



Nerathi Legends: The Knights of Rethmil

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“Virtue, honor, courage—these are the makings of a knight in any land. But in Rethmil, knights armor themselves in spells and scribe runes of power on their blades.”

On the shore of the Sea of Dragons lies the ancient kingdom of Rethmil, the last free land in western Altara. Threatened by the relentless growth of the Iron Circle over the last twenty years, Rethmil stands fast against the servants of Asmodeus, and it is defended by the valiant Hyarthan Knights. These mighty swordsmen serve as the elite warriors of the land, and they are sworn to a strict code of honor and unswerving loyalty to the magnate of Rethmil. Time and time again the Hyarthan Knights have blunted monstrous incursions from the lands of the Iron Circle, and they have ferreted out Iron Circle plots taking shape in Rethmil’s dark alleyways and jeweled palaces. As long as the Hyarthan Knights defend the throne of the magnate, the Iron Circle’s dominion remains incomplete.

Rethmil is one of the oldest surviving human kingdoms. It was established more than three thousand years ago, before the rise of Arkhosia. After Arkhosia conquered it during an expansion phase, Rethmil became a self-governing province of the dragonborn empire over the next several generations. The kingdom’s practice of sword magic dates back to this time, when mercenary Rethmilian wizards in the service of the dragonborn warlords combined their arcane arts with a tradition of faithfulness, personal honor, and unflinching martial discipline. The Hyarthan Order had its beginnings as an elite legion in this age.

After the destruction of Arkhosia, Rethmil emerged as the most powerful state in western Altara. The Hyarthan Knights swore loyalty to Rethmil’s magnate and defended the realm’s interests for centuries. Rethmil came into conflict with the rising power of Nerath about four hundred years ago. At the time, the magnates had ambitions of establishing Rethmil as an empire unto itself, and they resisted Nerathi expansion over a century of intermittent wars and diplomatic intrigues. Rethmil’s resistance broke when a failed proxy war against Nerath in neighboring

Dercassia provoked rebellion against House Sathandin, the reigning family. Nerath backed House Tedrazar against the other contenders for the throne and established a line of puppet rulers more amenable to Nerathi dominance. The Hyarthan Knights, defenders of the old order, were exiled from the realm by House Tedrazar. Rethmil's legendary swordmages spent years wandering the world in small companies, earning a living as expert mercenaries who clung to traditions of loyalty and discipline.

In the years since Nerath's collapse, Rethmil has reestablished itself as an independent realm. Without Nerath's support, a faction of Rethmilian traditionalists overthrew House Tedrazar and returned House Sathandin to power. From all corners of the world, the surviving Hyarthan Knights followed, swearing allegiance to the Magnacy Restored. But now Rethmil faces a new threat—the rise of the Iron Circle. One by one, the neighboring lands have fallen under the influence of the Citadel of Iron's Grasp, and some believe that Rethmil is doomed to follow its neighbors into tyranny and subjugation.

Rethmil's Power Structure

Rethmil is an old, decadent culture. The populace distrusts foreign influences and has little interest in the doings of other lands. Trade, the lifeblood of many other realms, plays only a small part in Rethmil's prosperity. The kingdom is mostly agrarian, and its wealth lies in the estates and ranches of its large, conservative noble class. Of the power groups in Rethmil, the most widely traveled and open-minded one is the Hyarthan Knights.

Rethmil has little liking for reminders of Nerathi rule, but common threats make for strange bedfellows. In the last few years, the magnate has grudgingly sought allies against the Iron Circle in the lands making up the League of Nerath.

Magnate Tisera Sathandin

The sixty-year-old matron of the Sathandin family, Magnate Tisera, is a stocky, square-jawed woman with a sharp mind, a sharper tongue, and a spine of unyielding steel. Magnate Tisera has no patience for fools and has a reputation for being exceptionally demanding. She routinely discharges advisors and servants who fail to measure up to her exacting standards. The only person who sees her tender side is her husband of forty years, the Prince-Consort Idramor.

As magnate, Tisera stands at the head of a large and powerful bureaucracy. The Magnacy, as the royal administration is called, concerns itself with a number of civil works, collection of taxes, land usage, law and order, and the licensing of spellcasters. Magic use is commonplace in Rethmil, and many wizards serve in the Magnacy's ranks. Swordmages and bladesingers, however, find places in the knightly orders.

The Hyarthan Order

In Rethmil, knighthood is defined not by noble birth or skill at arms, but instead by the ability to master both blade and spell. Several knightly orders take oaths to serve different causes or faiths, but by far the largest and most important is the Hyarthan Order. The Hyarthans serve the magnate; they function as an elite bodyguard to the ruler of Rethmil and also serve as military commanders, spies, and scouts.

Unlike swordmages in other lands, the Hyarthan Knights are skilled in mounted combat. Their traditional mount is the dragonne, or liondrake. These noble beasts are poor fliers, but they are deadly in battle because they can cover ground with much greater speed and agility than any warhorse. Each Hyarthan Knight must earn his or her own drake through deeds of valor and demonstrated skill at arms. Younger knights devote much of their time and attention to winning their spurs.

The Hyarthan Knights number a thousand or so individuals. Most of them are talented swordmages

from old Rethmilian noble families; placing a son or a daughter in the ranks of the Hyarthan Knights is a high honor. The lowest ranks of the order are apolitical, and most junior knights set aside their family's rivalries and interests as long as they are in service. However, a limited number of prestigious knight-captain and knight-commander positions exist within the order, and competition for these titles is fierce. If the Hyarthan Order has a weakness, it lies in the political currents that tug at its most senior members. Knights of exceptional ability can be passed over in favor of knights whose families are more important or influential.

Knight-Marshal Anton Marduum: The leader of the Hyarthan Knights, Knight-Marshal Anton, is a stern traditionalist who privately longs for the days of old, when the Hyarthan Knights played kingmaker to ensure that only the most competent and worthy magnates came to power. House Marduum is a longtime rival of the ruling House Sathandin, and Anton blames Magnate Tisera for the troubles that are mounting on Rethmil's borders. Anton is a stern and capable man of fifty, and a reasonably competent knight-marshal. He places the greatest trust in knights of good stock, so he quietly favors the old families most closely allied to his own house.

Knight-Commander Seira Driloth: Fiery and tempestuous, Lady Seira Driloth is considered the boldest and most heroic of all the Hyarthan Knights. She has won victory after victory on every march of the realm, where she and her forces have scattered savage raiders, destroyed terrible monsters, and unmasked Iron Circle plots. Many knights believe that Seira is the best and brightest of their company, but her common birth means that she will never be knight-marshal.

The Three Academies

Arcane magic is regarded highly in Rethmil, and for many centuries all who have the intelligence and talent for studying magic have been encouraged to do so. Many Rethmilian nobles undertake the study of magic as part of their training in youth. Rethmilians of the lower classes are less likely to be tutored in magic, but the Magnacy's officials keep an eye open for promising students from any social class. As a result, schools of magic are commonplace in the cities and towns of the land. Commoners, merchants, and nobles (of modest rank) mix freely in these academies.

Of the various schools throughout Rethmil, three are especially prestigious: Ascarmel, Derdath, and Sagamar. Although each academy takes on a number of promising commoners, these schools focus on training the scions of the most influential noble families. Graduates of each school form a loose association or society that looks out for current students of that school. Rivalries between alumni of different academies are very real and sometimes turn bitter, distorting the natural alliances of the various noble houses of the realm.

Iron Circle Agitators

The masters of the Citadel of Iron's Grasp have fixed their eyes on Rethmil for years, and they scheme to bring the kingdom within their domain—or destroy it, if controlling it is impossible. The cult of Asmodeus is a widespread underground threat that pervades all levels of Rethmil's society, and the followers of the cult are prevalent among disaffected noble houses, especially those who were formerly allied with the deposed House Tedrazar. The cult is banned throughout Rethmil, so the priests of Asmodeus keep a low profile, patiently cultivating their followers.

Ophelia Rysandor: Seemingly an empty-headed noble given to decadent parties, gossip, and revelry,

Lady Rysandor is in actuality a high priestess of the cult of Asmodeus in Rethmil. An elegant and witty woman of forty-five, she is a widow who retains the great beauty of her youth and delights in toying with a bevy of male admirers. Twenty years ago, she began dabbling in devil worship out of sheer boredom and soon became caught up in the cult. Four years ago, she murdered her husband to gain full control of the Rysandor fortune, but few suspect her dark secret.

Dervis Beshan: One of the richest men in Rethmil, Beshan is the master of the largest counting house in Zagramor, and he runs a network of Iron Circle spies. Rethmil's merchants are bound to noble patrons who extract ruinous rents and royalties from their commerce. Like many of his fellows, Dervis Beshan thoroughly resents this situation. Years ago he threw in his lot with Rethmil's enemies, hoping to destroy the privileges of the nobility and plunder the resulting spoils. Beshan is a young,



energetic man of thirty-three, suave and darkly handsome. He goes to great lengths to conceal his true wealth and the depth of his hatred for Rethmil's nobles and their defenders.

Exploring Rethmil

Most of Rethmil is a wide, rolling plain that descends gently from the foothills of the Altaran Mountains to the shores of the Sea of Dragons. The land is arid and treeless; the noble estates and small farming villages of the countryside are given over to golden fields of grain, sun-drenched vineyards, and rangeland for cattle. Although little rain falls in Rethmil's plains, underground aquifers fed by the rains in the Altaran Mountains supply many cold, clear wells, watering holes, and oases.

Rethmil's eastern border is the broad River Zagran, beyond which the land grows drier. The western border with Dercassia is less clearly defined, and this area contains the town of Feyadyn and the uninhabited wastes of the Feya Basin within it. Most of the people in Rethmil live in the eastern half of the country, around the capital of Alam-Reth or along the fertile Zagran Valley.

Alam-Reth

The capital of Rethmil is the ancient walled city of Alam-Reth, located in a large oasislike vale forty miles south of the coastline. The city is well ordered and has long, palm-shaded boulevards, ancient statuary, monumental civic buildings, and the palaces of nobles. The soaring towers of the magnate's palace, the Magnacy courts, and ancient temples endow Alam-Reth with a striking skyline. The markets of Alam-Reth are modest in comparison to other cities of the same size—the port city of Zagramor is Rethmil's window on the outside world, and few foreigners make the three-day journey to bring their wares inland.

ALAM-RETH AT A GLANCE

Over three thousand years old, Alam-Reth is a beautiful city of ancient walls, soaring spires, marble palaces, and parklike avenues lined with palms. It is the capital and the largest city of Rethmil.

Population Mix: Alam-Reth is home to about 30,000 people, the great majority of whom are humans. A small number of dragonborn, minotaurs, and halflings also live here.

Government: The Magnacy official who administers the city government is the lord-consul. Currently, Harman Marduum, an ambitious member of the same family as the knight-marshal of the Hyarthan Order, holds this office. Lord-Consul Harman is engaged in a number of civic projects that are long overdue, such as rebuilding the city's ancient sewers and tearing down crumbling walls swallowed by the city's growth. Critics say he's little better than a vandal, or they claim that he is determined to memorialize himself with his grand projects.

Commerce: Rethmil is largely self-sufficient, and Alam-Reth has little trade with other lands. The estates and rangeland near the city produce grain, wine, dates, lentils, and olives, as well as plenty of beef and leather. The city's most important

institutions are the Magnacy bureaucracy and several excellent academies of magic, including Ascarmel and Sagamar. Libraries and scriptoriae manned by hundreds of clerks and scribes are also prominent features of the city's commercial life.

Defenses: The Magnate's Citadel is a great walled keep in the heart of Alam-Reth. Unlike many of the other fortifications in the ancient city, nothing about the Citadel's defenses is old or obsolete. The city walls are thick and strong, but they are awkwardly sited and don't cover Alam-Reth as well as they might—something Lord-Consul Harman is working to remedy. About two hundred Hyarthan Knights serve as the Magnate's guard, protecting the Citadel. In addition, a garrison of twelve hundred ordinary Rethmilian soldiers defends the city proper.

Inns and Taverns: Good inns and fine restaurants abound in Alam-Reth; nobles from all over Rethmil stay in the capital for weeks or months. The Rosewood Inn is popular with foreigners and merchants, offering good accommodations at a reasonable price. The Golden Fireflower is the most extravagant, offering sumptuous luxury for 50 gp or more per night.

Castle Jemar

High in the southern mountains, along a road that few dare to travel, lies a vast ruin of thick walls and crumbling domes. Long ago this was a city of the dreaded oni, and here oni still linger, ruled by a prince named Jemar-Khul. Centuries past, Jemar-Khul and his monstrous race warred against Rethmil, seeking to destroy or enslave the human realm on

their doorstep, but the wizards and swordmages of Rethmil defeated them. Only a shadow of the monsters' former strength remains. Jemar-Khul keeps a number of fantastic pets, and he is always eager to feed careless travelers to them.



Feya Basin

Most of Rethmil is dry but arable. The Feya Basin is the exception. This large stretch of dry scrub, thorn bushes, and boulder fields covers nearly three thousand square miles of western Rethmil. The basin has few inhabitants, and little if any water can be found in this great wilderness. Consequently, it serves as a formidable deterrent against attack from Dercassia, since would-be invaders must either funnel into the narrow coastal road or win past the battlements of Hyarth Keep. The basin is home to many desert monsters, including leucrottas, lamias, drakes, monstrous scorpions, and well-hidden genie palaces. Rumors persist of vast treasure hoards lost in the basin's dry brush and rocks.

Hyarth Keep

Citadel of the Hyarthan Order, this sprawling fortress stands in the foothills of the Altaran Mountains, commanding the western approaches to Rethmil. Those knights who are stationed here follow lives of simple discipline, sleeping in austere dormitories and devoting hours each day to sword practice and arcane study. The garrison normally numbers about

one hundred or so knights, although scores of additional knights are visiting at any given time to confer with the high-ranking officers of the order. Spacious stables beneath the flagstone courtyards house the widely famed liondrakes that serve as the Hyarthan Knights' mounts.

Suthmar

This remote town in the upper vale of the Zagan River is isolated from the rest of Rethmil, and raids and monstrous incursions from the Desert of Black Stone frequently target it. Consequently, the Hyarthan Order maintains a large, keep-like chapter house here, and a permanent garrison of twenty of more knights protects the town. Suthmar is worth defending: the mountains to the east are rich in precious ores, and the Zagan Vale has some of the most fertile farmland in the realm. The town is home to the much-diminished House Tedrazar, the former magnates who were deposed when Nerath collapsed. Some suspect the loyalty of the Tedrazar nobles, since the family did not willingly surrender its claim to the Magnacy during the Restoration, but no one has ever caught the Tedrazars plotting against House Sathandin or collaborating with enemies of Rethmil. It seems that the Tedrazars are content to rule in Suthmar, far from the intrigues of the capital.

Zagramor

The second-largest city in Rethmil—in fact, the only settlement in Rethmil besides Alam-Reth that one might call a city—is Zagramor, a bustling port town near the mouth of the River Zagan. Zagramor serves as Rethmil's gateway. All trade into and out of the country passes over its wharves, since the small towns of the western coast are hardly ports at all, and the road through Dercassia now leads to unfriendly lands. The city is home to a large garrison of Magnacy soldiers, and it is administered by the Lord-Consul Marivard Escala—a pompous, wheezing old man

ADVENTURES IN RETHMIL

Rethmil is a land surrounded by enemies. Monstrous incursions in the borderlands are a constant threat, as are the intrigues of its decadent noble houses.

The Marrowfangs: The rugged hills and mountains between the Sand Sea and the Black Stone Desert are home to scores of vicious gnoll tribes. Of these, the largest and most aggressive are the Marrowfangs. The heroes must blunt the Marrowfang raids and put an end to the threat by defeating the Marrowfang chieftain and his mysterious advisor.

Jemar-Khul, Prince of the Oni: A ruined castle in the trackless mountains south of Rethmil is home to the mighty oni mage Jemar-Khul. Under his command, the shapechanging oni have killed and replaced the family of House Stratham, and they plot to eliminate more of Rethmil's nobles in a bid to secretly assume power.

Buried Secrets: Lord-Consul Harman Marduum's grand construction projects in the city of Alam-Reth have a secret purpose: Marduum is seeking an ancient treasury of great Arkhosian battle magic. The lord-consul recently discovered hints of the vault's existence in an ancient scroll, and he is determined to seize the choicest items for himself. He entertains thoughts of overthrowing House Sathandin and raising House Marduum to the Magnacy, which would split the Hyarthan Knights in two, since Knight-Marshal Anton might well support his cousin's bid for power despite his oath of loyalty to Magnate Tisera.

who gained his position through sheer bureaucratic tenure.

Many Sand Sea nomads visit Zagramor regularly, since the Rethmilian city is the one outpost of civilization nearest to their desert home. The Sand Sea folk rarely take lodgings in the city, preferring to pitch their tents in the hills surrounding Zagramor.

The Knight's Lance

Unlike swordmages in other lands, the Hyarthan Knights often fight mounted. Long ago, they devised a swordmage spell that gave them the reach and hitting power of a heavy lance. Swordmages who study under the Hyarthan Knights often learn *arcane lance*.

Arcane Lance

Swordmage Attack 1

You form a gray lance of sonic energy around your weapon. The concussive force of its strike briefly slows your foe.

At-Will ♦ Arcane, Implement, Thunder
Standard Action **Melee 2**

Target: One creature

Attack: Intelligence vs. Reflex

Hit: 1d8 thunder damage, and the target is slowed until the end of your next turn.

Level 21: 2d8 thunder damage.

Special: When charging, you can use this power in place of a melee basic attack. Add your Intelligence modifier to the damage if you charge while mounted.

About the Author

Richard Baker is an award-winning game designer who has written numerous adventures and sourcebooks, including *Manual of the Planes*™, the *DARK SUN*® Campaign Setting, and the D&D® GAMMA WORLD™ Roleplaying Game. He's a *New York Times* bestselling author of FORGOTTEN REALMS® novels such as *Condemnation*, the Last Mythal trilogy, and the Blades of the Moonsea series. Rich is currently the Design Manager for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game at Wizards of the Coast.

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