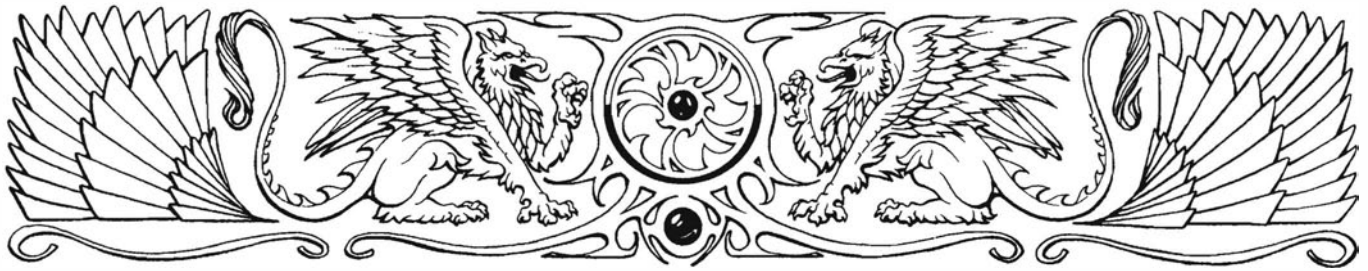


An Explorer's Guide to Barsaive

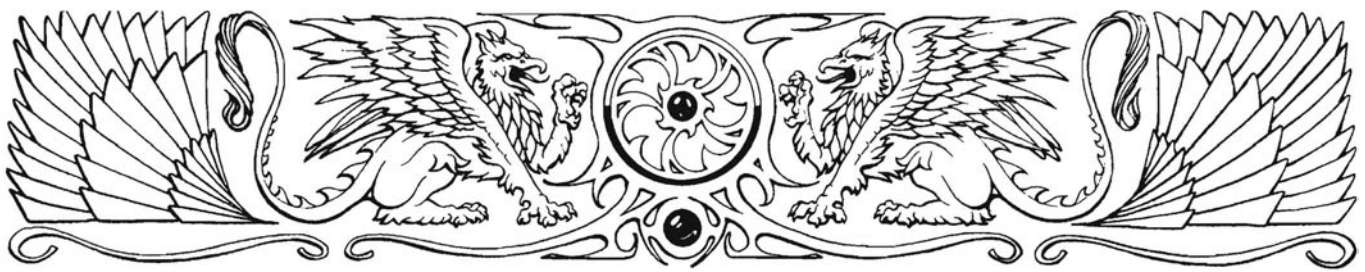


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ON THE NATURE OF THE EXPLORER'S GUIDE TO BARSAIVE	4	ON DENIZENS OF BARSAIVE	50
ON THE COMPILING OF THE EXPLORER'S GUIDE TO BARSAIVE	5	On the Name-giver Races	50
ON THE ORIGINS OF THE LAND OF BARSAIVE	6	On the Multitude of Other Denizens	58
Of the Land and Its People	6	Tribes and Clan Within the Races	62
Of Thera and the Scourge	7	ON TOWNS AND CITIES	76
ON THE SCOURGE		On Villages and Towns	76
On the Scourge and What It Wrought	11	On the Great Cities	78
The Books of Harrow	11	REGARDING THE LAND AND ITS PLACES	90
On the Building of the Shelters	13	On the Landscape and Weather	90
Of Life During the Scourge	16	On the Flora and Fauna	90
Of the Ending of the Scourge	17	On the Animals of Barsaive	92
On How the Scourge Changed Us	18	On Seas and Waterways	92
On the Legacy of the Scourge	20	On the Mountains of Barsaive	94
ON LIFE IN BARSAIVE	21	On Noteworthy Wild Lands	99
A Discourse on Daily Life	21	On Places of Legend and Peril	103
Barsaive as We Know It	21	ON THE KINGDOM OF THROAL	109
On the Varying Customs of Barsaive	22	On the First Sight of Throal	109
On Our Diverse Languages	25	A Discourse on Recent History	110
On Trade and the Flow of Goods	28	On the Workings of Throalic Law	110
A Discourse on Secret Societies	29	Within the Dwarf Kingdom	111
Where the Peoples of Barsaive Dwell	30	ON BLOOD WOOD	114
ON THE NATURE OF MAGIC	31	On the Terrible Beauty of Blood Wood	114
On the Wielding of Magic	31	How Blood Wood Came To Be	115
On the Nature of Magical Thought	34	OF THE THERAN EMPIRE	120
On the Nature of Magical Elements	36	Of Prideful Thera and Barsaive	120
On the Laws of Magic	37	Of the Theran People	121
ON TRAVEL IN THE LAND OF BARSAIVE	38	A Discourse on Theran Governance	121
On the Dangers and		Of the Theran Presence in Barsaive	122
Delights of Journeying	38		
On Traveling Over Land	38		
A Discourse on Maps	40		
On the Joys and Dangers of River Travel	42		
On the Wonders of Airship Travel	45		

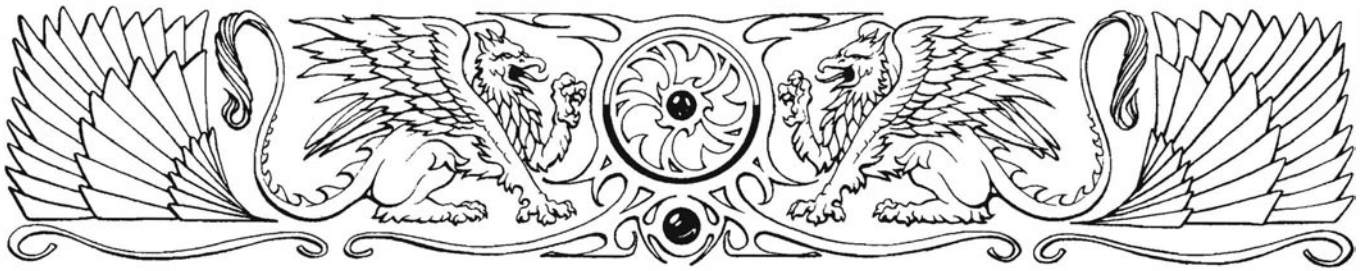




KEY TO ARCHIVIST SYMBOLS

-  **Ardinn Tero**
Scholar of the Library of Throal
-  **Daron Fenn**
Scholar of the Library of Throal
-  **Derrat**
Wizard of the City of Yntaine
-  **Jaron of Bethabel**
Scholar of the Library of Throal
-  **Jerriv Fortin**
Scribe and Scholar of the Library of Throal
-  **Karon Foll**
Elven Scholar
-  **Kern Redhand**
Historian of Throal
-  **Merrox**
Master of the Hall of Records
-  **Thom Edrull**
Archivist and Scribe of the Hall of Records





ON THE NATURE OF THE EXPLORER'S GUIDE TO BARSAIVE

We live in an age of magical thought. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the earth we stand upon, and the fire before which we warm ourselves are ours to manipulate as we desire. I know people who can give life to the bones of the dead with a wave of the hand. I have traveled with troll raiders in their magical airships, flying just below the belly of the clouds. I have seen a man ripped apart from the inside out because his enemy learned too much about him. Magic controls all things, all change, all destinies.

I do not know if our world has always been as rich in magic as it is in our own age—certainly the research of the Therans dictates otherwise. For myself, I am convinced of the inevitability and power of change in all things. I have watched the world transform from a bleak landscape of dry brown earth to a living bower of lush, green forests. I have seen the terror of the Scourge give way to cautious, new hope. Where once people lived in isolated hamlets ruled by fear of the outside world, the dwarfs of Throal have brought Barsaive's towns, cities, and villages together through trade and political pacts. I have also seen Throal's efforts thwarted by the airships and legions of the Theran Empire, bent on recapturing a province they once owned. The world abounds in complications, and the ebb and flow of its transformations form a pattern that no one still living in the world can discern.

Magic gives us all the chance to influence the fate of our world, because magic allows us to know and even alter all things. Magic leads brave adventurers to glittering treasures buried in the Dragon Mountains, and magic powers the fire cannons of riverboats that clash in fierce battles along the Serpentine River. One can use magic to assassinate political rivals, sway the emotions of enemies and allies, or steal jewels from the hand of a sleeping prince. Magic allows the Horrors to enter the minds of unwitting victims and determines victory or defeat for the bands of ork cavalry that sweep across the plains to plunder lonely caravans. Swordmasters, thieves, troubadours, magicians, and others practice their arts through the magical thought that is the living force of our world.

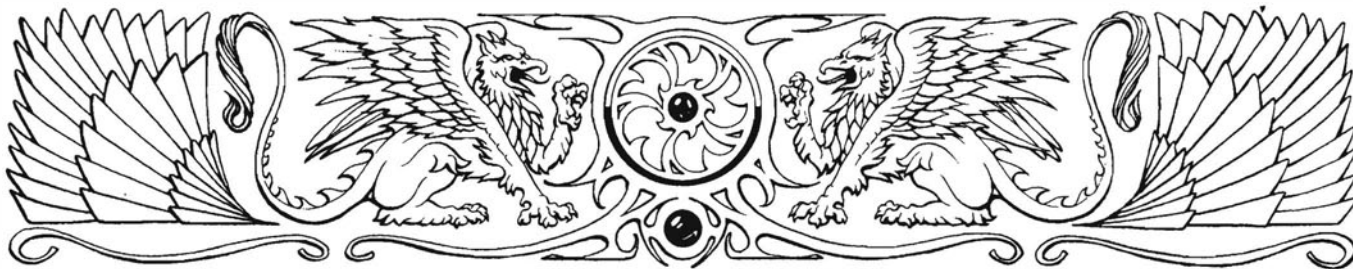
How long this age of magical thought will last, I cannot say, nor can I know what the following age may bring. I believe, however, that this magical age will one day end. So that those who come after us may remember the time in which we lived, I have commanded Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records, to see to the writing of this book.

Our story is a part of the world's legend, and our children must and should know of it. In our age, farmers defend their families against creatures more dreadful than nightmares from the darkest depths of the soul, and the free Kingdom of Throal battles tirelessly to throw off the last remnants of Theran oppression. Wonder and splendor exist side by side with brutality and strife.

The Barsaive I know is a world of despots and corrupted kingdoms, of magical treasures and fantastical creatures. In Barsaive, wonder and fear twine together; hope and despair are the twin sides of the same coin. You who read this, think well on our lives. Whether or not we have left you a world to your liking, we are your past, and our stories carry lessons for your future.

—Varulus III, King of Throal
12 Gahmil, 1506 TH





ON THE COMPILING OF THE EXPLORER'S GUIDE TO BARSATIVE

The writing of this great book began on a day no different from any other day. Though the summons that came for me was from King Varulus III, such an occurrence was not unusual. As Master of the Hall of Records of the Library of Throal, I have on other occasions been called by the king to gather certain information or to perform odd bits of research. On this day, however, his request far exceeded the mundane tasks he had previously set for me.

I found the king in his study, chin in hand as if contemplating his next move in the game of *pratee* he was playing with his eldest son. He looked up as I entered, greeting me with a warm smile.

"Merrox, I wish you to undertake an important task for me," he began as he almost always did. "I wish you to compile a document that describes Barsaive to those who know nothing of it. Many of Barsaive's own people remain ignorant of the wonders and perils that lie within the boundaries of their own province, but that is not as it should be. I wish for them to learn more of this place in which they live. Our library needs a book to serve as a guide to our land."

I clutched the back of a chair to steady myself, feeling the raised patterns of the carvings in its cold stone back bite into the tips of my fingers. My day had taken a turn into the realm of the fantastic.

"You may have whatever you need to complete the book—within reason," the king continued. "Spare no efforts, Merrox. This document is of paramount importance to me."

Dazed but undaunted by my king's unusual request, I returned to my office and called together my chief assistants. We sat wakeful long into the night, determining how best to accomplish our mission. It was many days before I returned to King Varulus with my list of requirements, all of which he granted save one. Permission to visit the Eternal Library of Thera he refused me, reminding me that the enmity between Throal and Thera made it impossible for any known citizen of Throal to patronize a Theran institution. Though I would have liked to inspect their archives, I acceded to my king's wisdom and began work on this book with the resources on hand.

At last, many years after King Varulus called me into his chambers that day, my assistants and I have completed the task set us. All of the information in this document was gathered first-hand by explorers and adventurers who have traveled across Barsaive in search of knowledge. Each group visited a different region of Barsaive, reporting on the various cities, mountains, rivers, forests, and other sites of interest along the way. My fellow archivists and I have distilled the information they brought into a readable and fascinating manuscript, available for the asking to any resident of Barsaive who visits the Library of Throal.

Each section of this book describes in detail a facet of life in Barsaive. Comments from the librarian in charge of each area of research preface every section. In addition, my fellow scholars and I have added our own observations regarding certain places and events in the margins of the text and copied in entries from the explorers' journals in hopes of conveying the realities of Barsaive through firsthand accounts of its marvels and terrors.

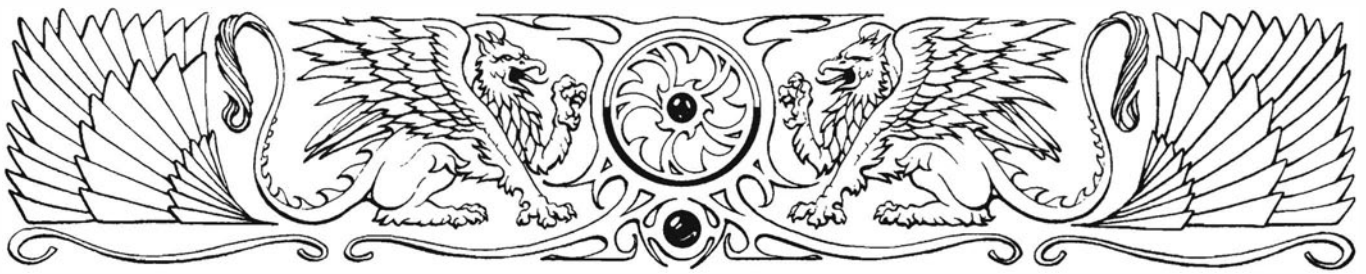
For all those who read this, remember that every individual sees the world through his own eyes. Though we have tried to pass on only verifiable facts, some of the information in this document may be inaccurate, if only because it reflects the particular bias or peculiar turn of mind of the explorer who provided the source material.

The following archivists contributed to this work, in the areas listed:

Project Master Merrox, On the Origins of the Land of Barsaive; Daron Fenn, On the Scourge; Ardinn Tero, On Life in Barsaive; Derrat, On the Nature of Magic; Thom Edrull, On Travel in the Land of Barsaive; Jerriv Forrim, On Denizens of Barsaive; Kern Redhand, On Towns and Cities; Thom Edrull, Regarding the Land and Its Places; Jaron of Bethabel, On the Kingdom of Throal; Karon Foal, On Blood Wood; Merrox, Of the Theran Empire.

—Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records
Great Library of Throal
14 Rua, 1505 TH





ON THE ORIGINS OF THE LAND OF BARSAIVE

Given the importance of the task, I thought myself the best candidate to write a condensed history of Barsaive. My work, culled from a vast array of material collected for this book, is as complete as I could manage, given the time and space constraints under which I labored. I can, however, personally vouch for the accuracy of the information given. To convey the fullest sense of Barsaive's wonders and rich past, I could find no better words than those of the following journal excerpt.

*—Most humbly offered by Merrox, Master of the Hall of Records,
and by the Passions' Grace, a Loyal Servant of His Majesty the King of Throal*



—From the journal of Torgak, 1665 TH (transcribed by Lorin of Throal)

After countless days of travel, many of my companions became convinced that we had become hopelessly lost. Though we had followed to the letter the directions given us in Throal, the Forgotten City was still nowhere in sight.

I was determined to find the place and so resolved to continue on alone if need be. Fortunately my resolve was never tested, for only three days later we found it.

We were walking through a partially wooded area, the trees covering the top of a large hill. As we reached the hilltop, we saw the spires of ruined Parlainth spread out below us like a shattered mosaic. The descriptions we had read in the journals of J'role the thief and in the Library of Throal told of the shattered splendor of the Forgotten City, but I had foolishly considered this description exaggerated. The sight of the ruins taught me that words alone could not convey the awe and sadness one feels when face to face with the ruins of Parlainth.

The city lay smothered in tangled vines and overgrown plants. Once-tall spires and pyramids had crumbled into piles of broken stone, mute testimony to the destructive power and corruption of the Horrors.

Parlainth was like no city I had ever seen. I had been an explorer of sorts for years before that journey, and had discovered more than a dozen lost cities and kaers, but none so magnificent and sad as this. The ruins had a majesty to them, as if to say that neither the Horrors nor time itself could mar their beauty. But for all its grandeur, the place held a cold and uninviting presence. . .

OF THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

**FOR MY PART, I
AGREE. BUT I MUST
ADD THAT MANY
YEARS AGO I VISIT-
ED BLOOD WOOD,
AND DESPITE THE
HORRIBLE THINGS
THE ELVES DID TO
THEMSELVES DUR-
ING THE SCOURGE,
THEY ARE STILL A
BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE.
A TERRIBLE BEAUTY,**

**PERHAPS, BUT
UNDENIABLE.**

—KARON FOAL

The Therans named the province of Barsaive six hundred years ago, before the Scourge began. Even today the Therans consider Barsaive a province of their empire, though most Barsaivians give their allegiance to the dwarf kingdom of Throal. This stark contradiction between the perceptions of Barsaive's people and its would-be overlords creates much of the conflict between Thera and Barsaive.

A vast land, Barsaive takes weeks to cross even on the back of a war horse. The journey from the northern boundary to the southern takes 40 days on foot, 25 on horseback; the journey from east to west requires 60 days on foot, 38 days on horseback.

Barsaive's southern boundary is Death's Sea, a huge body of molten stone so hot that only elementals, Horrors, and those with magical protection may travel over it. The heat from the sea has transformed the surrounding land into a vast expanse of barren sand and rock. Legend says that enough blood spilled into the earth will quench the fire, and the sea will turn to water.

At Barsaive's northern boundary lies Blood Wood, a lush forest many days' ride across wherein the elven Queen and her corrupt court reside. Many elves outside Blood Wood no longer give their allegiance to the elven Queen, considering her as monstrous as the Horrors. The elves of Blood Wood have never lost their ability to perform intricate magic, however. The Queen's castle, supported by six great trees, is a magical wonder to behold.

