

## THE REGIONS OF ALDIS

The land of the Sovereignty is broadly divided into four regions: the Central Valleys occupying much of the Aldin peninsula, the Northern Lands bordering the Ice-Binder Mountains, including the vast woodlands of the Pavin Weald, the Southern Coasts and the Islands of the Scatterstar Archipelago, and the Eastern Lands bordering the Veran Marsh.

### THE CENTRAL VALLEYS

The sun-drenched Central Valleys are the heartland of the Sovereignty. Numerous villages and towns extend up and down the Rose River and its many tributaries, with the great capital city of Aldis standing where the river pours out of the southwestern corner of Lake Vash. The region is the most densely populated and fertile in the Sovereignty. Its grain, nuts, oil, wine, and cloth are widely exported.

Broad roads, paved with large stones, crisscross the ridges of the region's hills and, combined with river travel, connect the Sovereignty's communities. Trees in the region mostly grow in cultivated groves on hilltops, often on either side of the roads. Almond, pistachio, and olive groves are especially plentiful. The valleys are devoted to growing grapes, wheat, cotton, and flax. Locals herd goats and reddish pigs along the hillsides while white cattle graze on fallow ground.

Using the white marble found in many low cliffs, people build gleaming white towns and cities, often painted with elaborate murals of animals, plants, and the ocean. The houses of more prosperous residents are built around square courtyards filled with fruit trees, fountains, statuary, and simple gardens. The region's villages usually have buildings of whitewashed brick, roofed with terra cotta tile. Whether a village or a city, most communities have grid plans and are located near a river or other natural source of fresh water.

Almost half of the region's human residents are descendants of the original dark-haired, olive-skinned inhabitants of the central valleys, while the rest belong to a diverse range of heritages, from the Old Kingdom to recent immigrants. Most live in large extended families, their houses holding not just parents and their children, but also grandparents and unmarried siblings. The four sides of a traditional Aldin home, surrounding a central courtyard, are arranged so residents can strike a balance between close family ties and privacy.

Individual villages rarely contain more than several hundred people, but the populations of multiple villages often gather together for festivals and feast-days. During the spring and summer, these festivals are held outdoors, but during the fall and winter, people hold festivals in large halls. The location rotates from village to village, so all of the settlements in an area have their turn.

In addition to being blessed by ideal climate and fertile soil, farmers in the central valleys have additional leisure time because of arcana. Many villages have adepts able to bless and encourage their fields and livestock. In general, farms in the central valleys produce more with less time and effort than the amount expended elsewhere.

Daily Aldin clothing tends towards the practical. In hot weather, clothing on the upper body ranges from a simple laced or buttoned vest worn by itself or over a short-sleeved or sleeveless shirt. In winter, people wear long tunics with slashed sleeves, with strips of brightly colored cloth sewn into the diamond-shaped slashes, or vests over high-collared, long-sleeved shirts. Urban folk wear low leather shoes or elaborately laced sandals, while nobles and travelers prefer knee-high leather boots, particularly for riding.

Clothing for festivals and special occasions tends to be far more elaborate: flowing gowns, often close-fitting through the body with puffy or flared sleeves and wide skirts, either pleated or simply full. Some wear long belted tunics and either close-fitting trousers or tights. Brocade or embroidered vests, or flowing over-robos, buttoned, laced, or designed to be worn open, are a part of most festival garb.

### THE CITY OF ALDIS

The great city of Aldis is the heart of the Sovereignty as well the largest and most splendid city in the known world. Home to the royal court, the metropolis contains a mixture of architectural styles from the realm's major cultures. While most of the city is built with the whitewashed brick and brightly painted marble used by the folks of the central valleys, it also features a number of architectural styles from the different peoples and cultures that have settled here over the centuries, and some structures in Aldis date back to before the founding of the Sovereignty.

The city has a radial street plan, with concentric circular roads connecting its wide radial streets, which lead to the royal palace at the center of the city. Narrow gardens on either side of the streets are planted with cedar, olive, and



# THE CITY OF ALDIS



ROSE RIVER

OUTER WARD

LOWER WARD

MIDDLE WARD

HIGH WARD

LAKE WARD

LAKE VASH

- 1. THE OLD CITY WALL
- 2. THE ROYAL PALACE
- 3. THE NOBLE ASSEMBLY
- 4. THE ROYAL COLLEGE
- 5. THE ROYAL ARCHIVE
- 6. THE AZURE PLAZA
- 7. THE TEMPLE OF THE ETERNAL DANCE
- 8. THE ACADEMY OF THE DANCE



almond trees, large rose bushes, and many flowers. These garden swaths are broken every few dozen feet by brick paths leading into one of the city's many shops or homes.

### THE SOVEREIGN PALACE

The central palace grounds are surrounded by a marble wall with frescoes of scenes from all over the Sovereignty. Unlike the well-defended temple-palace of Jarzon or the fortress tower of the Lich King of Kern, the palace

grounds in Aldis are spacious and inviting, and the gates are typically left open.

Inside the palace gates, large gardens and domed buildings surround the central edifice of the palace, a great marble structure capped by a majestic bronze dome. The smaller buildings contain the sovereign's residence, a museum and library, a small but well-tended park, and an open-air theater. Except for the sovereign's residence, which is only open to nobles and intimates of the royal court, the rest of the palace is accessible to visitors. Scholars come from days away to study the ancient artifacts in the museum, and foreign dignitaries often say the plays and other performances held in the royal theater are some of the finest anywhere.

Beneath the great dome of the palace's central building, large meeting halls and judicial chambers fill the back half of the building, while the upper floors are arranged in narrow rings close to the circular outer wall. These rooms are normally filled with busy record-keepers and bureaucrats. The front half of the building is normally left open to the public. Its walls are covered by murals of the history of Aldis and portraits of its greatest leaders. This space is also used for the large indoor festivals, masquerades, and balls forming an important part of life at the royal court.

## THE WARDS OF ALDIS

The city of Aldis is divided into five wards: the Outer, Lower, Middle, and High Wards, along with the Lake Ward, along the shores of Lake Vash. Except for the Lake Ward, the city's wards are concentric, with the Outer Ward on the outer edge of the city and the High Ward at its center.

### THE OUTER WARD

The outermost ward has hostels and inns, open-air markets, warehouses, and various restaurants, market stalls, florists, and other businesses reliant upon fresh goods from outside the city. The areas along the banks of the Rose River have the same sorts of businesses, along with fisheries and dockside taverns.

### THE MIDDLE WARD

The majority of the city lives in the Middle Ward, filled with townhouses belonging to scribes, clerks, shopkeepers, local merchants, and the like. It is also the location of taverns and theaters frequented by the city's inhabitant. The ward has public baths, gymnasiums, and sporting arenas, all popular with both residents and visitors.

### THE LOWER WARD

In this ward live many laborers: folk who work in various shops, load and unload ships and caravans, and maintain much of the city. The Lower Ward has blocks of apartments two to four stories tall. The ground floors of many have small shops or restaurants with living space above. Small townhouses inhabited by shopkeepers and hostels for out-of-town traders are also common in this section of the city.

### THE HIGH WARD

In the center of the city is the High Ward, also called the Noble Ward. It houses the residences of the Noble and Guild Councils, as well as the homes of Aldis's wealthiest citizens. Interspersed among the luxurious townhouses and small mansions are shops selling luxury goods and imported delicacies.

### THE LAKE WARD

To many, the most exotic area of the city lies along the shores of Lake Vash. Partially submerged townhouses and apartments are home to many sea-folk here. The upper floors look like any other dwellings, but flooded underground channels connect the lower levels. Wide canals, navigated by narrow gondolas, replace many streets. An evening gondola ride in the Lake Ward is considered one of the most romantic outings in the city.

### THE NOBLE ASSEMBLY

The greatest symbol of Aldin governance is the azure and gold dome of the Noble Assembly. The assembly chamber is under the center of the dome, a circular room with benches for the attending nobles, descending in rows to the sunken floor, where speakers stand to address the assembly. The rest of the assembly building is taken up by offices used by the nobles or their administrative staff and by the assembly archives.

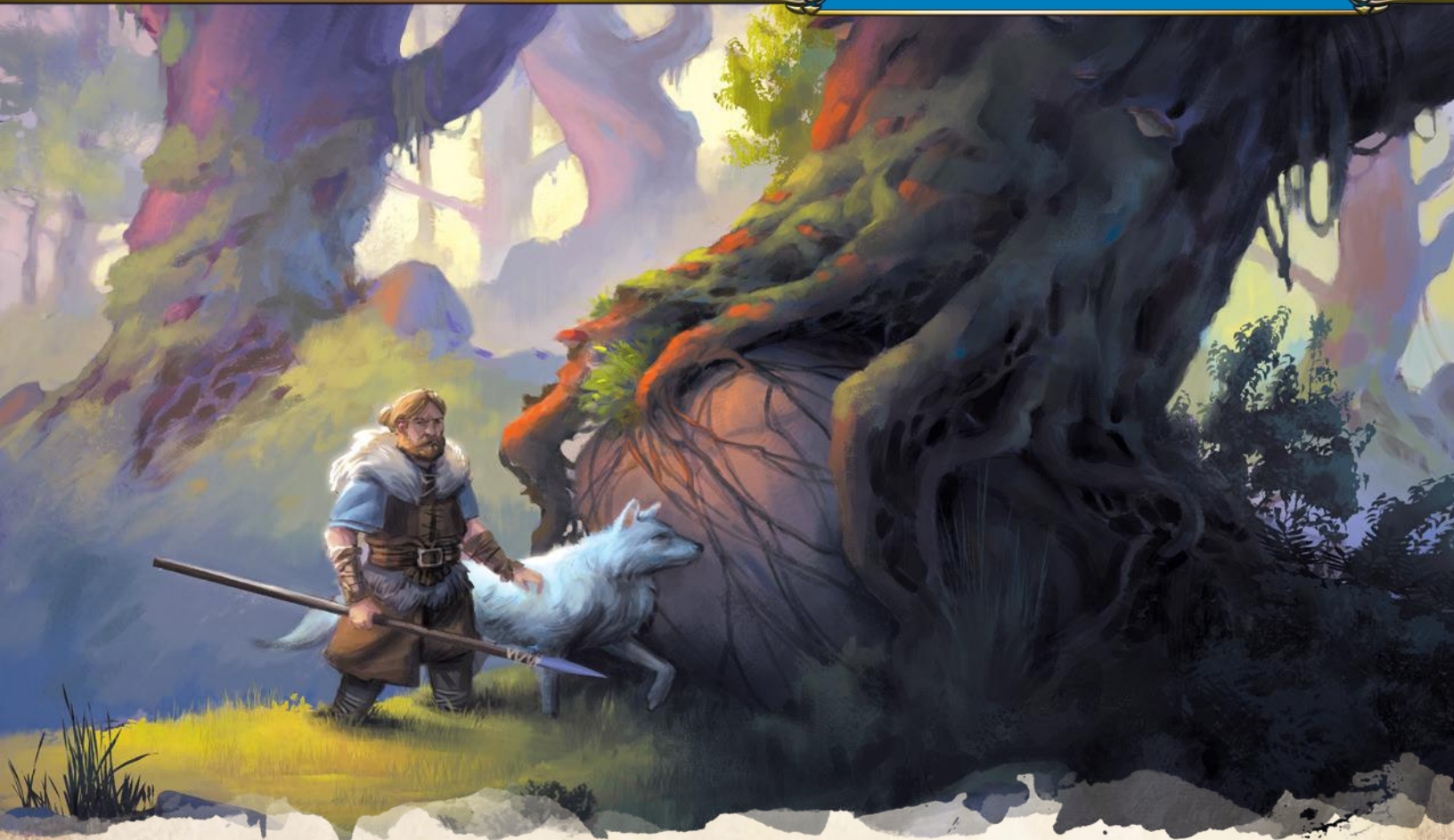
### THE ROYAL COLLEGE

Not far from the center of Aldis, the Royal College is where future scholars, adepts, and nobles of the Sovereignty are educated. The Royal College teaches all the arts and sciences known in the Sovereignty, including natural philosophy, astronomy, history, engineering, alchemy, medicine, herbalism, literature, the visual arts, and, of course, the arcane arts.

Students usually attend the Royal College for two to four years, although some go on to higher levels of education and end up becoming professors themselves. The Sovereign's Finest keeps a close eye on the Royal College for potential new envoys.

### THE TEMPLE OF THE ETERNAL DANCE

Situated on a high hill, the Temple offers a panoramic view of the city. It is a beautiful columned structure of marble, accented in gold leaf, restored from the original built during the Old Kingdom, a monument to the gods and the Eternal Dance.



## THE NORTHERN LANDS

The northern lands of Aldis become progressively wilder, moving away from the fertile and more settled valleys towards the northern barrier of the Ice-Binder Mountains. North of Verdaunen, the largest concentration of people is the city of Ennevan, a northern trading city located on the edge of the vast expanse of the Pavin Weald.

### THE PAVIN WEALD

A dense forest of primarily oak and maple fills the northern reaches of Aldis, giving way to increasingly more evergreens nearer to the Ice-Binder Mountains. The Pavin Weald extends partway up the slopes of the mountains. Visibility is low, and the dense forest significantly reduces the speed of travel. The forest also gives bandits and creatures many places to hide.

Further south, where the foothills end, the forest becomes thicker and deeper. The trees in the deep forest are ancient and soar up like vast towers. The depths of the Pavin Weald are replete with magic, including the presence of many nature spirits.

The Shadow Lords attempted many times to extract the Pavin Weald's living and magical wealth, but their attempts ended in failure. In addition to being a center for the world's inherent magic, the Pavin Weald was also one of the primary refuges for the rhydan. Their presence, combined with the forest's deep magics, prevented it from being clear-cut or destroyed. As a result, many fled to the

Pavin Weald to escape from the Empire of Thorns and the Shadow Wars that followed.

Refugees willing to live in harmony with the forest were relatively safe. As they came to know the forest, they also came to know the rhydan. The Pavin Weald was one of the places where the alliance between humans and rhydan was forged and formed the basis of the Great Rebellion. As a result, Aldins consider the forest a sacred place to preserve and protect.

There are many small settlements on the outskirts of the Pavin Weald, and some villages deeper within it. The forest spirits allow respectful folk to gather fallen wood, edible fruits, acorns, and nuts and to hunt reasonable amounts of game. Traveling merchants visit these villages to trade worked goods for furs, herbs, and wild mushrooms gathered in the forest.

### THE FOREST FOLK

Deeper in the forest, a few small communities live in harmony with rhydan, particularly rhy-wolves and rhy-bears. These forest folk often distrust strangers and are more comfortable with rhy-wolves than with other humans. Teams of the Sovereign's Finest who visit them must be careful and courteous to avoid antagonizing the forest folk and their rhydan companions.

The villages of the forest folk are usually small, between thirty and three hundred people living in a loose spiral of wooden houses around a central clearing. The elder, the priest, and the healer, if a village is lucky enough to