rhisian and ruins of old Rhisan.

Showing also the mines of Smokey Ridge, settlement of Cullam's Valley, and other significant, known ruins nearby.

Believed once to have been part of the old Kingdom of Halon, pE.



One hex approximating 24 miles.

The Setting

Places and inhabitants

Khe-Rhisan

Khe-Rhisan is a town of about 6000 people, located where the mouth of the river Terasin forms a harbour to a freshwater sea. It is a respectable distance from the haunted ruins of old Rhisan and mostly constructed from stonework cannibalised from that city. There are adequate natural resources nearby to make the town self-sufficient if necessary.

Coastal trading ships and the occasional less savory vessel visit regularly, bringing goods to trade for iron from Smokey Ridge and other surplus food and crafts. They also bring treasure seekers and sages determined to delve into the ruins of old Rhisan, and the town council makes coin by licensing these expeditions and claiming a percentage of any valuables or copies of any knowledge found. Two guilds and a variety of individuals offer equipping and guide services.

The town is overseen by an elected council but anyone may attend meetings and speak. Major issues may be put to a ballot of the entire town.

Smokey Ridge

Smokey Ridge is located in proximity to both coal and iron mines. Abandoned during the Godwar they were reopened some 10 years ago and now the small town of about 600 produces a regular supply of coal, iron and steel. Some of this is worked locally but most is sent to Khe-Rhisan in exchange for food and most other goods. It is named for the clouds of smoke from the smelters/charcoal huts which can be seen from a great distance.

The mines, trails and occasionally even the town are subject to frequent raids by the barbaric hill tribes, looting for food and valuable metal tools and weapons. Despite the risks prospectors and adventurers regularly follow tales of silver/gold/gemstone deposits and other abandoned mines further into the hills - many do not return.

The town is organised by guilds, and the heads of each guild form a council which makes any decision affecting the town as a whole. Guilds otherwise have autonomy in their respective areas and usually function as meritocracies internally. Rivalry between the guilds is usually friendly except in competition for resources.

Once a well-travelled highway led through a series of passes in the mountains to kingdoms in the north, but it crumbled away during the upheavals of the Godwar. No travellers have come from that direction in living memory.

Cullam's Valley

Toward the end of the Godwar a group of refugees led by a man named Cullam found this fertile dead-end valley and settled down with their few remaining livestock. The valley now keeps a large herd of cattle - upwards of 500 head at peak times - and every member of the village which sits at the entrance can proudly trace their relationship to Cullam. The village elders make all major decisions.

The clan are very insular and suspicious of strangers, although reportedly hospitable enough if you are only looking for a place to spend the night. They are mostly self-sufficient - supplementing beef with hunting/gathering and a few crops. A few times a year selected adult members of the clan drive surplus stock to Khe-Rhisan to trade for items they can't make themselves and a few luxuries.

Predators occasionally find their way down into the valley and raiding hill tribes have to be fended off on a regular basis.

The ruins of old Rhisan

Once the port city of Rhisan was a hub of commerce. Great highways ran west, north and east, and ships from all points south frequented her docks. Indeed, many of those ships were ships were commissioned and built in her harbour.

Even half submerged and crumbling after the Godwar the city is still impressive. The stone taken to build the town of Khe-Rhisan has barely made a dent in her miles of avenues. Who knows what secrets and treasures lie within those crumbling walls, waiting for a stranger to happen upon them?

One thing is not a secret – the city is haunted. Lights and movement can clearly be seen at night from the walls of Khe-Rhisan. It is not advised to stay in the ruins overnight – most who do come back insane, if they come back at all. The laws of Khe-Rhisan forbid any resident from putting themselves at risk in such a manner, and it is also one of the conditions on the licenses that the town issues to treasure seekers.

By day the danger is limited to crumbling stonework unless an expedition releases an old construct or undead which has been buried, these are invariably hostile.

Other Ruins

In the Mo-Halon forest lie the ruins of an old Kingdom capital. It is said to have at its centre a spring of magical water which grants eternal youth, the sum of all knowledge, or three wishes (depending on which version of the tale you listen to) and occasionally expeditions are launched. These usually travel up the river, as the forest itself is found to resist intrusion and strange creatures lurk in its depths.

In the mountains to the northwest of Cullam's Valley an ancient fortress perches atop a peak. No-one know when it was built or what it was guarding, and there is no easy path to reach it.

Off the coast to the west a single tower rises out of the sea marking a completely submerged town, once landlocked. A few ships are known to have been caught and wrecked here.

Lesser ruins of settlements and fortifications are scattered throughout the woods and hills.

The Great Forest

During the Godwar many battles were fought on the great plain to the east. Toward the end of the war however the plain became dense forest, not overnight but certainly at supernatural speed. Some say it grew at divine command to halt the fighting while others claim it was fed by the blood and flesh of the fallen and so is a cursed and evil place. Loggers and hunters from both Khe-Rhisan and Smokey Ridge work around the edges.

Several ruined cities and towns must lie with the ancient battlegrounds beneath the Great Forest's roots and branches, but expeditions report no success in finding them.

The Hill Tribes

These tribes are the descendants of those who fell into barbarism during the Godwar and never climbed back out. They are nomadic hunter-raiders who live by a harsh creed of to the strong victory, and to the victor the spoils. They are a constant threat to the inhabitants of Smokey Ridge and Cullam's Valley.

Slain tribesmen often have valuable items dating from the pre-war period which fuel rumours of further lost ruins and treasure in the mountains.

Bandits

Two groups of bandits are active in the area, living off the land and preying on travellers between the settlements. It is rare that a caravan between Khe-Rhisan and Smokey Ridge doesn't face a raid or hold-up by at least one of these groups. East of the river Tarasin the "Greenblades" operate from the fringes of the great forest and in the west "Roughin's Band" launch forays from a base somewhere in the hills.

Religion and Spellcraft

The Gods

Gods, beings of unimaginable power and unfathomable purposes, definitely exist. Fragments of the oldest legends speak of how they created the world and all things on it. In the first days they walked with and lived among humanity as teachers and guardians, and when humanity had grown enough that they were no longer needed they left for parts unknown. Occasionally one will reappear, heralding events which will also enter legend - the most recent example being the Godwar.

The landscape-rearranging events of the Godwar are still recent enough that there is no doubt in the power that can be wielded by a god, and the dangers of dealing with a god. In the legends such deals lead to ruin as often (if not more so) as they lead to glory. So while the gods are best not forgotten it is a foolish or desperate person who would actually pray for a divine boon, and the suspicion that someone is worshipping or trafficking with a god is considered good reason to avoid or ostracise them for one's own safety.

Religion in daily life

Of greater relevance to daily life in the Broken Kingdoms is the spirit realm which exists alongside the physical, wherein dwell the natural spirits of the greenbond and the totem warrior and the elemental spirits often summoned by the magister and the witch. Although most people lack the talent or training to deal with these spirits directly there exist many ceremonies to appease or request assistance from these spirits.

Arcana Unearthed suggests a world in which people take rituals very seriously, and ceremonies constitute an important part of every aspect of a person's life. - ACUPHB, p4

The source of magic

Magical power is a natural force in the world of the Broken Kingdoms. It can be captured and manipulated by spellcasters with the correct tools. With enough training and practice nearly anyone can learn to perform a little magic.

The history of magic

Pre-empire is considered the golden age of magic with regular new discoveries and marvelous constructions. During the time of the Empire the study of magic stagnated, and most powerful mages are believed to have perished during the Godwar (although some say the mages saw what was coming and just left, abandoning the rest of the populace to their fates). As with all the other knowledge then held by civilisation the understanding of magic was fragmented, scattered and lost as a result of the Godwar. More than any other sought after discipline this knowledge remains incomplete.

Dangerous Creatures

Wolves and bears of both normal and dire varieties are at the top of the food chain in the woods and hills. Further into the mountains pumas and great eagles have domain. The swamps are home to venomous snakes and large, aggressive rodents. Sea serpents are occasionally seen off the coast.

Fae spirits more mischievous than malign (but such mischief can leave a mortal forever lost) inhabit the Great Forest in significant numbers, and the Mo-Halon forest is home to those with darker natures.

Old battle grounds have been known to spontaneously generate mindless undead in the form of skeletons and zombies. Living creatures who perish at such a site run a high risk of returning as sentient undead, driven insane by their condition and cursed to prey on the living. Incorporeal undead haunt particular ruins and rarely leave their particular territory, but will usually attack any unwitting living creature who intrudes.

Some ruins also contain intact guardian constructs who continue to perform their old duties. These are a frequent hazard to delvers in old Rhisan.

Character classes in the Broken Kingdoms

This section takes a look at how the AU character classes fit into the Broken Kingdoms setting. In the time following the Godwar there are very few truly high level NPCs in the world.

Akashics

With their ability to access lost and barely-remembered knowledge akashics are popular in the Broken Kingdoms. Many of those who rise through the ranks of the craft guilds have akashic levels, and any organised ruin-delving expedition will endeavour to include at least one. Some akashics brave the wilderness to travel from civilised area to civilised area spreading news and putting together scraps of information scattered during the Godwar.

Champions

Champions are very rare in the Broken Kingdoms. Very few people have the time to devote to a cause in the way a champion must. There are rumours that a few champions survived the Godwar and founded orders which continue to defend small areas.

Greenbonds

Greenbonds played an important part in rebuilding civilisation after the Godwar, nurturing and defending the small settlements as they grew in the wilderness and suppressing the forces of the Dark (see *Greenbond, AU PHB, p36*) which found ready purchase among the bones of the fallen on a myriad of battlefields. These tasks continue to be important to humanity's survival in the Broken Kingdoms.

Mage Blades

The mage blade's versatile mix of combat and magical abilities make them valued members of the militia in most settlements. Many mage blades otherwise choose to take up the mantle of explorer or hire on to trading expeditions as ranking guards.

Magisters

Magisters of great ability are still uncommon in the Broken Kingdoms. Much magical knowledge was lost during the Godwar and most magisters make rediscovering this knowledge a high priority. They can be found based in towns near old ruins (like Khe-Rhisan) or leading expeditions further afield.

Oathsworn

Oathsworn are as rare as champions in the Broken Kingdoms, and for much the same reasons. However, one will occasionally be found as bodyguard to a rich merchant or defending a small settlement from a great threat. They are more common in areas where a shortage of resources hinders development of those fighting classes which rely on weapons and armour.

Runethanes

Runethanes may be the most common magic-orientated class in the Broken Kingdoms. In the absence of a greenbond a runethane will often serve as a community's healer, sage and defender. Many runethanes also share the magister's aim of recovering lost magical knowledge and forgotten runes and so can be found accompanying expeditions or exploring on their own behalf.

Totem Warriors

Totem warriors are most common among the hill tribes but many the hunters and explorers also have levels in this class. In larger, "more civilised" towns they are often viewed with some suspicion.

Unfettered

Valued as members of a militia but rarely settled in one place, unfettered roam the Broken Kingdoms as guards, mercenaries or bandits, relying on their wits and skill to keep them alive in the wilderness. The most common perception of an unfettered involves them turning up in town with full pay or some treasure they “found in a ruin somewhere”, spending all the money on a few days of drinking, company and brawling, then leaving again.

Warmains

In the aftermath of the Godwar, those who deliberately study the arts of war are frequently viewed as troublemakers and “discouraged”. (Khe-Rhisian is not warmain-friendly). Some people however see uses for their talents. In the Broken Kingdoms warmains are further hindered by a scarcity of the heavy armour they favour.

Witches

Witches are a new development in the Broken Kingdoms, postdating the Godwar. Although some point to figures of legend who could have been possessed of these powers they have only recently started appearing in any number, perhaps the fall of the Kingdoms and the Empire has seen those who would otherwise have been apprenticed and trained as one of the other spellcasting classes develop their abilities in other ways or perhaps there has been some divine meddling.

Reaction is mixed, but most treat a witch as they would a runethane or mageblade. Witches can be found in almost any walk of life.

D&D classes

Additionally the Fighter and Rogue classes from the D&D 3.5 PHB or d20 SRD may be used if they are considered a better fit to a particular character concept. These classes have the following modifications:

Fighter

Choose bonus feats from the Unfettered and Warmain bonus feat lists, with the following exceptions and additions.

Exceptions

Great Fortitude, Stomp, Sturdy, Tough Hide

Additions

First Strike, Crippling Strike, Mighty Hurl, Mounted Archery, Opportunist, Rapid Reload, Sense the Unseen, Two Weapon Defense, Mighty Unarmed Strike.

The fighter's class skills are Balance (Dex), Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Handle Animal (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Ride (Dex), Swim (STR)

Rogue

The Trapfinding special ability is removed in the AU ruleset.

The rogue's class skills are Appraise (Int), Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Decipher Script (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disable Device (Int), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Innuendo (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Listen (Wis), Open Lock (Dex), Perform (Cha), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Sneak (Dex), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str), Tumble (Dex), Use Magic Device (Cha), Use Rope (Dex)