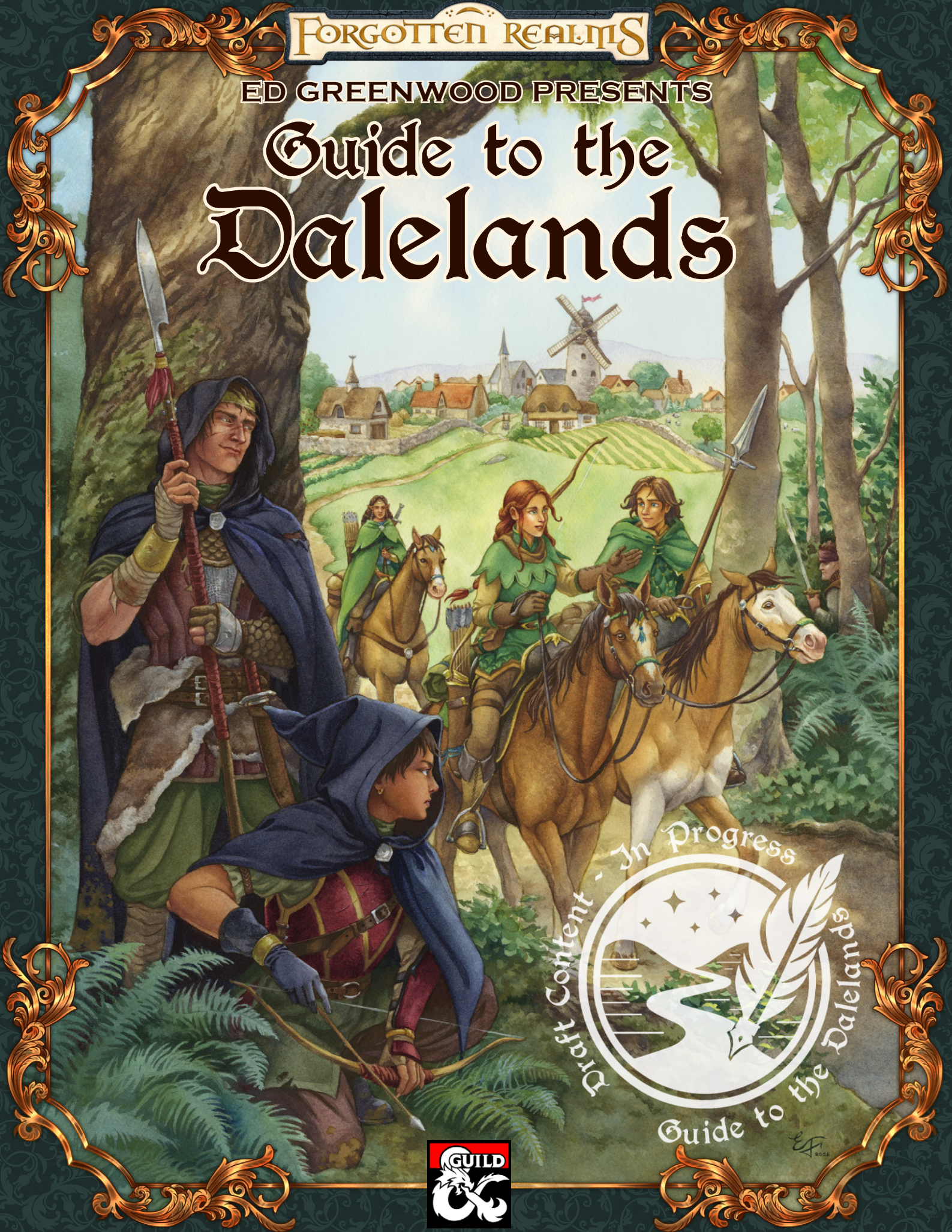


FORGOTTEN REALMS

ED GREENWOOD PRESENTS

Guide to the Dalelands



Draft Content - In Progress

Guide to the Dalelands





ED GREENWOOD PRESENTS

Guide to the Dalelands

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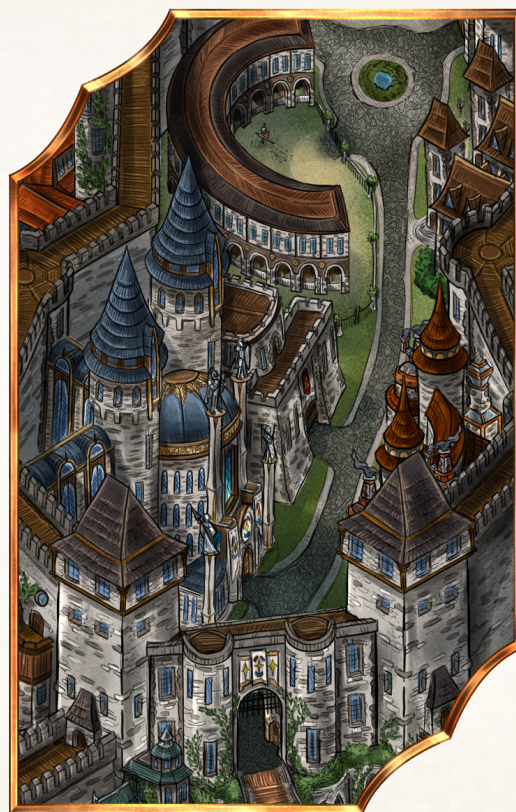
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Archendale

Wealthy and militant, Archendale has a history of aggression, violence, and belligerence toward fellow dales and other realms—especially Sembia, which has attempted to conquer it several times, militarily and economically. Should Archendale ever fall, Sembia's armies would likely sweep across the rest of the Dalelands. This is the nationalist myth of Archendale—a view of themselves as natural defenders and, if left unchecked, destined rulers of the Dalelands.

Introduction to Archendale

From the heavily-fortified capital of Archenbridge, built around the formidable fortress Swordpoint, the Swords exert strong militaristic rule over the dale. Ten-member bands of chainmail-clad Archenriders patrol the streets; rarely can a traveler on the country roads go an hour without seeing an entire Ride—a group of 60 such **Knights**—scouting for potential threats.

Archendale also controls Cormyr's easiest route to the other dales: along the Thunder Way and the Dawnpost south of the mountains. A Cormyrean host marching along this path would find itself trapped between Archendale, High Dale, and Sembia at the foot of Archenbridge, with the Archenriders of Swordpoint ever at the ready to set them to glorious rout.

Over a tenth of the dale's population lives in Archenbridge, where support for the Swords is open and essentially compulsory. Parades and rousing songs about protecting the heartland are commonplace in the capital. Most Arkhenfolk dwell in smaller villages and hamlets or on self-fortified farms, often built around ruined keeps and holdfasts from centuries past. Outside the cities, the common folk of the dale keep to themselves, trying to avoid the scrutiny of authorities. All citizens keep weapons on hand to march when called, as a militant civic pride pervades town and farm alike.

All this militarism fosters an air of scrutiny and distrust, as locals worry about stepping out of line or being perceived as a potential traitor or "bad seed." Arkhenfolk tend to be suspicious of outsiders, though strangers who prove their loyalty to the dale are trusted implicitly. For those who step out of line, justice is swift and delivered at the point of a sword.

Archenbridge is no great military power when compared to neighboring Cormyr or Sembia, but a fierce warrior spirit pervades the folk. It would be a mistake to underestimate Archendale's will and courage.

Year of the Shining Mythal

Archendale spent most of the last century as an uneasy, chaotic oligarchy, ruled by a merchant council that considered itself unaccountable to the common folk and never made inroads. Frequent Sembian incursions compounded the people's sense of urgency, prompting them to seek a new path. Enter the Swords, the three lords whose identities are kept secret in the dale by tradition and law. Reappearing in 1492 DR, they



Archendale summary

The strong, wealthy, and expansionist Archendale provides well for its growing population, nearly half of whom have some degree of military training or at least familiarity with weapons and tactics.

- **Demonym:** Arkhenfolk
- **Population:** 94,770 (55% Human, 10% Dwarf, 5% Elf, 10% Soum, 5% Halfling, 4% Orc, 1% Other)
- **Capital:** Archenbridge (11,024 plus 390 outside the city)
- **Settlements:** White Ford (1,538)
- **Government:** The Swords (LN, N, LE), Merchant Council (N)
- **Military:** Archenriders (600 **Knights**), potential citizen levy (2,000 **Warrior Infantry**)
- **Religions:** Lathander, Amaunator, Chauntea, Tempus
- **Exports:** produce, lumber, iron, salt
- **Imports:** clothing, lace, textiles, jewelry, metalcrafts, paper, glass
- **Threats:** civil strife, Moander, Sembia, giants, Archwood, Tasseldale

awakened Archendale's long-slumbering nationalist pride, and the dale quickly reorganized into the modern military force it is today.

The overweening love of homeland and force naturally leads to rivalries and belligerence, and Archendale has made numerous enemies of late. Its rapid militarization has given pause to other dales, who fear another would-be conqueror arising in their midst. Foreign powers such as Sembia, Thay, and the Zhentarim also eye the dale with increasing interest, not only as a foothold in the Dalelands but also as a staging ground for attacks on Cormyr.





Archendale

Lay of the Land

Archendale crouches like a guard dog at the southwestern edge of the Dalelands, growling at would-be invaders and controlling a substantial stretch of the River Arkhen.

Forests & Grasslands

The Arch Wood

The Arch Wood stands atop the ridge east of Archendale, forming a natural boundary for the dale. Ash, duskwood, elm, oak, and shadowtop trees grow thickly along the ridge's crest, casting a dark shadow across the Arkhen Vale, which locals often call the "Walls of Night" along with the mountains. The dense forest gives rise to rumors of monsters, ancient elven ruins, and the tombs of mages waiting to be plundered.

In olden days, thriving lumber production led to the clear-cutting of nearly half the southern forest, but recent political disagreements have weakened the industry's hold. Greedy Archenbridge merchants and their Sembian backers desperately want the forest's lumber and other natural resources, but the Swords have seized production to supply the dale's armed forces. The merchants have dug in their heels, however, and now the whole matter is mired in so much administrative dysfunction that dozens of ghost towns and mill sites have lain fallow and abandoned for years.



Mount Thalagbord, by Ben Mehlos

It is unsafe to hunt or log in the deep Arch Wood, where one is liable to come across Shadow Druid circles, emboldened fey, **Goblins**, **Giant Spiders**, or worse beneath those dark canopies.

Highlands & Valleys

Arkhen Vale

Running almost the width of Archendale, this long valley owes its existence to the flow of the River Arkhen, which carved it over centuries.

Steep, treacherous cliffs line either side of the vale, riddled with caves and hideaways for goblins, orcs, and bandits who prey on traders traveling along the Dawnpost. Narrow footpaths, replete with switchbacks, allow foot traffic to bypass the cliffs, but Archenbridge and White Ford provide the only routes where wagons or pack animals can cross the river safely.

Frequent flooding has made the valley floor rich and verdant, with a wide assortment of ferns and mosses, as well as isolated ponds and small waterfalls. It is a pleasant place to hike and picnic, provided one avoids the occasional raiding band hiding in the gorge.

Mount Thalagbord

Amid the rugged Thunder Peaks to the west rises the famously beautiful Mount Thalagbord, which is renowned for being both beautiful and treacherous.

If one is brave and skilled enough to make the expedition to the peak, they will encounter the wondrous sight of Thalag Falls, where a small herd of **Pegasi** is known to frolic through the air and bathe beneath the sparkling waters. The majestic creatures are surprisingly comfortable around people and consent to being approached and even caressed by those with pure intentions.

Followers of Chauntea and Mielikki often make a pilgrimage to behold the winged horses, rarely discouraged by rumors of disappearances on the mountain, which they chalk up to ill luck in the difficult terrain. In truth, the **Oni** Thalagbord—after whom the mountain was named—has enchanted the pegasi as a lure for fresh victims. Those who find their way into her cave behind the falls, marveling at the veins of copper and uncut gemstones, rarely leave.

The Weeping Rock

Named for a spring that flows from the pinnacle of a rock in the Marching Mountains overlooking the heart of Archendale, this lovely spot makes for an excellent campsite as well as a curious curse.

The Bell of Auros—a bell-shaped rock twice the height of a grown man—has an archway carved into its side. Above the arch is inscribed: "Auros of Elmore, Bard Beyond Peer." There are no bones to be found within, but if disturbed, the stones reconstruct the cairn within a day or so. A curse similar to that of Grave Hollow (see [Special Locations](#) under "Archenbridge") falls upon would-be grave robbers seeking an ancient elven treasure known as the Howling Harp.

Roads & Trails

The Dawnpost

Originating in the Sembian capital, Ordulin, this trade route runs parallel to the River Arkhen, crosses through Archenbridge, and heads south toward Daerlun. The idyllic scenery makes the road seem pleasant to travelers despite the threats lurking in the Arch Wood.

Settlements & Landmarks

Archenbridge

The capital of the dale, Archenbridge, is detailed below (see “Archenbridge”).

Hidden Hand of Fate

This little-known temple dedicated to Hoar in the Arch Wood is hidden within a hard-to-find cave entrance that once led to a sprawling underground complex housing and supporting a loosely organized fellowship of bards, bounty hunters, assassins, and other vigilantes pursuing the Doombringer’s cause.

While the temple once provided sanctuary, equipment, and provisions for any number of vengeance-takers, it has seemingly vanished from the present day. The secret to finding the temple has been lost, and whether it still operates or has been claimed by another force remains a mystery.

Tanglethorn Fortress

Some fifty years ago, an enterprising lumber tycoon commissioned an eccentric architect to construct this holdfast of wood and stone, filled with labyrinthine passages and rooms. It soon became known for being haunted, especially the underground levels, with many claiming they had dug too deep.

Despite its dour reputation, the fortress served as a bastion of protection against the Arch Wood’s dangers until Shadow Druids destroyed it in 1475 DR. In truth, the corruption ran deeper: the druids awakened a hive of Moander’s influence beneath the fortress. Now known as the Rotted Circle, they exist only as mind-controlled puppets, seeking to lure more bodies to digest and fuel the Darkbringer’s foul designs.

White Ford

White Ford lies 45 miles upstream along the River Arkhen from the capital of Archendale. Once a hamlet with a crude wooden palisade, it has grown into a thriving town over the past century.

Originally created by rolling boulders into the River Arkhen to form a ford, the fortified town now boasts a year-round population of over a thousand, including a full 60-member Ride of Archenriders in a permanent garrison known as Arch Hold.

White Ford relies on an encircling oval stone wall, the Wolf Wall, which has repelled numerous **Goblin** and **Worg** raiders descending from the Thunder Peaks over the past century. Should this wall be breached, the inner keep has enough space for most residents to take shelter behind a ditch and a strong stone wall.

White Ford is an important trading hub, enriched by steady merchant traffic between Highmoon and Archenbridge. It is known as a good place for trade caravans to start out, as well as for successful merchants who want to escape the capital’s constant military parades and trumpets for a tenday or two.

Golden Door Lane. White Ford has grown significantly over the last decade, attracting Sembian expatriates seeking a quiet place to retire, away from the hustle and bustle. This community has been thoroughly vetted and surveilled by the Blue Sword, who is often seen visiting White Ford without his armor.

His chief agent in Whiteford is his secret daughter, Vilya Verita (N she/they Tiedfling **Spy**), a charming young woman with a sterling reputation on the revel circuit. She, in turn, passes information to her father, especially regarding Sembian contacts.

Amid these renovated cottages and gentrified streets, young upstarts apprentice themselves to a practiced hand—for a fee, of course, often paid in invitations to revels, meals, and copious amounts of wine. Despite the increasingly lively nightlife, the town is considered quieter than the capital.

Waters & Swamps

Arch Pool

This lake marks the spot where the waters of the Arkhen River spill over a few rapids near White Ford. It is a lovely spot, and consequently its shores are crammed with crumbling old farmers’ cottages, Archenrider hilltop strongholds, and merchant palatial estates.

The limited campsites are always in high demand and accessible only by paying a toll to the Archenriders. The price for a night varies depending on how wealthy travelers appear, but it rarely exceeds a Silver Piece or two.

Arkhen Falls

The Arkhen River begins at this spectacular waterfall, which descends into the Arkhen Vale between the Marching Mountains—a local term for the southwest Thunder Peaks—and the Arch Wood.

River Arkhen

This river runs the length of Arkhen Vale, and most of the dale’s settlements are built along its banks or within walking distance of its course. The river’s waters are cold and fast, unpredictably shallow or deep, and can easily sweep away unwary travelers. Water levels rise and fall with the seasons, but frequent flooding has made the surrounding land rich and fertile.

Life in Archendale

Life in Archendale is militaristic and not a little pompous. Everyone in the dale is expected to share in the same nationalist bravado and hard work, while laziness or corner-cutting is discouraged. Arkhenfolk see this high standard as emblematic of their superiority, while visitors from outside mostly find it exhausting.

Many aspects of civic life involve celebrating the military. Locals train with weapons, wear the finest clothes and armor they can afford, and always try to honor Archendale.

Culture & Society

Arkhenfolk pride themselves on their strength and self-reliance, considering themselves by turns as the shield of the dales and the scepter that will one day rule them. They're more like Sembia than they care to admit, thanks to decades of rivalry, a brief occupation, and cultural crosspollination. Other Dalesfolk typically regard Arkhenfolk as haughty and arrogant.

Aesthetics

Even when not expecting combat, Arkhenfolk traditionally wear gambesons, or armor-like clothing, and carry blades everywhere except in the presence of the Merchant Council. By contrast, going unarmed to an audience with the Swords is considered a grave insult.

Children dream of becoming Archenriders—defending their dale and, to a lesser extent, the other dales from foreign oppression. Those with means encourage their offspring to train with weapons from an early age and squire to established Archenriders. Serving as a squire to one of the ruling Swords is a high honor.

Customs

Hardiness is evident in most aspects of life: Arkhenfolk do their utmost to appear tough and confident, believing it a dire mistake to show weakness. Outside a clear chain of command, an Arkhenfolk is expected to take charge, assert dominance, and react negatively to defiance. Those who can't adhere to their high standards are looked down on, and there's no quicker way to find oneself ejected from society than to appear weak in front of others.

BLADE-BREAKING PRESSURE

As one might expect, it is not easy to sustain the kind of warrior-like posturing of the Archendale ideal, which can lead to fights and rivalries that get in the way of more positive relationships. Those who inevitably fall short often suffer from recurrent depression or mounting desperation to fit in and maintain the respect of peers.

The church of Chauntea and the Broken Shield in Archenbridge provide support and counseling for those seeking help when their blades cannot hold up.

Festivals

At Midsummer, Archenbridge hosts a full day of parades, and on that day, locals and foreigners alike can wear armor or go armed in the streets without suspicion. Every four years on Shieldmeet, the celebration lasts all night and into the morning.

The capital observes "Swords Day," commemorating the day the current Swords appeared, replacing Greengrass and appropriating the traditional holiday for their own purposes. The notoriously grumpy Green Sword is widely known to hate festivals—Greengrass in particular.

Language

Arkhenfolk speech is replete with references to knights, warhorses, and weapons. "Belt up," "gird yourself," and "shield up" are all common ways to tell someone to grin and bear it. They also tend to refer to all coinage, foreign- or domestic-minted, as "swords." Some specific local phrases:

"Blade back in the scabbard!" rebukes someone who is being too forward or pushy.

"Mount up and let's ride!" means "let's go," such as at the end of a night of drinking.

"Their foot slipped the stirrup." refers to someone making a faux pas or acting a fool.

Law & Order

For most of the last century, Archendale was governed by a Merchant Council that emphasized economic freedom and deregulation, at the cost of a widening wealth gap between merchants and common folk.

It was not to last. During the Second Sundering, the economy collapsed almost completely, unrest spread throughout the dale, and change was in order.

Rulers

The unpopular Merchant Council has seven members, led by the long-suffering Gnarl Goloraunt (see "Important People"). Other members include Penitenzia Clael (see "Important People"), Rezra Rodaern (NE she/her Human Noble), Anatol Ilkurhorn (CN he/they Human Noble), Primrose Saefast (LN she/her Human Performer), Elzid Nimbus (NE he/him Soum Spy), and Kittamun Dourhus (LG they/them Human Noble).

They are unofficial merchant nobility in the same sense as in Sembia: the wealthiest, proudest local families fancy themselves as grand as anyone in Faerûn, though they lack the power and influence to fool an objective observer.

The Merchant Council has grown anxious with the current political status quo, and some have been plotting to replace one or more of the Swords. The Blue Sword is especially difficult to control and the primary target for replacement.

Who Really Rules

Some eight years ago, three armored figures—in suits of plate armor colored red-gold, silver with a blue sheen, and well-oxidized copper—presented themselves at the holdfast of Swordpoint, demanding to be heard regarding Archendale's future. They so thoroughly captured the public's imagination that the Merchant Council could do little but elevate them, vainly hoping to control the three like puppets.

The three Swords wield considerable power and influence, though they cannot act unilaterally, as the Merchant Council controls the dale's purse-strings. Likewise, the Council lacks the charisma and public trust to lead reforms or usher in sweeping change. As a result, each serves as a natural check on the other.

Faiths & Sanctuaries

Religion in Archendale almost always involves public displays of devotion and pride, especially during parades. Festivals honoring the most popular deities often extend an additional day or two, though the Archenriders are always on hand to clean up any excessive celebration.

Major Faiths

Though Lathander, Amaunator, Chauntea, and Tempus are Archendale's most worshipped deities, other popular faiths in Archendale include Helm, Torm, Tyr, Selûne, and Mielikki. Cults of Garagos and Loviatar have grown in membership within the halls of Swordpoint and the pleasure houses of the capital, respectively. Bane, Shar, and Talona are particularly reviled by the Arkhenfolk, and their followers are relentlessly purged whenever found.

Lathander/Amaunator. Lathander is the patron deity of Archenbridge, depicted in local religious art wearing golden armor, riding a glowing white-gold steed, and wielding a blade blazing like the sun. It is customary to pray for Lathander's blessing when a Ride departs on a mission and for Amaunator's when it returns.

Chauntea. Many Arkhenfolk venerate the Mother Goddess, especially in the rural areas between Archenbridge and White Ford. Her followers make seasonal pilgrimages to The Bounty of the Goddess, a renowned temple of the faith in the capital.

Tempus. The deity of war has grown immensely popular in the dale, and many of the Archenriders pray frequently to the Red Knight, who is rightly considered the patron deity of the Red Sword.

Production & Trade

Currency

Since 1495 DR, Archenbridge has been minting its own coinage, mostly from melted-down treasure seized from bandits and alleged spies.

The dale mints three coins, each engraved with the profile of one of the three Swords: the dour and stiff Green Sword (Copper), the long-nosed Blue Sword (Silver), and the heroic Red Sword (Gold).

These coins are still rare, and within Archendale, it is considered the height of patriotic fashion to use them. In other dales, while they spend fine, they serve as a subtle reminder of Archendale's power and influence, perhaps presaging an effort to conquer the Dalelands through economic dominance.

Major Products

Archendale is a highly self-sufficient dale, producing most of its own food, clothing, weapons, and armor. The dale imports finery: lace, velvet, fine textiles, glasswork, and jewelry. It exports produce, ore, lumber, and salt.

Major Merchants

Mirksha, Mirksha, Mirksha, Lyka, Smoot. This company has imported spices, silks, and metalwork for more than a century and a half. Originally a family business, M.M.M.L.S. recruited Harkan Lyka (N he/they Moon Elf Noble), a merchant from Cormanthor, and, most controversially, the Smoot clan of goblins, including their matriarch, Griselda Smoot (CN she/her Goblin Boss), a brilliant alchemist.

Marketplaces

Alternately fending off Sembian invasions and absorbing Sembian expatriates has made Archenbridge a trading hub and the richest, most fortified town in the dales.

The Merchant Council has decreed that all goods must be inspected and taxed there, citing frequent economic manipulation by Sembia and, to a lesser extent, Cormyr. Merchants often add the finest goods to their private stockpiles, making shipments between Archenbridge's market and the gates of Swordpoint a dangerous yet lucrative target for bandits.

The merchants of Archendale possess considerable wealth, much of it invested in town real estate and small, shady moneylending firms in Marsember and the southern coastal cities of Sembia. Many further enrich themselves through smuggling between the two realms.



Archenriders, by Ben Mehlos

Archenbridge

Walled, cosmopolitan, and well-defended, Archenbridge bristles with a diverse array of shops, taverns, and artisans. As the chief trading hub of the dale, receiving all legal shipments from Sembia and Cormyr, Archenbridge offers almost any goods a visitor could want to buy, including finely crafted and even magical items.

Some 400 years ago, a dwarven engineer named Naiden Stonewright built a marvelous stone bridge over the River Arkhen in what would become the town, and while only a few stones of that original structure remain, the town that grew up around it has endured countless attacks, large and small.

Archenbridge has seen significant population growth over the last century. The town welcomes all like-minded folk, though the Archenriders look askance at visitors or anyone with foreign loyalties. Agents of other dales or foreign powers can expect to be closely watched.

Civics & Defense

Archenstone

Life in Archenbridge is a constant struggle, where a string of misfortunes can bring even the most prosperous citizen crashing down.

Approximately four hundred people live outside the town's walls in a slum of tents, shanties, and similar cheap structures. Informally named Archenstone after the stones that form an arch, this community is home to the poor and desperate, driven to destitution by draconian policies, regressive taxation, and illness. Archenriders patrol the slums of Archenstone in force, and skirmishes are common.

A few kindly souls within the town are constantly advocating for efforts to protect and reintegrate the folk of Archenstone, but due to relentless propaganda, the town largely views Archenstone as a breeding ground for thieves and malcontents.

The Green Sword is constantly trying to eradicate “the unsightly warrens,” though the Blue Sword has thus far thwarted his efforts. The Red Sword coldly argues that the problem will resolve itself when a horde of goblins or a foreign invasion force falls upon Archenbridge, which would serve a tactical purpose.

Old Town

The oldest part of Archenbridge lies behind a high, thick stone wall. Towering manors, townhouses, and a few lushly appointed tallhouses make it a highly respectable—and expensive—place to live.

The people of Old Town are well-to-do and wear their warrior posturing on their sleeves. Most people on the street go armed or at least appear capable of handling themselves in a fight.

Outside the temple close, Old Town has the most décor inspired by the town's religious devotion. Archenbridge is famously and proudly dedicated to Lathander, though imagery of the Morninglord has grown increasingly militant, featuring a sword of sunlight.

Visiting faithful might not recognize local depictions of the golden god, or they might find it unsettling to see him portrayed as a war hero.

Swordpoint

This intimidating fortress stands at one corner of the town, surveying the famous bridge over the River Arkhen. The bridge, packed with charging Archenriders shoulder-to-shoulder, can break the will of the fiercest enemy horde.

The fortress's defenses go beyond high, thick walls and staged courtyards full of murder holes, including magical wards as well. Over a century ago, the Merchant Council hired a grumpy, agoraphobic archmage named Orosul to fill the place with mystic guards and wards, which he did for the price of a tower of his own on the then-outskirts of Archenbridge, where he would be left alone.

The complex is vast and sprawling, as the merchants of Archendale—fearing an uprising—hired dwarven masons to expand the castle's tunnels, dungeons, and storage chambers into an underground city. When pressed, the fortress complex can hold up to 5,000 people, though accommodations would be tight. In particular, the fortress's dungeons include several secret escape routes and can store enough provisions to supply a besieged Archenbridge for a year.

Aside from quartering three full Rides of Archenriders—60 riders each for a total of 180—the castle serves as the ostensible seat of the Swords' power, though traditionally only one of the Swords resides there at any given time. If all three Swords are publicly known to be at Swordpoint, it is considered an indication that Archendale is at war.

fractured magical wards

Orosul's work served the fortress well for decades until the Spellplague fundamentally altered the Weave of magic, rendering the wards nearly useless.

After the Wailing Years, magic had stabilized by about 1400 DR, and the increasingly insular archmage rebuilt the wards as best he could, but the magic remained notoriously unreliable. The Merchant Council recently granted control of Orosul's tower to Rias, a mage claiming to be his descendant, if she would rectify the situation.

Rias either overpromised or was intentionally negligent, as the wards are now malfunctioning worse than ever. Not only do plates spontaneously fly through the air while tankards empty themselves on Archenriders' heads, but some alarms fail to sound at all, and what should have been sleep-inducing gas is instead merely the scent of roses or jasmine. This leaves Swordpoint vulnerable to exploitation by a clever infiltrator.

After just such a daring but so far carefully covered-up heist a few years ago, the Merchant Council is growing increasingly desperate to find a capable archmage to repair the wards in Swordpoint.

Archenbridge

To Ordulin

Archenstone

To The Dale

Archenbridge, by Lori Krell



Legend

- 1 The Darkwater Brand
- 2 The Waxing Sun (Lathander)
- 3 Mirksha, Mirksha, Lyka, Smoot
- 4 Bounty of the Goddess (Chauntea)
- 5 Stensen's Paddock
- 6 Drunken Lion
- 7 Jendalar's Fine Fruits
- 8 Grave Hollow
- 9 Sandan's Haunted Sawmill
- 10 New Stonebrows
- 11 Elgath's Provisions
- 12 Heward's Mill
- 13 The Broken Shield
- 14 Watcher's Roost
- 15 The Black Horse
- 16 Orosul's Tower
- 17 Archstone Steel



Inns & Taverns

The Black Horse

Across the river Arkhen from Old Town, the Black Horse is a modest, popular inn for budget travelers. Common lodging costs only a few Silver Pieces per night—a rate unchanged for nearly a century and a half. Its large, popular common room is always full of adventurers toasting free-flowing Archenwood Stout.

The proprietor, Harvis Hardfoot (N he/they Strongheart Halfling **Gladiator**), claims to have once been a skilled horse jockey in Westgate, but the truth is far bloodier.

The Drunken Lion

The Drunken Lion rose from humble beginnings to become the town's premier place to stay, known for its reasonable prices, fine cuisine, and even better drink selection. This success came from hard work and cultivating connections with wealthy patrons, including several noble expatriates from Sembia. As a result, the Lion is a well-known haunt for Sembian spies. The dour inn master Breven Stonehopper (LN he/him Shield Dwarf **Tough**) takes himself and his business very seriously.

New Stonebows

Rebuilt on the foundations of Old Stonebows, which burned down some fifty years ago, New Stonebows is the town's most modern inn, catering to merchants and traders willing to part with a few Gold Pieces or more per night. The current owner, an acolyte of Sune named Nesta Heartarrow (CG she/her Soum **Priest**), emphasizes “kingly treatment” for her high-paying customers, and the pampering at New Stonebows rivals that of the finest temples of Lady Firehair.

Shrines & Temples

The most prominent faiths in Archenbridge are Lathander, the town's patron, as well as Chauntea and Tempus. Tempus has no designated temple in the town but exercises influence from the shrine in Swordpoint. Most folk in the district pay equal reverence to all three deities.

The local branch of Mirksha, Mirksha, Mirksha, Lyka, Smoot (see [Major Merchants](#) in “Life in Archendale”) operates a popular outlet in the temple close.

Archstone Steel

This small but popular shrine to Tempus stands in the main courtyard of Swordpoint. The shrine is a smithy adorned with an array of weapons, all crafted by the aging soldier-turned-priest Gamelon the Gambler (CN he/they Human **Warrior Veteran**).

Gamelon tests every would-be Archenrider who comes to the fortress with a duel to the first blood. He encourages recruits to underestimate him because of his wild, graying hair and unkempt beard. They favor risky, flashy moves to simulate the unpredictability of battle.

Bounty of the Goddess

Built around an ever-flowing fountain of blessed water, this famous temple to Chauntea always seems to have enough food for any hungry person who calls at its gates, flanked by pillars carved like stalks of wheat. The priests make daily pilgrimages at dusk to donate any leftover food to the poor.

The kindly High Harvestmaster Anisse Summerset (NG they/them Strongheart Halfling **Priest**) maintains the temple and handles most face-to-face encounters with petitioners. A dozen other priests serve in the temple, though most spend their days in the town, ministering to the people.

Rotted Blood

A persistent local legend holds that if a fervent adherent of Chauntea is violently slain in the Arkhen Vale, the sacred fountain will run dark red with the priest's lifeblood in the Goddess's sorrow, and that this blood is anathema to disease, infection, fungi, mold, and all manner of curses. For obvious reasons, the clergy has tried to stamp out these tales.

The legend bears a kernel of truth, however: periodically, a dark current creeps into the sacred font, resembling blood. This is the poisonous ichor of Moander, and anyone who drinks the befouled water becomes one of his puppets. Three of the thirteen priests are corrupted so far; the telltale sprouting flowers that mark their curse are hidden among the garlands and cornucopias they wear regularly.

Chapel of Resounding Justice

In a field a short way southeast of Archenbridge stands a temple to Tyr, god of justice, commemorating a legendary battle that occurred in 1295 DR, more than two hundred years ago.

Here, the foul Krysus Vaant, dark champion of Gargauth, fell in battle against an angelic being known as Resounding Justice, who sacrificed herself in a storm of radiant energy to defeat the oathbreaker and his pit fiend. She became a statue of white and gold marble, around which priests of Tyr built a shrine to commemorate her selfless act.

It is said that Resounding Justice's power lingers in the temple, accelerating and strengthening the healing of petitioners.

The Waxing Sun

At around 150 years old, this beautiful temple to Lathander draws pilgrims from across the Dalelands to pay homage to the sun in all his glory. Its white granite balconies offer stunning views of the eastern and western horizons. The temple interior is filled with gold and silver displays depicting legends of the sun's life cycle, and a stunning sundial sits atop the roof.

The staunch traditionalist Stellaga Brightstar, who led this temple, passed away some ten years ago, paving the way for reformers seeking to introduce worship of the reemergent Amaunator. Rites to Lathander are held on the eastern balcony in the morning, and to Amaunator on the western balcony in the evening.

About twenty acolytes maintain the Waxing Sun under the leadership of Holster Sunhnd (NG he/him Human **Questing Knight**), one of Brightstar's outspoken critics, who believes Amaunator—not Lathander—saved his life. On campaign years ago, the former Archenrider lost his hand and might have bled to death but for a divine blessing: a hand of pure light that appears from sunrise to sundown.

Watcher's Roost

Overlooking the river, near the remains of the original Arkhen Bridge, stands a lonely tower whose spiral staircase climbs fifty feet to a spare shrine to Helm. The tower, which shakes in a stout wind, commands an unusually panoramic view of the town below.

Academic & Arcane

Orosul's Tower

The tower of the famous archmage of Archenbridge stands across the river. It has fallen into disrepair after being abandoned for decades following the last comprehensive repair of Swordpoint fortress's wards.

Orosul apparently grew tired of the thankless work, or else grew too annoyed by local children daring one another to approach his tower and laughing as they ran away. He vanished around 1450 DR to parts unknown.

Recently, the diminutive magician Rias (CN she/her Lightfoot Halfling **Mage**) has moved in, claiming to be a descendant of Orosul. Earlier this year, she attempted to prove her lineage by performing maintenance on the wards of Swordpoint. Her efforts went awry, causing chaos throughout the tower. The Merchant Council now seeks brave adventurers to approach Orosul's Tower and collect a refund for her sloppy work.

Artisans & Traders

Elgath's Provisions

A must-visit for the well-equipped adventurer and a town institution, Elgath's Provisions carries any and all supplies the aspiring Archenrider or adventurer might want, all at a small markup. The upheavals of the last decades have made the adventuring trade highly lucrative, and Elgath has grown wealthy indeed.

Byessa Elgath (N she/they Soum **Mage**) runs the shop, having inherited it from her human father and elven mother, who moved to Deepingdale decades ago. Byessa is a friendly yet shrewd woman who loves the finer things in life. She is often found at the bar of the Drunken Lion with a bottle of Elverquisst, reminiscing about the old days.

Jendalar's Fine Fruits

Named for its founder, this busy trading coster buys fruits, nuts, cider, preserves, and other produce from farms and orchards throughout Archendale, then ships them by wagon to markets in Sembia, Cormyr, and the neighboring dales. The shop smells of fresh fruit, waxed crates, and spiced cider. Near the entrance, a desk is always crowded with ledgers and caravan contracts.

Erden Snowbrand (NG he/him Human **Scout**) runs the coster and is known for being practical, warm, and difficult to deceive, with a talent for remembering faces and the exact contents of every wagon that passes through his yard.

Market Field

In all seasons except winter, merchants from across the dale pitch tents here and sell their wares. This is an excellent place to acquire a wide range of goods, from the mundane to the exotic. Stersen's Paddock lies right on the edge of the field, advertising its horses.

Crime & Underworld

The Broken Shield

The constant pressure to be strong and stoic in the face of the myriad dangers surrounding Archendale inevitably grows too great for even the stoutest of hearts, and it is to these folk that the Broken Shield caters.

Equal parts festhall and hospital, the Broken Shield offers healing and counseling to Archenriders or any warrior who spills blood on Archendale soil. Treatments range from medical care and talk therapy to baths, massage, and more intimate encounters, always with the enthusiastic consent of all involved. Folk who routinely seek treatment at the Shield feel renewed, though never fully, creating an addiction to its unique services.

In truth, the Shield is a front for a Sharran cult that preys on the despair of soldiers returned from battle and abandoned by the machismo of Archenfolk culture, slowly building a force capable of undermining the dale from within.

threats foreign and domestic

Archenbridge has seen numerous attempts to take over the town, leaving a legacy of paranoia and over-preparation. Doors to buildings feature arrow slits and barred windows. Even ordinary homes are trapped with pits, murder holes, and the like.

A thriving cottage industry has emerged to set, maintain, and dismantle these traps, and the Darkwater Brand—once primarily a mercantile guild but now essentially a thieves' guild run by "Uncle" Devis (see "Important People")—has a monopoly on this work.

Special Locations

Arkhen Bridge

This isn't the famous dwarven bridge that collapsed during heavy flooding two centuries ago, but rather what was rebuilt on the stone casements of the original. The town has since reinforced the wooden bridge with metal and stone, and local superstition holds that it is also strengthened by persistent enchantments.

Whether there is truth to these rumors or not, the bridge can rise and lower by means of winches and counterweights. Not only does this versatility aid in passing masted riverboats, but it also allows the bridge to be lifted in times of war, like a castle drawbridge, forcing an invading army to cross the oft-dangerous river by their own means. The Arkhen Bridge is a marvel of engineering, at least by Dalelands standards, drawing sages and students of the art from leagues away, even from outside the Dalelands.

Grave Hollow

This mysterious barrow of an unknown warrior lies near the center of Archenbridge but boasts no houses or permanent dwellings.

Legend holds that the hollow is heavily cursed and anyone who enters will endure a fearsome curse, but this has not kept locals from enjoying the barrow for strolling, picnicking, or risky lovers' trysts. The owners of manors adjacent to the barrow despair of keeping adventurers and other visitors from touring the area, which boasts a wide assortment of exotic flowers and trees.

Should one light a fire on the Hollow grounds or—worse—try to delve into the barrow itself, matters take a turn for the worse. This summons any number of **Wraith** guardians, supposedly conjured by several elven **Liches** that lurk beneath the barrow. Whether these baelnorns exist or not, the wraiths have been known to inflict a persistent curse that prevents a trespasser from touching metal for a full year.

Sandan's Haunted Sawmill

Once an old water-powered sawmill that stripped and sawed timber in decades past, this mill was the site of a massacre of Sembian invaders that left the place heavily haunted. An effort is underway to reclaim the mill, but it needs the aid of a good exorcist.



The Three Swords, by Francesco Simone Savi

Important People

Kefrin Heeldown

NG they/them Shield Dwarf Priest

Kefrin is the de facto mayor of Archenstone and regularly presents the interests and demands of those outside the walls to the Merchant Council and the Swords. The acolyte of Chauntea is a hesitant rabble-rouser, preferring to resolve all problems through diplomacy and peaceful protest. Nonetheless, Kefrin keeps getting dragged into conflicts with the authorities. Thus far, Kefrin's commitment to negotiation and understanding has kept tempers cool, and they have always been able to defuse standoffs before more than a few injuries occur.

Kefrin fears the rekindling of militant Archendale nationalism and the recent rise of the three Swords. If they could learn the identities of one or more of the masked rulers of Archendale, it might give Kefrin the leverage needed to secure concessions and a place at the political table—perhaps even a seat on the Merchant Council. Conversely, should foul play befall Kefrin, the simmering unrest may erupt into a full-blown revolt.



Kefrin Heeldown, by Cristiana Leone

“Uncle” Devis Denreth

LE he/him Soum Bandit Crime Lord

Raised by his elven father in Cormanthor, Devis's impatience and propensity for theft led to his exile two decades ago. He returned to Archenbridge to reconnect with his human mother's kin, only to find her an old woman, remarried, with a gaggle of professional thieves for children and grandchildren. When she passed away, “Uncle” Devis took over and now runs the Darkwater Brand from the shadows.

Devis is darkly handsome and charming, and very careful with his moves. He is working to coerce, charm, or seduce his way onto the Merchant Council and has befriended Gnarl Goloraunt while gathering blackmail on Gnarl's Sembian connections.



Devis Denreth, by Cristiana Leone

Gnarl Goloraunt

N he/him Human Noble

Gnarl is the elected head of the Merchant Council, though his efforts are constantly frustrated by the three Swords. He isn't the wealthiest member of the council, but he pulls the most strings. Born and raised in Saerloon, his Sembian ties constantly prove politically difficult for him, and he takes care to avoid styling himself in any way reminiscent of the land of merchants.

Gnarl is a dashing man in his thirties, constantly running to and from appointments. He always dresses in local fashions and carries a sword in the Archendale style, even though he is a mediocre fencer at best. Despite being eligible for a marriage alliance, he appears to be a confirmed bachelor. In truth, he is already married—to the heir of a powerful Sembian mercantile house back in Saerloon.

Penitenzia Clael

NE she/her Human Priest

At over sixty years of age, Penitenzia is the richest and most powerful woman in Archendale, well-connected to both the Merchant Council, on which she sits, and to Swordpoint, as her house funds the Archenriders to the tune of thousands of Gold Pieces a year.

A vibrant woman in the sort of health that defies her age, Penitenzia has been romantically linked to many powerful movers and shakers in Archendale's past, many of whom have fallen on hard times. From her complicated history, she has four children—all half-siblings—and a brood of grandchildren. Currently, she is rumored to be linked to the Green Sword, suggesting that he is either of comparable age or simply has a taste for older women.

In truth, Penitenzia knows Belthagast's secret (see page 13), and he knows she is a semi-retired priestess of Loviatar. Their relationship mirrors their deities' hierarchy: just as Loviatar submits to Bane's authority, so too does Penitenzia bow to Belthagast, claiming he is the only man she has ever known worthy of her submission. However, not being his dominant rankles her, and she is constantly seeking additional leverage over him. Despite their ongoing power play, the two have forged a strong alliance to exert growing control over Archendale, encouraging its rivalry with Tasseldale.



Penitenzia Clael, by Cristiana Leone

Vantia Vhentressel

CG she/they Wood Elf Scout Captain

Vantia is the nominal head of the Fire Arrows, working hard to raise awareness of the growing threat Moander poses in the Arch Wood. Originally hired as an experienced ranger to lead an expedition to reclaim the woods, Vantia has repeatedly been ignored, and their increasingly desperate reports have been dismissed.

Although she isn't yet proscribed as an outlaw, the Merchant Council has cut off her funding, and Swordpoint has dispatched several Rides to arrest her and her band. The Red Sword has taken a particular interest and periodically ventures into the Arch Wood with her personal guard. This has sparked a pseudo-romantic game of cat-and-mouse with Vantia, as the two display fierce chemistry that has given rise to numerous speculative rumors and risqué chapbooks.

Ruggedly beautiful and possessed of unshakable conviction, Vantia is something of a folk hero among loggers and homesteaders who resent what they see as Archenbridge's overreach. Her followers spread tall tales of her exploits, but she discourages any mention of her association with the Eldreth Veluuthra a century ago.



Vantia Vhentressel, by Cristiana Leone

The Swords

The three Swords who publicly rule Archendale in 1501 DR hide their appearances behind bracers that project an illusion masking their voices and faces. Even if the helmets they constantly wear are removed, the illusion makes their faces approachable and noble, with classic Arkhenfolk features that always seem familiar to an onlooker but impossible to describe in retrospect.

Belthagast Durindyne

LE he/him Human Archpriest

The Green Sword, Belthagast Durindyne, is a Dreadmaster of Bane. Originally a Cormyrean soldier, he was captured and indoctrinated in the Darkhold. Set free one year ago, Bel slew his brother Talgahast, a priest of Tempus and the original Green Sword of this new generation of Archendale's rulers, then assumed his identity. His alliance with Penitencia Clael has helped him consolidate his power, and anyone who grows too close to him tends to go missing. Bel believes Penitencia is thoroughly subordinate, and his arrogance may be his undoing.

A handsome man of noble bearing, pushing forty, Bel is almost never seen without his armor, even in the presence of his fellow Swords, though he looks enough like his brother that few would be the wiser as to his true identity. As if hinting at his nature, his dark green armor has grown increasingly gray over the last year, with a grim, skull-like faceplate. Already, some are calling him the Gray Sword, though not in his hearing.

A thoroughly practical and strategic operator, Bel does not want to conquer Archendale for the Zhentarim—yet—but only maintain it as a bulwark against Sembia until the time is right. In part, he is unsure which faction of the Black Network should have his loyalty, so he maintains lines of communication to the Pereghost, Fzoul Chembryl, and Manshoon's factions. Whoever comes out on top, the ruthlessly ambitious Bel intends to side with the winner.

Malison Cinderfall

LN she/her Human Warrior Commander

The Red Sword is Malison Cinderfall, a paladin of the Red Knight, originally from Tethyr, and a strategic genius who keeps her emotions tightly bottled, lest they prove her undoing. When driven to an outburst, she acts decisively and viciously, taking steps far more aggressive than she usually does. She always appears in public in a full suit of crimson plate armor that disguises her already deep-pitched voice, rendering it the monotone of an emotionless automaton.

Without her illusion-generating bracers, Malison is a much-scarred woman of action and great strength. Her battle prowess inspires deep devotion and respect like a proper military commander. She is particularly annoyed with Vantia (see above), suggesting a deep attraction she constantly tries to deny.

Svine Archenbeak

N he/they Tielfling Performer Maestro

The Blue Sword, a former adventurer known as Svine Archenbeak, is not actually a warrior of any kind, but he fakes it so well that he's convinced all of Archendale. That, and he's quite handy with a rapier.

Whether in or out of his armor, Svine cuts a somewhat clownish figure, with his developing potbelly and his infamously long nose, which he insists is a coincidence given his name. Interestingly, the illusion hides his long nose, so the helmet seems to have a flared faceplate for decorative purposes only. His flashy silver suit of armor has winged flares at the ears, shoulders, elbows, and knees.

Without his illusion, no one would know that Svine is one of the Swords. He seems like any other traveling minstrel or adventurer.

Intrigues & Clack

Intrigues of Archendale

Despite its boastful claims of mighty security, insidious weaknesses lie beneath the shiny veneer of polished armor and walled fortifications. Archendale's clashing interests between the Merchant Council and the Three Swords leave room for spies, blackmail, and exploitation. Military pressure weighs on commanders, their soldiers, and the commoners who supply them. Dangers lurking in the mountains and the Arch Wood grow more threatening every day. For a place so proud of its righteous force, Archendale is quick to hide the truth of its problems from plain sight.

Fiery Arrows of Passion

Most believe the Red Sword's animus toward the Fire Arrows in the Arch Wood stems from a personal insult by their elven leader, Vantia. No one knows the content of the insult, only that it was dire. The Red Sword has offered a substantial reward for her capture, alive and mostly intact. Others believe the two are bitter ex-lovers playing out a violent drama over their star-crossed affair.

Orosul's False Apprentice

Word on the street in Archenbridge is that Rias, the wizard in Orosul's Tower, is actually an archmage in hiding from arcane enemies, perhaps from Rashemen, Thay, or another foreign magocracy. Someone should drive her from town before it's too late, though that's easier said than done.

Jealous Ghosts

The curse on Sandan's Sawmill is perpetuated by a fledgling necromancer from the Heward clan, old rivals of Sandan from over a century ago, who are trying to keep Sandan's great-grandson from reestablishing his ancestor's timber access and logging empire.

Sweet Windfall

Thanks to Chauntea's blessing, Jendalar's Fine Fruits has a stockpile of especially large and flavorful fruits and vegetables for sale. Some of the older folk of Archenbridge have been scandalized by the "rude" shapes of certain produce. Consuming such specimens increases one's virility and general health.

The Rivers Run Red

The waters of the River Arkhen near White Ford sometimes turn a bright red at a certain twilight hour, signaling impending violence. The Swords don't seem to be taking the bad omen seriously, but the villagers are convinced that unless forces are dispatched to fortify the settlement, it will become Blood Ford within the season at the hands of some unknown foe.

Rumors in Archendale

Roll a 1d12 for a rumor or pick one. This "clack," as rumors are called in the Forgotten Realms, can be as true or false as you want them to be in your campaign.

d12	Rumor
1	The Swords are rapidly recruiting new Archenriders to build up an army for a new attempt to take over Tasseldale.
2	Goods tainted with plague from Scardale recently made their way through Archenbridge, which is why several people in the town are getting sick.
3	Wary of the Swords' gathering power, the Merchant Council is making connections with Sembian leaders to stage a coup. Which councilors precisely? Who can say.
4	Sembian agents are infiltrating the Archenriders so that they can turn on them at a key moment during an invasion. We can't afford to ignore this!
5	Swordpoint is not as impenetrable as it seems. Not only is the dwarven craftsmanship imperfect, but there is a secret weakness in the castle, and Rias, the mage living in Orosul's Tower, knows the secret.
6	The body interred in the Grave Hollow is the once-and-future King Arken (or is it Archan?), Ark Knight and champion of Lathander, who will rise to defend Archendale in its hour of need, which is approaching soon.
7	The Swords are divided on whether to burn Archenstone, the village outside Archenbridge, though it is unclear which one supports allowing the people to remain. Protests against the Merchant Council and the Swords are common there, not winning Archenstone any sympathy.
8	One of the Swords is a secret Cormyrean noble on the run from their duties. Perhaps even a prince or princess in line for the crown!
9	A fiendish tempter has infiltrated the Merchant Council and is the root of the current political dysfunction. Maybe Penitenzia Clael is a succubus—how else do you explain her beauty at her age?
10	The Archenriders are looking for magic-trained members in order to create their own answer to Cormyr's War Wizards. Results haven't been promising so far, but hope springs eternal.
11	There's no sense trying to reinvigorate the logging business in the Arch Wood, and not just because the Fire Arrows band of brigands and cutthroats have claimed the wood. Rabid beasts bear the bloody talon of Malar, god of the Hunt, and folk wearing flowers in their hair serve even darker powers.
12	The pegasi at Mount Thalagbord are so friendly that they'll let you pet them, but if you mount one, it flies off into the Thunder Peaks, taking you with it!

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