

Welcome to Kaurath

Today, the **High Kingdom of Kaurath** is a royal union of twelve realms, including the original Kingdom of Kaurath, and has spent half its millennium of existence fighting a (civil) war with the undead Kingdom of the Barrowheart, which was born in curse and misunderstanding. That war is over, the ancient curse that caused it now abated, though the consequences and ill feelings of five centuries linger. The death of the old King sealed the peace, and his bastard son Bulzaric rose from the command of the half-orc Razioch forces, traditional guardians of the Land, to assume the throne, confirmed by the Stags, the mystical symbols and guardians of Kaurath.

An even more ancient foe, the would-be Sorcerer-King Zoradieth, raised his head again, and his great enemy, the ancient High King Morathel—freed at the end of the war—temporarily re-assumed the throne to oppose him. King Bulzaric concentrated on preparing to take up active rule, and with Zoradieth pushed back, Morathel stepped down, and a more mature Bulzaric now rules as High King Zaric.

Forced by a power from outside its world, the fae of Kaurath performed a great ritual, assisted by the humans, and threw Kaurath out of its home world and across the multiverse until it landed in an Ocean on Erümir.

Periodically, nobles and adventurers gather in one of the cities of the land to address problems not solved by lesser means.

The High Kingdom is divided into four Royal Provinces. Each Province is governed by a member of a Royal Family and administered by a noble Skald. The Skald, a knight of the realm, administers matters of law and justice for that part of the human kingdom and liaises with the other member kingdoms located in that Province.

Each Royal and Skald maintains a personal court of Knights, Squires, Lords and Ladies, and other supporters who aid them with their responsibilities. Those seeking advancement find a current noble to sponsor them on the path of nobility, learning and practicing essential skills, and facing practical and ethical tests. Others choose different paths of advancement, such as through the Guilds, the military, any member kingdoms, or scholarship.

Free schooling and reduced taxes cover the basic education of the crown's subjects. Teaching is provided by the Viisas Talos (Houses of the Wise), established by the High Queen 500 years ago, throughout the Kingdoms. More advanced training was usually handled by apprenticing to a Master of a Craft, but now the Royal Academy and Guilds offer additional options.

Guilds

A variety of craft guilds exist in Kaurath. The High King charters the most important ones and has duties to advise the monarchy and its magistrates and work to improve the craft and the realm. Among those with charters of most interest to adventurers are the Mages Guild, the Bardic Guild, and the Creators Guild. Another body of interest to adventurers is the Royal Academy. This relatively new Viisas Talo focuses on training new adventurers in the skills they need to succeed and progress in their endeavors.

Kingdoms

While Kaurath is often used as the name for the entire region, it is most properly the human monarchy, which holds the High Kingship among the Twelve Kingdoms. Humans are found everywhere in the Twelve Kingdoms and the Barrowheart, but are rare in the Plains of Morathel.

Innos Halal, an elven kingdom in central Haltia east of the Lake, is ruled by the Haran Quinar and Harni Ruthiel. It is heavily forested, ancient, and rich in lore and skill. Its people are of the main elvenfolk.

The **Gythai** are a reptilian **Magocracy** south of Haltia, ruled by the Kawei and a council of clan leaders. It is mostly water and swampland with dry land reserved for purposes that require it, such as trade and libraries. They engage in aquaculture and trade up and down the river.

Seannaught in the north (Western Kasember near the Lake) and **Briars Hollow** (Southern Kasember along the river) in the south are similar realms ruled by the Grand Foreman or Grand Sheriff, respectively, who are elected for a seven-year term by the constituent regions of the realms. Seannaught has more Riverfolks and active Traders, but Briar Hollow has more Hillfolks, agriculture, and the Great Merchant houses. They are noted as the first supporters of the High King and supplied many of the first units to the army.

The **Vaeltaa** have a road culture that is found throughout Kaurath. They were more settled than the root culture they came from and had a stronger hierarchy than elsewhere, perhaps because a single voice was required to speak with the High King in council during the Barrowheart War. They are traditionally suppliers of the Royal Guard and are considered the most noble and honorable of the Kingdoms.

The **Vorlonal** are a union of tribes that have established a kingdom with a fixed capital and unified rule. They live, herd, and farm in Harcos to the east of the Dragonspine Mountains, but as part of the High Kingdom, they provided a strong backbone of the army fighting the Barrowheart during much of the 500-year-long war. They clash with the Vanastagg, the totemic and nomadic tribes, who view settlements as a betrayal of their way of life and tribal patron spirits.

The **Razioch** are the Orcs native to Kaurath. They have a martial culture, having spent 500 years at war with the Barrowheart and its minions and continually fighting the monsters spawned from the Plains of Morathel. They are deeply tied to the land of Kaurath and take pride in being its defenders both in the past and recently (since Bulzaric won their allegiance for the kingdom while he was a Prince).

The **Ograth** are the Ogres native to Kaurath who occupy the forests in the south and southwest of Kaurath. They have a somewhat mystical culture that might have been peaceful, save for constant conflicts with the Troll Masters of the Dubhember Peaks and the Razioch.

The newly peaceful **Barrowheart** occupies a large area west of **Haltia** through and past the mountains. It was recently “conquered” despite being an ally to become the 10th kingdom.

The new Mountainfolk and Gnome realms, **Malmiheim** (formerly **Alta Kasember**) and **Āmurs Akmens** (formerly **Alta Haltia**), were formed by those (mostly Clan Iron and Clan Copper, respectively) fleeing unrest in Kulta Kerros, actively digging tunnels and asserting sovereignty by ancient Dwarven law over those digging. They swore fealty to the High King and joined the High Kingdom as the 11th and 12th kingdoms.

Provinces

The province of **Haltia** lies in the west of the High Kingdom between the two great rivers flowing from the Lake of Ice and the Dragonspine Mountains. It is heavily forested and produces a wide range of timber, wood products, fruits, and vegetables. The current capital, **Kaurath City**, lies within its borders just down the Royal Road from the Gatetown of **Celtios**, where many Gatherings have taken place. It is the province with the longest border with the Barrowheart. Much of the Royal Road, and the Gatetowns spaced all along it, which saw combat in the war, lie in Haltia on the border or separated from it by Lake Haltia and its associated river.

The province of **Kasember** lies north and west of the Dragonspine Mountains, and the river connects them to Haltia. It is primarily plains and a source of much of the grain that can be forced from the rocky soil of Kaurath. Its large size permits it to support the same population as the denser but richer lands of Haltia. The plains (and forests) of **Rensvarvas** lie to the north and west, and the ‘Eastern’ mountains mark the northeast edge of Kasember.

The province of **Harcos** lies east of the Dragonspine Mountains. It is primarily plains and a significant source of meat, as much of the land is occupied by herding tribes. The rich grasslands support numerous clans, many of which are part of the Vorlonal Kingdom, as well as towns and trading posts. The only city in Vorlonal is the capital of Vahnakard. The **Keskaur forest** is home to a closed foreign kingdom of elves and now gnomes. It lies against the Kalivan Mountains and marks the eastern border of the 12 Kingdoms.

The province of The **Plains of Morathel** lies south of the Dragonspine Mountains. It was infested with monsters and echoes of the past. Since the Great Ritual, it has blossomed and seems much more stable than in the past, when all attempts to colonize or build cities there failed. It is a source of rare herbs, exotic plants, and strange beasts, and there are still remnants of dangerous things. This is where one can find most of the Razioch and the Ograth (the orcs and ogres of Kaurath).

Royal Road

The Royal Road runs through western Kaurath from the Siltamuri in the north, the great gate between the Barrowheart and the rest of Kaurath, where many battles were fought. Most soldiers put in their years of service on the Wall, holding back the undead hordes, to the Eltamuri in the south, another great gate blocking access to the road from the bandits and other things that live in the Southern Wastes. The road facilitates trade in peaceful moments and supports rapid redeployment of troops along the border. Along the route, one day's travel apart are the "Gate Towns", standardized royal rallying points and garrisons.

Kaurath City

The Gate Town of **Kaurath City** is the "new" capital of Kaurath and the High Kingdom. Kaurath City is a standard Gate Town expanded by the Royal Castle and extensive manors and holdings for the notables of the twelve realms. There are still large fields and room for vital agriculture within the outer walls, sufficient to sustain a large population through an extended siege, especially by enemies not at full strength in the daylight. It is common to see royals and notables slip away from the castle and into the older part of town with their friends from their years of military service on the Wall.

Celtios, a typical Gate Town

The Gate Town of **Celtios** is one of the royal cities set apart for a day's travel along the royal **road** from the southern border to the pass into the lands of the Barrowheart. Built on a standard pattern as part of the Kingdom's defense against the Barrowheart each town is marked by a large central Inn usually operated by some member of the Barnstead family, four walls with the large gates which give the city its name, a Garrison for the guards and military stationed there, Storehouse and Armory to hold supplies, residences, temporary housing for visitors and visiting officers, merchants, farms, and artisans and their families in residence, the local primary school, and areas of protected agriculture within the outer walls.

It is common to see royals, notables, and adventurers gather in each Gatetown for major festivals seeking interesting rumors and offers of employment. Since the Barrowhart War ended, the mood in the Gatetowns has lightened. Although the walls do not keep out all hazards, they make it hard for a large force to enter unchallenged, and the local adventuring community uses the gatetowns as hubs to address issues in the area.

Brighthold

The newly formed town of Brighthold, though located on the northern border, has many of the same features as the Gatetowns and may end up being the first of a series of Royal settlements along a new war front. It is still early days with regular shipments of supplies from the Capital, but the features common to Gatetowns are starting to appear.

Militia

A strong local militia supplements the Royal Army in the Gate towns and supports the constables and sheriffs elsewhere. Composed of veterans mustered out after the end of the war, the militias provided a venue for those veterans who were not happy with civilian life. The knight's fief is the basic unit of administration in the less built-up areas, and knights have taken to recruiting the best of the militia to expand their personal spear of troops.

Nearby Realms

South of the Plains, one finds the Southern Waste. Most of Kaurath's external trade used to flow south down the Royal Road to the South end, the great fortified gate called the Etelamuuri, and across the Southern Wastes, now they end in the ocean and rocky coastline.

Other realms are known to lie beyond the mighty mountains to the northeast and west, but there are few passes and little trade there.

There are many unincorporated barbarian tribes throughout **Kaurath**, especially in the north and east. Most are reasonable if fierce, but some are ferocious beyond measure.

The kingdom of the **Keskaurani** lies in the Keskaur Forest against the **Kalivan Mountains** in the east. Those who enter their lands uninvited are generally not seen again.

The mysterious **Dubhember** resided under the **Dubhember Peaks** and was rarely seen throughout the war. At the end, there was a terrible genocide by a foreign wizard, believing them to be loyal servants of Zoradieth. But the Dubhember, who survived the attack, fought with Kaurath as allies. They mostly appear to be the rare Shadow Elbaels today.

Two independent Mountainfolk kingdoms, Kulta Kerros and Eltor Szakal, are found to the north and south of the Barrowheart, respectively. Many Gnomes are also found there, which is causing issues with those not used to the impact of flux. A fair number of the unaffiliated **Ahkera** mountainfolk also work individually throughout the High Kingdom.

North of Kasember are the nomadic Ferrishyn of the land of **Rensvarvas** and their more settled rulers. They have been wracked by war for several years. Beyond them lie formerly impassible mountains and many strange realms, first among them the **Beyzor Imperium**, occupied by the red-hued Beyzors.

The mountain borders and the central Dragonspine Mountains are lightly populated, and the locals do not necessarily give allegiance to the High Kingdom in any helpful sense.

A group of classic spider-riding night elves came to Kaurath and founded the town of Webspire. Similarly, a small group of Avian humanoid mentalists migrated to Kaurath and established a community. A community of Packed also settled in the northwest woods at the edge of Rensvarvas.

Moon Festivals

Peasants have started celebrating festivals on the various full moons throughout the year. Each moon has a different name, such as Blood, Fool, Ghost, Green, Harvest, War, etc. The tradition is to draw little sheets of paper with a useful motto, a message, or a symbol.

Seasonal Meets

Once each quarter, representatives of the Twelve Kingdoms meet to discuss matters of mutual interest. From time to time, for example, just after the peace with the Barrowheart was declared, they meet in a more formal Grand Council to give full depth to a debate and, in turn, full assent to the final resolution. The meetings are chaired by the Kaurathel, or his representative, but each of the Twelve has equal say in

the Council. On such occasions, representatives from the neighboring realms also attend to discuss matters of mutual interest. The Dwarven realms often send representatives after their years of alliance. The Meets are more vital but contentious as all the realms try to navigate the new world, and the internal tensions with the High Kingdom rise as the external threat that forced everyone to cooperate was resolved.

Elementals and The Fae

One free of Elementals but filled with Fae folk, since the Great Ritual and attack that motivated it and the associated sacrifices, Fae are all but absent. One couple of powerful Fae are known, and occasionally, the Morrigan will assist a group of heroes in performing a powerful ritual and call back one of their ancient allies, who then remain. However, we now have Elementals, both native to Erümír and refugees from other worlds, as well as groups of Fae of very different traditions visiting as well. Also, the adventurers have recently summoned the Faery Markets, Day, Night, and Wild back into the world.

Spring and Autumn Revels

Not to be confused with the seasonal Meets, the two Revels were a period of celebration for the **Fae**, marking one of the significant seasonal shifts of power in their lands between summer and winter. Sometimes their visit overlaps with mortal celebrations of the season, and grand fae quests and entertainments take place. But the presence of so many faeries made it very important to be on your best behavior with strangers, to be cautious not to carry cold iron weapons openly as they are considered active death threats, and to offer traditional tributes to the fae. The peasants are still known to be rigorous about placing gifts outside their doors for the faery.

Invocation of Mountain Mother

In late Spring, the Dwarves call upon their mother spirit—now worlds away—and apparently, she answers them. She chooses to truly answer one question asked by all the various petitioners.

The Spirits of Autumn

Similarly, many peasants leave gifts at the door or paint their doors red to discourage the spirits who walk by night in the evenings in autumn when the Veil is drawn tight across the world and thins. Some hope to visit with those who have passed, but many are content to leave the past beyond the Veil.

Mountainfolk Brewing Contest

The other spirits of autumn appear when the reformed Guild of Zymergists, brewmasters, hold their harvest brewing competition. At the first gathering of the fall, they offer prizes for traditional mountain beers and other brews. They are said to seek those who can recreate the ancient brews that convey great health and longevity.

Trollball / OGREBALL

Those traveling in or near the Ograth lands may encounter them playing some version of their game of Troll ball. The Razioch also took it up, although their version is more martial. Gambling on the outcome of a game is common, and depending on the season, there is often some mystical benefit attributed to winning a game. It is worth noting that a game depends on having a dead troll to extract a skull, and any benefit seems tied to the nature of the skull used. An exception to the troll skull rules is that the penalties for deliberate cheating or trying to fix a game will be used as the ball in the replay.