

War of the Burning Sky Campaign Background

I. Introduction

Once news reached the Free City-state of Gate Pass by teleporting courier. Now that channel has gone silent, and news travels by the old routes of rumor via travelers from the outside world. You might be one of those travelers, or a concerned native of the city, but you have heard the rumors as they spread through Gate Pass.

People are saying that Emperor Darikus Coaltongue, tiefling ruler of the mighty Ragesian Empire which lies to the west of Gate Pass, has been slain in a distant nation. Coaltongue ruled Ragesia for decades, and some claimed he was immortal as year after year passed with Coaltongue showing no signs of aging. Regardless of how he maintained his youth and vigor, it seems that he is now dead. No one doubts the tales of armies mustering in Ragesia, with orders to secure the borders of the empire at this time of weakness and uncertainty. There is fear that the maneuvering armies are the sign of a power struggle among the remaining Ragesian leaders.

Rumors from Shahal-esti, the nation east of Gate Pass, say its half-elven king Tirradion seeks to claim the vulnerable Ragesia for his people. Tirradion helped Coaltongue's rise to power, and so feels he is entitled to the throne he helped win. The Ragesian succession is unclear, as no heir was ever named by Coaltongue. Now Tirradion's armies are marching towards Ragesia to consolidate his claim.

Gate Pass sits alone in its mountain pass, one of the few safe routes between these two powerful nations — the Empire of Ragesia and the Shining Lands of Shahal-esti. For weeks people have been saying war would come to Gate Pass, and now the rumors are true. Even now the drums of war can be heard approaching.

II. Rules Information

War of the Burning Sky will be a 4th edition D&D campaign. Rules from the three core rulebooks will be used, with options from official sources such as *Dragon* magazine or future books being allowed subject to DM approval. So far I plan to use most of the rules and items from *Adventurer's Vault*. Official errata will generally be incorporated, even if it means nerfing your character. =)

Characters

Characters will be created using 24 points and the point buy costs detailed on page 17 of the *Player's Handbook*. (Note: This is 2 points more than standard. Enjoy.) You may not buy a stat higher than an 18 (20 with racial modifier) to start. No races from the *Monster Manual* will be allowed. Genasi will be available as a player character race, and the Sword Mage will be available as a class.

War of the Burning Sky is a heroic campaign, so the characters cannot be evil in motive or alignment. Background information for the characters will be created with the DM's help. This will allow characters to

have ties to Gate Pass or the surrounding area.

Deities

The campaign uses the pantheon in the *Player's Handbook*. In addition, a series of myths tell of an ancient time when the lands that are now Ragesia and its neighbors were the domain of four elemental spirits — the Tidereaver Kraken, the Worldshaper Serpent, the Flamebringer Dragon, and the Stormseeker Eagle. These four beings are not worshipped in the way that the gods are, but they are common motifs in the art and architecture of Gate Pass and Ragesia, and their stories are widely known.



Table Rules

Mostly the usual — be nice, have fun. If a rule dispute arises, I will make a ruling for that session. If a player isn't satisfied with the ruling, we can talk about it after the session, and perhaps I'll change my mind, or look into it further on ENWorld and the WotC forums. My snap ruling may well not be the right decision, but I want to avoid bogging down the game with rules disagreements in the middle of the action.

Missed Sessions

We will do our best to schedule games such that we all can be there for each session. If you have to cancel at the last minute, please call to let us know. I'd like everyone to leave a copy of their character sheet with me, and to designate someone to play their character for them if it happens that they are late or can't make a session at the last minute. This is a contingency only — rescheduling is much better if it can be managed.

Changing Characters

If a player wishes to change characters, I will try my best to work it in as soon as possible, but there are certain points in the course of the game where adding a new PC would be difficult. Your new character will have fewer experience points than the rest of the group, but will generally be the same level. I would prefer to see people playing a single character for the entire course of the campaign, but I understand that the game is new to all of us, and you may not be happy with your initial choice of race and class.

House Rules

- **Bastard Swords** are too heavy to be dual wielded.

- **Create Magic Item ritual:**

- 1) To enchant a magic item you must begin with a masterwork item of the appropriate type. The cost of the masterwork item is one half the cost of the ritual (and this cost counts towards the ritual component cost). Furthermore you may need specific rare ingredients depending on the type of enchantment. Recipes for magic items may be found, researched, or purchased, but in order to enchant an item with anything beyond a basic enhancement bonus, you will need to find a recipe for it.

- 2) The use of this ritual to resize armor will require enchanting materials. I have a chart to determine cost. As an example, magically fitting +1 armor within the same size category costs 50 silver (2.5 gp) in materials.

- 3) With a few specific exceptions based on the type of enchantment, this ritual may be used to change the basic shape (but not the category) of a weapon. Thus a magical scimitar could be shaped into a long sword as both are heavy blades, but the scimitar could not be made into any other basic type of weapon. Size changes (small to medium, or 1-handed to 2-handed) will affect the cost.

- 4) This ritual may be used to change the basic shape of a magical holy symbol and reconsecrate it to a new deity. Use Religion as the ritual skill check when using it in this fashion. The cost for this usage will be the same as for armor or weapons.

- **Transfer Enchantment** - This ritual from *Adventurer's Vault* can be used to move magic from one item to another, as directed on page 199 with the requirement that the item to be enchanted is of masterwork quality.

- **Critical Miss** (optional rule from the DMG) - If you roll a natural 1 on a combat roll or skill check, you grant combat advantage that round due to being out of position.

- **Dragons** are not color-coded for convenient identification. While they still have distinctive features that can be recognized by the knowledgeable, their coloration is based more on where they live than what elemental type they are. For instance a fire dragon living near a volcano might be black, ash grey, red, orange, or some combination of those colors.

- **Economy** - The silver coin is the basis of the economy, with gold being more valuable than listed in the PH. Divide gold piece values in the books by 10 in order to convert. 1 gold coin = 20 silver coins. 1 silver coin = 20 copper coins. Gold coins are smaller than copper or silver, with 100 coins weighing 1 pound. Silver and copper coins are 50 coins to the pound, as per the PH.

- **Game Grid and Vertical Size of Powers** - We will be playing on a hexagonal grid, with 1 hex equal to 1 square for movement purposes. This may slightly alter flanking and line of sight rules from those illustrated in the *Player's Handbook* and will change the shape of various area effect powers. Burst effects are spherical and blast effects are cone shaped. In each case, at the center the spell reaches a height equal to one half of its widest point.

- **Resurrection** - When most people die, the Raven Queen is reluctant to let them return to the world of the living. Yet there are those whose fates are closely inter-

twined with major events, whether for good or ill. If the gods feel that a person has an unfulfilled destiny, he or she may be resurrected by using the Raise Dead ritual as per the *Player's Handbook*.

- **Sunrods**- The radius of light emitted by a sunrod is the same as that of a lantern — 10 squares. Otherwise they are as listed in the *Player's Handbook*.

- Double ended axes, flails, and swords as listed in the *Adventurer's Vault* are not allowed, and I reserve the right to ban any other weapon that couldn't really be used without injuring yourself. While it is a fantasy game, twenty years in the SCA is bound to have some influence on what I consider to be a usable weapon. Feel free to talk to me about it if there's something you particularly want your character to have.

III. Races of The World Dragonborn

The dragonborn were created by the dragons of the Arkhosian empire, who desired servants to worship and aid them. In time, Arkhosia came into conflict with Bael Turath, the tiefling empire. The two powerful nations fought for decades and in the end, destroyed each other. The surviving dragons became scattered and feral, leaving their servants to fend for themselves. The dragonborn population was decimated after serving as the bulk of the Arkhosian armies, and to this day they are still not numerous.

Dragonborn have no particular homeland, but will often hire themselves out to guard dwarven or human caravans and thus are found here and there throughout the world. They are seen as a brave and honorable people known for their skill at arms. Dragonborn hatch from eggs, and after infancy the child is raised by one of his parents, who oversees his training and education.

Dragonborn have tails. While they are never bright jewel tones, tending towards muted natural shades, dragonborn can be various colors such as mossy green, slate blue, grey, or black, in addition to the gold and rust colors listed in the book.

Dwarves

The dwarven people were once the enslaved by the giants. After winning their freedom, they built their own communities in the mountains and hills of the world, raising goats and mountain sheep, seeking out gems and ore, and crafting weapons, armor, and jewelry. They tend

to build walled settlements in the high mountain valleys, but don't generally live underground. They are famous for their woolen cloth, stonework, architecture, and mining. Dwarves can be found in many places in the world, but Dassen is the only large nation truly ruled by them. Gate Pass was also founded and built by the dwarves, and they still are the most common race in that city.

Eladrin, Elves, and The Sundered

The eladrin, elves, and the Sundered are native to the Feywild, and were at one time a single people. The elves are those that came to live in the world, and became attuned to its natural energies. The eladrin live primarily in the Feywild, but from time to time, one will venture across the boundary and decide to stay. These eladrin often reside in human or elven towns, or in one of several small eladrin communities. The Sundered are those of the fey who were banished forever to the dark places of the world in the distant past. Few remember the reason for the Sundering, and those who know do not speak of it.

The Shining Lands of Shahalesti are one of the places where the veil between worlds is naturally thin. Elves and eladrin have traditionally resided in that region, but the leader for the past 50 years has been the half elf Tirradion. The famed eladrin city of Mithrendain exists in the Feywild, but for a fortnight on either side of Midsummer's Day, it appears in the normal world in the forest at the northern edge of Shahalesti. During that time there is a great market festival bringing traders from hundreds of miles away to purchase eladrin-made goods.

The Exarchate of Sindaire is another country where there is a large population of elves, although it is ruled primarily by humans. Eladrin and elves both tend to be somewhat aloof and difficult for other races to relate to.

Genasi

Humanoids who once dwelled in the elemental chaos and were pulled into our world through a magical rift, each genasi has an affinity with a particular element — air, earth, fire, water, or storm, that determines their appearance, personality, and some of their abilities. A genasi's elemental manifestation is randomly determined at birth. All genasi have fine glowing lines on their skin called *ala*, the pattern of which is similar among family members. They sometimes dress to show off these lines, or will match the patterns with embroidered patterns on their clothing.

Earthsoul genasi tend to have brown skin, ranging



anywhere from tan, to reddish brown, to nearly black, with golden colored *ala*. They have dark hair worn tied back, or are sometimes bald.

Firesoul genasi have skin ranging from ruddy bronze to the black of coal, with bright orange *ala*. Their hair crackles with what appears to be flame, but is simply a reflection of their elemental power.

Stormsoul genasi have skin ranging from dark blue to purple, with silvery *ala*. Their hair sticks up in spikes or floats around their heads like a cloud, crackling with sparks, and ranges from silver, to grey, to white in color.

Watersoul genasi have skin that ranges from seafoam green to a deep teal color, with bright blue *ala*, and deep green or turquoise hair that forms strands that gently wave around their face and heads.

Windsoul genasi have white or silvery skin, with pale blue *ala* and pale blue, white or grey hair that waves around similar to that of the watersoul genasi.

Genasi are uncommon in most of the world, but have a city (Akanûl) and several small communities in the Exarchate of Sindaire, far to the west. They are strong and intelligent, but often strange in appearance and manner. Of all the races, they get along best with the dragon-born and eladrin. Genasi are known for crafting elemental weapons and implements, and for their skill in magic and swordsmanship.

Half Elves

The fey can often be mischievous and interfering, and they have their own ideas of morality. The half elves were the creation of one group of fey who sought to “improve” the human leaders of an empire which is now long dead.

A child of the emperor’s family was taken away to the Feywild, and a changling left in her place. The changling soon sickened and “died” as such magical creations are bound to do. The child was raised in the Feywild, and shaped by the powerful magics of the fey to be something more than human. She was educated to be a fair and just ruler with a deep understanding of her people and of the natural world in which they lived. After being returned to her family along with proofs of her identity, she was crowned as empress. Her reign was long and prosperous, and she had numerous children, each of whom shared her unique blend of human and elven features.

Pleased with their efforts, the fey repeated this with several other prominent families in the empire, creating a number of “half elven” rulers. It was found that the half elven could have offspring with either humans or elves, and that their distinctive half elven appearance always bred true. Most were excellent rulers, and as they grew more numerous, they came to hold positions of power throughout the empire. The fey eventually lost interest in their “project”, but the legacy of their interference lives on in the half elven race. Many people see the half elves as natural leaders and rulers, and the half elves themselves have come to feel that they were bred to hold the reigns of power.

Halflings

Halflings have traditionally traveled the rivers and lakes of the world, and have floating houseboat communities in many countries including Dassen and Ragesia. They are a friendly and gregarious people who work as traders, fishermen, and skilled boat pilots. Halflings often run ferries, or hire out their boats to transport others, although they keep to the inland waterways, leaving seafaring to the humans, elves, and tieflings. They are known also for their carvings of wood, bone, and gemstones.

The halflings are among the only people who reliably trade with the secretive gnomes of the Feywild, obtaining rare magical items and unique fabrics from them, which they sell throughout the world. Some halflings have found the merchant life appeals to them, and have formed major trading consortiums that have become powerful players in the economic markets of the world. The Amberguild Trading Consortium is the most influential



0 Distance in Miles 300

Great City
X Place of Mystery

War of the Burning Sky

of these groups, with widespread interests in most of the major cities of the region.

Humans

Humans are the most abundant of the races, although their last great empire crumbled centuries ago. The only country currently ruled by humans is the Khaganhold of Ostalin. Most other nations have a large human population. In Ragesia, humans outnumber the other races substantially as Coaltongue conquered many human nations during his rise to power. Humans are famed as weavers, shipwrights, riders and horsebreeders. Some have even branched out into raising gryphons and hippogriffs as riding animals.

Tieflings

They were human once, but the ancestors of the tieflings made dark pacts with devils to increase the power of their mighty empire Bael Turath. They became cursed with a devilish appearance because of the terrible rituals performed in their unending quest for might. Bael Turath

grew so powerful that it eventually clashed with the draconic empire of Arkhosia. Both were destroyed after many decades of fighting. Large areas of both countries were laid to waste by unimaginable forces. Tieflings were scattered among the human nations, surviving however they could. They were often distrusted by other races.

Centuries later, Darikus Coaltongue persuaded many other tieflings to follow him in his grand vision of rebuilding the empire of Bael Turath in a new location. His success has drawn tieflings from the surrounding nations to Ragesia, where they are treated with respect rather than the resentment and fear shown to them elsewhere.

Tieflings tend to have large horns emerging from their temples or upper brows, along with a long slender tail and taloned fingers. Otherwise they are as stated in the PH.

IV. Gate Pass

The Free City-state of Gate Pass lies in a rocky mountain pass that runs east to west between Ragesia and Shahalesti. Sheer cliffs mark its northern and southern borders, and fortifications built up over centuries have

Famous Myths

"The Wavering Maiden" tells of how the Tidereaver Kraken sought to explore the land by making a human body for itself out of the substance of the seas. In the form of a beautiful young woman with rolling black hair, the Kraken wandered the world. However, because the tide is not constant, sometimes her assumed form would pull away, and the Kraken would be forced to spend an evening in a lake or river in its true form. The myth is a series of comic events based around numerous suitors who fall in love with the Kraken in its woman's guise, and who often seek to destroy it in its Kraken form.

"The Trilling Stone" tells of how the Worldshaper Serpent sang to shape the caverns of the earth into places of wonder and beauty. The song caused crystals to grow from the walls, and pillars of gleaming stone to arise. Yet its singing was unanswered by any living creature, and the Serpent was alone. One day it heard a trilling song and the Serpent raced to find the source, but was unable to trace the echoing sound. It continued to sing, seeking to find the origin of the trilling song. The Serpent's alluring song drew animals and plants into the deep caverns where they were astonished at the beauty to be found there, and made new homes beneath the earth. Some say the Serpent found the trilling singer, while others say it still is searching. There are places where the Serpent's ancient song can still be heard echoing among the cavern walls.

"The Aquiline Heart" is a morality tale about the dangers of both pride and power. The Stormseeker Eagle was lord of the storm and the skies, and taunted the Flamebringer Dragon with its superior flying skill. Although it tried for many years, the Dragon had never been able to catch the Eagle in a race. The cunning Dragon decided to prey instead on the Eagle's pride, bragging that the Eagle was too weak and cowardly to ever chase the Dragon and could only fly away. The angered Eagle pursued the Dragon, and was tricked into flying down a tunnel into the depths of the earth, where the intense heat of molten rock burned it.

The Dragon seized the Eagle, demanding that it admit the Dragon had won. The Eagle laughed, saying the Dragon had cheated, bringing only mindless destruction and pain as it always did. The Dragon was enraged, and shouted, "I will rip your pride from you once and for all!" and tore out the Eagle's still-beating heart, hiding it in the caverns of the earth. This could not kill the elemental spirit, but did change it greatly. The Eagle not only lost its arrogance, it became numb to the destruction wrought by the storms it controlled. Where once it had ensured that the storms brought only enough rain, but never too much, now it was indifferent to the pleas of the people whose crops died from drought, whose fields were inundated by floods, or whose homes were ripped assunder by powerful winds. It is said that if the heart is ever found and returned, the Eagle will once again show mercy to those affected by its great power.

made the city highly defensible, allowing it to avoid being annexed by either of the nations that surround it. Though the city's borders to north and south are tightly limited — less than a mile wide at the widest point — the mountain pass is nearly twenty miles long, giving the city a lot of room to grow eastward and westward.

Gate Pass architecture tends to multi-story buildings with bridges between roofs, creating thousands of “gateways” along roads and alleys. Even in poorer districts, buildings are usually at least two stories tall. Many merchants, made wealthy from the traffic that passes through the city, own vast ranges of adjacent buildings, all of them connected with high bridges.

A broad, twenty-foot wide thoroughfare runs the length of the city, interrupted only by the district walls every half mile or so. Only a handful of districts have gates to actual roads leading outside the city, and most of these are used for deliveries by farmers and miners. Each day,

The Festival of Dreams

Though Gate Pass has its share of holidays, the most prominent is the Festival of Dreams, a holy day observed by all of the city's major temples, taking place on Midwinter Day. Parades march from either end of the city, stopping at the grand square on Summer Blue just before sunset for a ceremony in which the high priests of each of eight different temples “offer up the dreams of the people.”

Every citizen is encouraged to write a prayer or hope on a slip of paper and place it in a small clay urn, which the city produces by the thousands every year. People deliver their urns to Summer Blue in the days leading up to the festival, and on the holiday itself, each high priest chooses one from amid the thousands. Each breaks open his or her urn and reads the prayer held within, then pledges to fulfill that dream if possible during the next year. selfish requests are frowned upon, and often the city takes great glee in perverting the words of selfish prayers, fulfilling the adage “be careful what you wish for.”

The rest of the urns are left in the center of the square, and citizens are encouraged to pick one up and try to fulfill someone else's wish. The morning after the festival, those left unopened are carted en masse to the countless small caves that dot the cliffs around the city, where they are buried. There are folk tales of these buried dreams coming to life and bringing good fortune, though most adults of the city view these as merely superstition.

groups of Gate Pass soldiers patrol the northern and southern borders, looking for signs of illegal passage and occasionally apprehending criminals who try to hide in the craggy hills.

The natural landscape of Gate Pass rises in the center to a broad hill called Summer Bluff, the site of the city's grand square, where various annual holidays are celebrated. The grand square can easily hold several thousand people, and is dotted with dozens of small groves, statues, and ornamental gate arches.

The rest of the city consists of various districts of skilled workers, common housing, warehouses and businesses. Some districts are inhabited predominately by a single race, but most tend to be divided more by income level than any other factor.

Additionally, various small farms and ranches dot the mountains around the city proper, where food is grown, and goats and mountain sheep are raised for wool and meat. Tough and independent, many of the farmers and ranchers view themselves as the first line of defense for Gate Pass.

People and History

With natural supplies of fresh water, and nearby grazing land for their herds of mountain sheep, the Gate Pass region was a perfect place for dwarves to establish a community. Over time Gate Pass has become a major crossroads of trade between Shahalesti and the Ragesian Empire, attracting merchants and craftsmen of every race, although dwarves are still the most numerous citizens.

The proudly independent citizens of Gate Pass are governed by an elected Doge rather than any sort of hereditary ruler. The doge is chosen by a complex process designed to balance the varied interests of the different merchants and trade guilds, and rules for a term of seven years. He or she is advised by influential members of the community, who make up the City Council. Generally the doge has been dwarven, half-elven, or human, but the current office holder, Reskara Goldenscale, is dragonborn. She was a gem merchant prior to being elected.

Gate Pass & Ragesia

Gate Pass has the distinction of being the only city to successfully drive out occupation by the Ragesian Empire. Forty years ago, Emperor Coaltongue defeated the city's army, set up a military government, and erected a 50-foot-tall statue of himself in the grand

square before moving on to his next conquest. For two years, citizens waged an insurgency against the occupying army, until finally Coaltongue decided the city wasn't worth the loss of men. Shahalesti and Ragesia, once allies, were approaching open war, and Coaltongue declared that he would withdraw from Gate Pass if the Lord of Shahalesti agreed to leave the city as a neutral buffer between their two nations. The half-elf agreed, the city celebrated its victory, and trade between the two nations began to flow. The city still sports numerous indications of the occupation; even the emperor's statue remains. It is decorated and painted gaudily on various holidays, as if both to mock the Ragesians for their failure and to respect Coaltongue's wisdom in deciding to leave their city alone.

V. Ragesia & Surrounding Lands

Ragesia is the largest nation in the region, and four other nations commonly interact with it: Shahalesti, Dassen, Sindaire, and Ostalin. The politics and history of

the region are relatively simple, though the recent power vacuum in Ragesia threatens to make things much more complicated.

Overview

The Ragesian Empire lies in the northwest of the region, spanning several hundred miles north to south and east to west. To the east is the Shining Land of Shahalesti, a tenuous ally with whom relations have frayed of late. To the south lie the Exarchate of Sindaire, the Kingdom of Dassen, and the Khaganhold of Ostalin, three nations which so far have managed to avoid being conquered by Ragesia.

Ragesia

The Ragesian Empire is based in the capital city of Ragos, located on central lowlands dominated by many lakes. While the core of the empire is populated heavily by humans and tieflings, the outer regions have wildly diverse cultures and populations, the result of having once been

Emperor Darikus Coaltongue and the Torch of the Burning Sky

The Old Dragon, some called him, since he seemed immortal, and grew more cunning and powerful with age. Coaltongue held an iron grip over his hard-won empire that not even time itself seemed able to weaken.

Decades ago, a warlord arose among the villages of what is now Ragesia. Darikus Coaltongue, tiefling son of a human noblewoman, brought a level of patience and political cunning rarely seen among the warring states that made up the region. By proclaiming his intent to recreate the fallen tiefling empire of Bael Turath and earn a new respect for the tiefling people, Coaltongue drew many followers to his banner. He slew a gold dragon and took its child as a prize, and prepared his army for glory.

And then, to everyone's surprise, he did not sweep into neighboring lands for a bloody but ultimately short-lived rampage. Instead, Coaltongue allied with various poor nations, helping them drive back the predations of the strongest country in the region, Morrus. Coaltongue even gained the aid of the insular elves of Shahalesti, until finally he was ready to lead a coalition army against Morrus. For this great assault, Coaltongue revealed a devastatingly powerful artifact that would lead him to victory, the *Torch of the Burning Sky*. The power of the Torch was to call down fire from the sky, and to carry Coaltongue's army hundreds of miles in an instant, plucking them up with one pillar of flame, and depositing them with another. Coaltongue and his al-

lies easily defeated Morrus, and from the nation's burning remains, Coaltongue created a new kingdom for himself and his followers; Ragesia.

For a time Coaltongue and his allies coexisted in relative peace. Coaltongue was content with his new homeland, and did not want to jeopardize it by reaching too far and falling before the might of many nations, as Morrus had fallen before him. But slowly, Ragesia expanded its borders. It took years for events to play out, and always in a way that Ragesia's imperialism was justified, either in response to enemy attacks, or to aid another nation that was being threatened. With the benefit of hindsight, many suspect that somehow Coaltongue provoked these conflicts.

Finally, when Coaltongue was far older than any tiefling had a right to be, all the lands that had once belonged to his allies were his. Recently, after nearly a decade of inactivity, Coaltongue offered to help the Exarchate of Sindaire put down a rebellion within its borders, and the nation nervously accepted, fearful of being swallowed up by another trick. What Coaltongue was planning may never be known, because a few weeks into his military campaign, something went wrong. Ragesia has not heard from its emperor in over two months, or if they have, they have hidden the news. Some dread it, and some cautiously hope for it, but it seems the Old Dragon has been slain.

many separate nations, conquered by sword and torch.

Every region has a large component of tieflings in the population, along with heavy military presence to ensure loyalty and peace. Though the people of Ragesia have been conquered, most are content that they live today in relative safety. Given the power of the empire, rebellion just doesn't seem worth it. The majority of the population is still human however, and different ethnic groups remain mostly concentrated in their old homelands, which are often separated by low, long mountain ranges.

The northern reaches are home to people known as the Kelanarr, who live in frigid lands that are frozen for most of the year, where they coexist with frost giants, mastadons, and vast herds of bison. The western plains were once the nation of Latia, its renowned ship-building now benefiting Ragesia and its navy. The southern lands are craggy, with cold rocky deserts dominating what was once Chathus, a land of nomads and traders who nevertheless defended their lands with great vigour, using cavalry and mobility to wage a protracted war, allowing their home to be the last conquered by Ragesia. The central heartlands once belonged to the powerful nation of Morrus, and numerous old castles, forts, and walls dot the landscape, defenses which were easily bypassed with Emperor Coaltongue's Torch.

The capital city of Ragos stretches along a vast lake, and the imperial palace lies safely offshore on a fantastically-defended island. At night its walls burn with thousands of torches, making the lake look like it is on fire. An ocean borders Ragesia to the west, with rocky mountains marking Ragesia's borders with the nations to the south — Sindaire and Dassen. The northern border is a high, frigid mountain range, separating Ragesia from most of the rest of the world. The same mountains curve down to form the eastern border, rising high enough that Ragesia never saw much value in trying to conquer beyond them.

The Inquisitors

Their faces concealed by unadorned white masks, inquisitors are the feared blade of Ragesia, expert in cutting out those who resist its rule. They fervently serve Ragesia's supreme inquisitor named Leska, who until recently was a loyal servant of the emperor and his chief advisor. Now Leska seems to be among those scrambling to grab the reins of power in Ragesia, and her inquisitors are her greatest weapon.

Mages tell stories of inquisitors — sent to hunt down disloyal mages — completely ignoring powerful spells, or even turning spells against their casters. The few who have

been captured by inquisitors and have lived to tell the tale recount being tortured and being left to a slow, cold death unless they betrayed their allies. Some rumor that inquisitors can even devour the souls of magic-users, taking their powers for themselves before raising the slain mage as an undead follower. No one is certain what the source of the Inquisitors' power is, or why it seems so effective against both arcane and divine magic. Those who inquire too closely tend to vanish quietly.

Shahalesti

On the far side of the mountains that mark Ragesia's eastern border spreads the Shining Land of Shahalesti, ruled by Lord Tirradion, a middle-aged half elf who rose from being a military commander to the nation's ruler during the ascension of the Ragesian Empire. Shahalesti was in danger of being conquered like Ragesia's other neighbors, and Tirradion's aggressive displays of force — including the conquest and destruction of two nearby elvish lands that were hostile to him — are credited as major reasons why Ragesia has so far not looked east for conquest.

During Ragesia's annexation of its neighbors, Lord Tirradion lent aid, and he and his trusted aides participated personally in battles at Coaltongue's side. A canny, charismatic commander, Tirradion is respected even by the Ragesian army, and many expected him to succeed after Coaltongue's death. Rumors say that the half elvish lord had been quite displeased that the old tiefling was refusing to die of old age.

Shahalesti is not an entirely elvish nation. A large percentage of its population is human, but they live as commoners with little real power. The aristocracy as well as the higher ranks among the military are almost exclusively half elvish, elvish, or eladrin. Despite a grudging alliance with Ragesia, however, tieflings are despised and persecuted, unable to hold any public positions, often horribly exploited in difficult jobs with poor wages. A few outposts of wealthy tieflings with ties to Ragesia have tried to start their own communities, and this is a steady source of strife.

The capital of Shahalesti, Calanis, is built over a crescent rift carved by a waterfall. The city is forbidden to non-elves except by invitation from one of the royal family which, as of now, consists only of Tirradion and his daughter Shahadel.

Dassen

The Kingdom of Dassen lies to the south of Ragesia, and the southwest of Shahalesti, its borders defined by craggy mountains defended by hundreds of small dwarven strongholds. Dassen's people, a swarthy assortment of humans and dwarves, cherish their land, to the point that superstitious cavalymen even put dirt in their boots so never have to stop touching the soil of their homeland.

King Sigeward rules a patchwork of eight feudal holdings, many of them controlled by distant relatives with claims to the throne of numbing complexity. To assure that he never has to worry about untangling these claims, Sigeward has had a huge family with eighteen children, all of them legitimate on the word of his oath.

There are no mighty cities in Dassen; only thousands of farms and towns growing out from the nine castles of the king and his jarls. The largest city, Bresk, lies on a major river beside Sigeward's castle, and is a hilly community built both above and below ground. The island of Seaquen is technically part of Dassen, but tends to be quite independent, and is dominated by a large school of magic which has flourished there for many years.

Sindaire

The national government of the Exarchate of Sindaire is officially run by a representative from Ragesia, but in practice the Exarch has limited power. The people of Sindaire pay some taxes to Ragesia, but maintain their own armies and laws. They take mild comfort in knowing that, should Ostalin, their neighbors to the south, ever attempt to claim more land, Ragesia will come to their defense. Sindaire is largely a collection of refugees from various conflicts in the past, including humans, elves, halflings, tieflings, and dragonborn. Sindaire is also the only area where genasi are common enough to have their own communities, notably the city of Akanûl.

Sindaire has a large elvish population, coming from a time when a group of refugees fleeing a catastrophe in what is now Shahalesti settled in Sindaire's warm forests, converting many of the locals through their generosity and their disciplined devotion to nobler ideals. Because lions are revered in these foreigner's culture, lions and other large cats such as ocelots now fill the role of pets to the aristocracy, and guard dogs for the common folk.

The capital city of Turinn lies on two sides of along rock spur. The western side has ports on the sea, while the bulk of the city lies safe on the east.

Recently a vocal group of city mayors and members

of the Amberguild Trading Consortium from the center of the nation began to protest the taxes to Ragesia, and refused to pay. Unlike the coastal cities, they little benefited from trade with Ragesian ships, and they called for the removal of the Exarch, a tiefling woman named Juliana. Despite protests from the government ministers, the Exarch sent a plea to Ragesia, and Coaltongue's army repounded, traveling by Torch to the central prairies to put down the rebellion.

It is in Sindaire that Emperor Coaltongue is rumored to have met his long-delayed fate, although no one knows exactly what happened, or how his death came about.

Ostalin

For many years, the island people of Ostalin battled among themselves, before finally a warlord conquered his foes and proclaimed himself Khagan. He then led his people to the mainland, conquering lands from Sindaire with the aid of hippogriff aerial archers and his fierce army. The city of Qin Dao resisted strongly, but was unable to fight when their city was torched by flaming pots of oil dropped from the air onto vulnerable buildings. Qin Dao was almost burned to the ground as a result of the attack. The remaining cities of what was then southern Sindaire surrendered and payed tribute to the unstoppable war leader. The Khagan continued northward, until he reached a mountain range and felt he had done enough. He chose to rebuild Qin Dao and make it his capital. The Khagan had many children with many wives, but ultimately left his nation to his son Tegutai, in whom he saw the same fire of obsession that led him to conquer. The Khagan hoped his son would be the one to topple Coaltongue and rule Ragesia.

The Khaganhold of Ostalin is a violent state, ruled poorly by Khagan Tegutai, whose passions and desires far outstrip his talents. The capital city of Qin Dao is relatively small, since the city that used to occupy the land was burned down only a few decades ago by the original Khagan during his rise to power. The nation's diverse landscape is renowned for its beauty, and Sindaire still seeks to reclaim it.