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*The stories told about the Serpent River are
as numerous as the fish swimming in it.*

• MERROX, MASTER OF THE HALL OF RECORDS •

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INTRODUCTION

*Throal has become the heart of Barsaive,
and the waters of the mighty
Serpent River serve as its lifeblood.*

• SEPHIRIA MONS, TROUBADOUR TO QUEEN ALACHIA OF THE BLOOD WOOD •

The age of **Earthdawn** was an era of magic that existed thousands of years ago in our world's dim past. Magic touched every aspect of the lives of men and women of the Namegiver races: humans, elves, dwarfs, orks, trolls, windlings, t'skrang, and obsidimen. However, as the levels of magic rose, so did the dangers in the world. The rise of magic brought the Horrors to Earth, creatures from the depths of astral space that devoured all life in their path. For four centuries, the people of Barsaive hid underground as the Horrors devastated their lands during the dark time that came to be called the Scourge.

Now, the Scourge is over, and people have emerged from their sealed kaers and citadels. From all across Barsaive, bold heroes step forward to champion their land, arming themselves with powerful spells and magical treasures. Through magic, skill, and daring, Barsaive's heroes strive to heal the world of the scars left by the Scourge, and fight the oppression of the Theran Empire. By doing so, they become Barsaive's living legends.

Nations of Barsaive Volume Two offers gamemasters and players an in-depth look at the Serpent River. This book provides detailed descriptions of the six great t'skrang trading houses, featuring revised and updated content, and new material for adventures in the world of **Earthdawn**.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

N**ations of Barsaive Volume Two** is a sourcebook for the **Earthdawn** game. This book offers readers a cross section of legends, history, customs, and lore of the people who live along the Serpent River, with a particular focus on the masters of the river, the t'skrang. Players can use this information to enhance their characters' backgrounds and increase their knowledge of the world of **Earthdawn**. Gamemasters can use the wealth of opportunities in this book to create new adventures, flesh out the game world, and expand the scope of evolving campaigns.

Aside from the **Player's** and **Gamemaster's Guides**, the gamemaster and players need no other material to use this product, though gamemasters may find other published **Earthdawn** products useful; for example, more information on t'skrang culture can be found in the **Namegivers of Barsaive** book.

This sourcebook begins with an overview of **The Serpent River**, offering a brief glimpse of the waterway and surrounding lands, the various t'skrang trading houses that control it, and the manner in which travel and trade are conducted along the river's length. Following this overview is a chapter devoted to **The T'skrang Aropagoi**, each of which controls a region of the river, including notable settle-



ments and communities, famous and infamous characters whom players may encounter, and other items of interest. **A Tour of the Serpent** highlights places of interest to player characters who travel along the Serpent River. The final chapter, **Adventures on the Serpent**, includes several sample adventure outlines.

The second part of this book offers game mechanics and rules for situations that might arise when adventuring along the Serpent River. The **Creatures** chapter provides descriptions and game information for a variety of new creatures and unusual plants. The **Goods and Services** and **Magical Treasures** chapters include descriptions and statistics for various magical and common items that adventurers may encounter on their travels. The **Riverboats** chapter includes new game statistics for several different types of riverboats. Finally, the **Character Index** summarizes the many gamemaster and other characters described in the book.

Like other **Earthdawn** sourcebooks, *Nations of Barsaive Volume Two* provides the gamemaster with detailed background information to read at his leisure. It also offers plenty of solutions for problems that gamemasters are likely to run into in the course of an adventure. The Serpent River and its major tributaries form a network of waterways that extends for more than 10,000 miles throughout Barsaive, so this sourcebook can't possibly describe it all. The purpose of this sourcebook is not to fill in all the gaps, but to open the doors of the gamemaster's and players' imaginations.

To give gamemasters and players a taste of the flavor of **Earthdawn**, first-person fictional accounts from **Earthdawn** characters are interspersed throughout the book. You can use them as a guide to the game's atmosphere, or as jumping-off points for story lines in which the player characters get involved.

Though the material offered in this book is presented as fact and should be treated as accurate in terms of **Earthdawn** continuity, remember that you are the ultimate author of your campaign. If a fact in this sourcebook contradicts something you have already established in your game, or if you find it inconvenient, go ahead and change it. Any player who claims that the gamemaster is wrong about some detail of Barsaive deserves to have as many changes thrown at him as you can dream up. In some instances, this book presents contradictory accounts of a setting or character as options from which the gamemaster can choose. These **options** allow you to decide which version of the truth is real in your campaign.

AT THE BRINK OF WAR

In addition to providing gamemasters with basic information on the recovering civilizations in Barsaive, this book details several conflicts developing in the province. Whether groups of adventurers explore the length of the Serpent or settle down to explore its mysteries, terrible dangers are brewing in the background.

Barsaive has staged a remarkable recovery from the devastating effects of the Scourge, largely because of Throal's efforts.

Thanks to the dwarf kingdom and a few legendary heroes, Barsaivians can live in relative safety in the province's larger cities and towns. However, this surface stability is currently facing a crisis.

When the threat of the Horrors receded, the major powers of Barsaive felt secure enough to focus on their political and military rivalries. When the Therans established the fortress of Triumph near Lake Ban, a new, bloodstained chapter in Barsaive's history began.



THE SERPENT RIVER

Ah, how the river sparkles! Liquid divinity, like the Passions come to rest in Barsaive.

• S'RELLA JRISTOL, T'SKRANG TROUBADOUR •

Of all the Namegiver races, none is more closely associated with the Serpent River than the t'skrang. To the t'skrang, the river is life itself—a source of food, shelter, livelihood, even divine inspiration. The traditional t'skrang tale of the Four Gifts of Upandal explains the origins of the t'skrang mastery of the Serpent. This tale is told in t'skrang villages to this day, each word unchanged since the first telling.

In the days before the Theran Empire, before t'skrang riverboats and village towers had spread across the river, the t'skrang foundations lived on the banks of the Serpent and plied its waters in oar-driven galleys. In those days the elves were a great nation, and they vied with the t'skrang to be masters of the river waters. It so happened that the Passion Jaspree favored one of the Elven Queen's attendants, a questor Named Elidar, with powers over elemental wood. Armed with these powers, Elidar crafted a new kind of ship, a vessel propelled by the wind and the energy of elemental wood. So swift were these new ships that they outpaced even the swiftest t'skrang ship. The elves armed their ships with archers and swordsmen, and expanded the realm of the Elven Court all along the river from Lake Vors to Lake Ban.

Now in those days, one shivalahala ruled all the t'skrang—the Prophetess of Syrtis. The Prophetess had great wisdom, and the t'skrang of the Serpent River looked to her as the elves did their queen. When the elven fleet besieged the Halls of Syrtis, countless brave t'skrang came to their honored leader's defense; but the elven fleet was strong and well supplied, and all too soon the defenders of Syrtis came near to surrendering from sheer exhaustion. The shivalahala, seeing their distress, drew upon the vast knowledge and power of generations of t'skrang, and beseeched the Passions to aid her people.

In answer to her call, Upandal the Builder appeared to the shivalahala as a huge four-armed t'skrang, clad in the apron of a blacksmith, carrying a hammer and a steel triangle in his right hands and bearing a cup and a flame in his left hands. "Welcome, O Passion, to the Halls of Syrtis, the Nightwatcher," said the shivalahala. "From Lake Vors to Lake Ban, the elves in their sailing ships chase my people away from the river. Our ships lie sunk and abandoned on the riverbed. Our villages are empty and the people have lost hope. Jaspree has delivered a great boon to the elves, but a great curse upon t'skrang. We seek counsel and salvation, Upandal, you who laid the foundations of the world."

Upandal looked out over the face of the land and saw that things were as the shivalahala said. And the Passion said, "The balance of life on the river has come undone. I cannot undo the work of Jaspree, for hers is the power over life, and thus over the wood and cloth that makes the elves strong. But in my hand lies command over the other four elements. What will you have of me, Mother of the Riverfolk?"

The shivalahala thought long, then answered thus: "The Halls of Syrtis are a great fortress against the enemy, but my people are many and these halls cannot hold them. If it can be, I would ask that you provide refuge for my people in citadels all along the river, that they may defend themselves against the elves."

At this Upandal let fly his hammer, and the hammer ran the length of the river. And where it touched the surface of the waters, great towers of stone erupted from the riverbed. And the shivalahala thought again and said, "My people will rest safe under the great towers you have raised, Upandal. We shall make our homes on the riverbed of the Great Mother Shivoam. But our gills are not such that we can live under the River's water. We must have air to breathe."

And so Upandal reached out with his steel triangle and cut half of the towers to the surface of the river. The force of the river's current broke against these towers, and air flowed through the towers. Once more the shivalahala thought, and said, "The ships of the elves can still come against us, bringing war to our towers and blood to our homes. We must have fortifications to turn back their ships."

And so Upandal overturned the cup in his left hand and elemental water poured forth into the river. The water took solid form as reefs of spikes around the towers, sure to pierce the hull of any ship that passed too close. These were the refselenika. Finally, the shivalahala said, "All this that you have made is wise, Lord Upandal. But what good shall come of all you have wrought if the t'skrang are prisoners in the fortresses you have built for us? We must have a boat that can stand against the ships of Elidar, so that we can come and go along the river as we please."

In reply, Upandal placed his remaining hand on the forehead of his questor, T'chaidos. The flame in the Passion's hand passed into the questor's mind. Filled to the limit of madness by the Builder's gift, T'chaidos constructed the first fire engine and the first riverboat. Armed with these new tools, the t'skrang soon raised a fleet and sailed against the ships of Elidar. And when the K'choss na Erawyrm, the War Between the Elves and the T'skrang, ended, the t'skrang became the undisputed masters of the Serpent River.

—From The Four Gifts of Upandal:
A T'skrang Tale

The t'skrang know her as Shivoam, the River Dragon. To the dwarfs of Throal, she is Zhirazkhul the Encircler. The elves of the Blood Wood call her Shilarai, the Watersong. And the trolls of Barsaive know her as the Shining Path, for she becomes a glittering ribbon of light when seen from an airship. From the rushing waters of the Grand Cataracts to the impenetrable

fog of the Mist Swamps, the great Serpent River runs the length of Barsaive, connecting the far-flung settlements of the province. Since the dawn of history, Namegivers have plied her waters in fishing boats, merchant vessels, and mighty warships. And today, the Serpent River still flows through the hearts and histories of Barsaive's peoples. To know the Serpent River is to know Barsaive.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE SERPENT RIVER

The following overview of the Serpent River briefly describes the river's geography, the *aropagoi* that dominate the various regions, present-day politics surrounding the river trade, and the workings of trade and travel along the river.

ON THE SERPENT'S GEOGRAPHY

The long, winding Serpent River runs the entire breadth of Barsaive, from beyond the Scol Mountains in the North to the Mist Swamps in the South. Countless tributaries feed the Serpent along its course, forming a network of watery highways that travelers and traders have used for thousands of years. The Serpent also provides fresh water to thousands of Barsaivians, and its banks contain some of the richest farmland in the province.

The source of the river lies in the uncharted mountain ranges to the northwest of Barsaive beyond the Grand Cataracts, a series of waterfalls that tower more than one hundred feet in the air. The river becomes un-navigable beyond the Cataracts, and so the exact source of the Serpent remains unknown.

A few hundred miles south of the Grand Cataracts, the **North Reach** of the river runs south past Iopos, home of the Denairastas clan, then winds eastward in the shadow of the Scol Mountains into the domain of isolated troll moots. From there, the river continues east to Lake Vors, site of the Citadel of House Ishkarat, the fierce t'skrang *aropagoi* that dominates the Serpent's North Reach. The harsh, untamed lands along the North Reach contain little more than isolated settlements of Namegivers.

East of Lake Vors the Serpent is joined by the River Mothingale, which marks the beginning of the Serpent's **Mid Reach**. The Mid Reach flows east through the foothills of the Scythia and Caucavic Mountains, then turns south before it reaches the Lalai Gorge, site of the Cliff City of House Syrtis. As the river flows south, the rugged foothills give way to lush vineyards and increasing numbers of farming settlements. The Mid Reach passes through the dwarf settlement of Tansiarda and the renowned boatyards of Denlikyan before reaching the northern shores of Lake Ban.

Lake Ban marks the confluence of the Serpent and the Coil River, which flows from the Throal Mountains down to Urupa, the powerful trading city on the shores of the Aras Sea. The lake is best known as the site of the Floating City of House V'strimon, a powerful t'skrang *aropagoi*.

From Lake Ban, the **South Reach** of the river flows west to Lake Pyros, located along the edge of the Servos Jungle. Pyros is the smallest of the Serpent Lakes, but its fertile shores continue to attract numerous Namegivers in spite of the nearby jungle's hazards. West of Lake Pyros, the Serpent is joined by the Byrose River, which runs south to the wealthy trading city of Travar. The Serpent then continues west and is joined by the Servos and Tylon rivers before it empties into the Mist Swamps.

For more information on the Serpent River's geography, including notable settlements and personalities, refer to **A Tour of the Serpent** on p. 50.



OF TRADE AND POLITICS

Throughout the history of the Serpent River, trade and politics have been intimately intertwined. The t'skrang communities of the Serpent have dominated both since time immemorial, and this dominance—personified by the *aropagoi*, the t'skrang great trading houses—largely determines the conditions traders and travelers on the Serpent must face.

The fundamental social, economic, and political unit of Serpent River t'skrang society is the *niall*, or foundation. Each *niall* is an extended family that may include up to 200 individuals. Some *nialls* maintain their own settlements along the river, but most often two or more join together to form a village. Each village forms its own crew and trading covenants to operate riverboats. While many t'skrang villages operate as independent economic and political entities, most belong to one of the *aropagoi*, which represent the pinnacle of t'skrang economic and political power on the Serpent River.

The exact translation of *aropagoi* is “honored center,” which reflects the key function of an *aropagoi*: to serve as a central foundation based not on family relationships, but on loyalty and respect gained within the *aropagoi* organization. Individuals may join an *aropagoi* by being elected or chosen by the *aropagoi*'s members, who are known as *aropagoinya*. Upon joining an *aropagoi*, a new member adopts a *g'doinya*, a Name for use within the central foundation. During the *g'doinya* ritual, the initiate also receives a token of identification unique to the *aropagoi*. As a member of the *aropagoi*, the individual receives several privileges, including the opportunity to serve as an officer on one of the *aropagoi*'s warships. Because t'skrang consider *aropagoi* membership so important, most regard possession of an *aropagoi* token under false pretenses as a criminal act, and punish offenders by cutting their tails off. Amputation of an arm or leg is the typical punishment for a non-t'skrang offender.

Every *aropagoi* is led by a *shivalahala*, who serves as political, social, and spiritual leader. *Shivalahalas* preserve the ancestral memories of their predecessors and many are said to possess supernatural powers. Because of their importance to their *aropagoi*, *shivalahalas* seldom venture forth from their home cities. Most *shivalahalas* maintain councils whose members aid them in setting and implementing trade and political policies, as well as governing the *aropagoi*. Generally, council members are selected from the various villages and foundations that belong to each *aropagoi*.

Before the Theran War, riverboats from more than a dozen *aropagoi* plied the waters of the Serpent River. These *aropagoi* grew over the course of centuries, as the river t'skrangs' never-ending quest for supremacy over trading rivals led them to form ever larger groups. Despite their high level of political and economic development, the t'skrang of the Serpent have never exhibited a sense of national identity like that displayed by Barsaive's dwarfs and elves, largely because of the wide dispersion of t'skrang settlements along the Serpent and the intense, ongoing economic competition between the *aropagoi*.

Currently, six t'skrang *aropagoi* dominate trade on the Serpent: **House K'tenshin**, **House V'strimon**, **House Syrtis**, **House Ishkarat**, **House Henghyoke**, and **House T'kambras**. Each *aropagoi*, with the exception of House Henghyoke, controls a section of the river system, but riverboats from all the *aropagoi* travel the length of the Serpent. Although many t'skrang villages and settlements along the river are not officially affiliated with any *aropagoi*, all settlements operate under the system of trade the *aropagoi* make possible.

House Ishkarat

House Ishkarat, the House of the Wheel, dominates the North Reach of the Serpent River. The *aropagoi* has adopted a crimson wheel set on a field of white as its symbol. A ritual dagger of black obsidian serves as the *aropagoi's* *g'doinya*. The *aropagoi's* base, an island fortress located in the western end of Lake Vors, is known as the Citadel of Ishkarat. The *aropagoi's* thirst for conquest has left it with few allies, other than the Denarastas clan of Iopos. Little is known of the *aropagoi's* *shivalahala*.

For more information on House Ishkarat, see **House Ishkarat**, p. 16 of **The T'skrang Aropagoi**.

House Syrtis

House Syrtis, the House of the Dragon Moon, has ruled the Serpent's Mid Reach for centuries. The *aropagoi's* symbol is a silver dragon on a blue field, and a silver ring with a dragon cameo set in blue crystal serves as its *g'doinya*. The heart of the *aropagoi* is the Cliff City, which lies in the Lalai Gorge. The Syrtis *aropagoi's* only true ally is House V'strimon, but in recent years House Syrtis has joined forces with the elves of the Blood Wood to check the expansion of House Ishkarat. The House of the Dragon Moon is led by the *Shivalahala* Syrtis, a Wizard also known as "the Prophetess" for her extraordinary prophetic gifts.

For more information on House Syrtis, see **House Syrtis**, p. 19 of **The T'skrang Aropagoi**.

House V'strimon

House V'strimon, the House of Reeds, controls the Coil River, which runs from the Throal Mountains to the Aras Sea and intersects the Serpent at Lake Ban. The *aropagoi* also controls a small portion of the Serpent on either side of the lake.

A sheaf of green reeds on a blue field serves as the symbol of the house.

As their *g'doinya*, the *aropagoinya* of House V'strimon wear bracelets woven with reeds native to Lake Ban. The reeds remain forever green and supple around the bearer's right wrist.

The Floating City, located in the center of Lake Ban, serves as the *aropagoi's* central settlement. House V'strimon is closely allied with Throal, the city of Urupa, and House Syrtis. The *Shivalahala* V'strimon, an Elementalist of monumental talent and a questor of Jaspree, leads the *aropagoi*. Recent events have led to open warfare with House K'tenshin.

For more information on House V'strimon, see **House V'strimon**, p. 30 of **The T'skrang Aropagoi**.

House K'tenshin

House K'tenshin, the House of Nine Diamonds, controls the South Reach of the river. The *aropagoi's* symbol is nine red diamonds set on a gold field. The *g'doinya* of the *aropagoi* is an earring of ruby and gold, which K'tenshin *aropagoinya* wear in the skin slits under their left ear slits.

The *aropagoi's* base is a magnificent river village located on the Serpent between the Byrose and the Servos rivers. The village features 16 towers, arranged to form a pattern of nine diamonds.

House K'tenshin is an ally of the Theran Empire. Since the arrival of the Theran behemoth, the K'tenshin seized control of the river from the Mist Swamps to Lake Ban. The *aropagoi* is best known for its war college, which is headed by the *Shivalahala* K'tenshin, a respected Warrior adept.

For more information on House K'tenshin, see **House K'tenshin**, p. 40 of **The T'skrang Aropagoi**.

House T'kambras

The recently revived House T'kambras, the House of Swift Waters, vies with House K'tenshin for control of trade on the Tylon River. The *aropagoi's* symbol is a white salmon leaping over blue-green river rapids. The *g'doinya* of the *aropagoi* is unknown.

This *aropagoi's* influence is strongest along the northern Tylon, but the precise location of House T'kambras' central settlement remains unknown. The house is allied with House V'strimon and has no known *shivalahala*, but its most prominent member is the riverboat captain known as Jedaiyen Westhrall.

For more information on House T'kambras, see **House T'kambras**, p. 45 of **The T'skrang Aropagoi**.

