

MERCIN

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MERCIN

Location: Habe/Azadmere
Holder: Jermain of Ardwyn
Population: 340 (Approximately)

The village is situated on the river Idain north from Habe. It is one of the largest human settlements in the dwarven kingdom. Foreigners are seldom seen here as most do not travel beyond Habe. There is a ford to cross the river within this village. The fields to the north-east of the village belong to it.

History

In the year 812 BT clan Ardwyn was granted the permission to build a wooden palisade around the settlement, which was then only a few years old and consisted of just a few buildings. A need for a fortification was seen during the Atani wars. During that time Habe was also just a village with wooden wall. But whereas the Kophars had to remove their wooden palisade in Habe when they built their stone fortification in the year 142 TR, Mercin's palisade remained. As most humans in Azadmere, the inhabitants of Mercin are farmers with a small number of craftsmen among them.

When the Kophars finally gained dominance over the other humans in the valley in the year 300 TR, this had not been uncontested. Many clans had striven for it, among them the clan of Ardwyn which was among the favorite. This clan took it's residence in Mercin after a particularly gruesome battle with garguns which left Habe in ruins. This lead the traditional-minded Khuzdul to accept the claim of the Kophars who held out in this oldest settlement.

The Ardwyns finally accepted the rights of the Kophars who were backed by the Khuzdul. But since then they have used legal and semi-legal means to gain dominance of the humans in Azadmere. The last serious attempt was made in the year 633 TR, when the late Milloff of Ardwyn, then Lord, tried to poison Baron Cyndir at a banquet. This assassination attempt failed because a servant of his uncovered the plot. Lord Milloff was hanged and only a petition of the remaining lords could persuade the baron to grant the land around Mercin to the lord's son. How this young man gained the support of the other lords is unknown. In the course of time, however, Laslir of Ardwyn showed to be a competent

governor of his land without the ambitions of his father and filled the coffers of the Baron — and his own.

Government

Presently Mercin is the seat of the ambitious Jermain of Ardwyn, a grandchild of Laslir. He is scheming against the baron, aiming to take control of the barony. He has confidential information that the Khuzdul king would not oppose a change of power, if it at least appeared legal and went without unnecessary violence. The actions of Lord Ardwyn are covert and difficult to discern by the general populace. At times people will complain about stiff obligations, but the Lord is a popular leader and knows how to channel resentment in the baron's direction. The baron does not know about this but he is also not particularly interested in the opinion of the people as long as he receives his dues. This has been the case up to now; since Laslir's times the Kophars are satisfied with the government of the estate and do not expect troubles from clan Ardwyn.

Economics

The surrounding land is of average quality (with respect to the Azadmerian standard). Minor fishing is allowed and restricted to the section of river which belongs to the estate. Nonetheless, there are a few fishermen in the village leaving for the lake during fishing season. An additional source of revenue is honey from the local beekeepers, which are the best in Azadmere. Fruits of the forest are also gathered. The lord of the manor is often seen in the woods where he contemplates new ways of making profit of the land. It is generally held that the revenue this estate produces is due to the concentrated use of the forest but others were not able to duplicate this with the same effect.

Taxes

All building and property are enfeoffed from the Baron of Habe which has conveyed it exclusively to the Lord of Ardwyn. He in turn lends it to other people for various periods of time, generally around seven years. The rents are acceptable and seldom change. Taxes are one percentage point above the kingdom average and

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the appropriate part is transferred to Habe. The only exception is the hawking fee of 12% which stays with the Lord of Ardwyn. Additionally a fee is taken for usage of the ford. It is approximately 1/4 of the usual fee in Hårn to use bridges. This semi-official toll is tolerated, because nobody of importance cares (or pays). In "special" situation this fee is waived. The guard at the ford may be bribed but has to deliver a certain amount of toll each month.

Local Map Notes

1 POTTER (Clan Staganth)

Size: 4 Quality: *** Prices: average
The shop is run by Joel Staganth. Because the quality of clay is not particularly good, the quality of the wares is also just average. However, the techniques of decoration are similar to the ones in Habe. If Joel receives some of the clay from Habe, his earthen wares rival those of his brother in Habe. But generally Joel doesn't bother about getting it.

2 THE STAFF AND CUP (Clan Hamyn)

Size: 6 Quality: **** Prices: high
The inn has 6 single bedrooms. Passing dwarfs seldom stop here, but humans tend to stay at this inn more often than in any other of the inns along the route northbound from Habe.

3 MANOR

This manor was founded in the year 812 TR and is as old as the palisade that surrounds the village. At that time the lord decided to enlarge his residence as became his position. Plans are found on the following pages.

4 METALSMITH (Clan Pakath)

Size: 5 Quality: ***** Prices: average
The clan only produces for the local need or single pieces as ordered. For mercantylers wares one has to go to Habe (or Azadmere).

5 MARKET

The right to display goods and sell them costs 3f per day for a mercantylers and 6f per day for other traders. Only mercantylers are allowed to buy substantial amounts. The market is open during daytime and when someone has to sell something. Fees are paid at [7].

6 THE MILL

Size: 6 Quality: *** Prices: average
Mills in Azadmere are not run by the millers guild. The mills are run by a tenant of the lord, in this case Gaes has bought the franchise. He

is the first born son of one of the free farmers in Mercin.

7 MERCANTYLER (Clans Tynath/Berbakh)

Size: 3 Quality: *** Prices: average
This shop serves as a outlet for the odds and ends the Chandler clan Berbakh sells and as a store for the Mercantylers clan Tynath. Usurer notes are also traded. The two owners are married. They also manage the market [5].

8 HOUSE OF CYLGAR

Cylgar Marman is the richest (and free) farmer of the village. The lord has taxed him rather high in the correct assumption that the richest peasant in town lamenting about high taxes is not going to be taken seriously. Cylgar knows the financial situation of the lord almost as well as Jermain himself. He his not just a good observer and apt manager; a cousin of his works for Lord Ardwyn as a substitute chamberlain.

9 HOUSE OF HOLON (Clan Shiron)

Holon of Shiron settled here. For a seafarer this is quite unusual, but he seems to have the money to support his living and the goodwill of the rulers. He is a respected, free man and has not only traveled on the freshwater lakes of Hårn.

10 TIMBERWRIGHT (Clan Foraen)

Size: 5 Quality: *** Prices: average
Clan Foraen owns exclusive timbercraft rights not only in this estate. The local timberwright Armenes knows a bit about the cave of his lord although he never stepped across the threshold of it. He considers the regular watches that meet there unusual for a mere cave but deems it unwise to talk about it.

Manor

Ground Floor

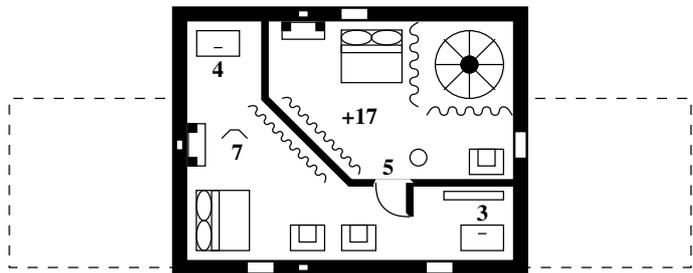
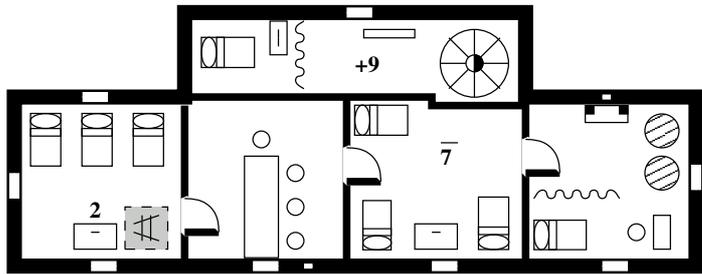
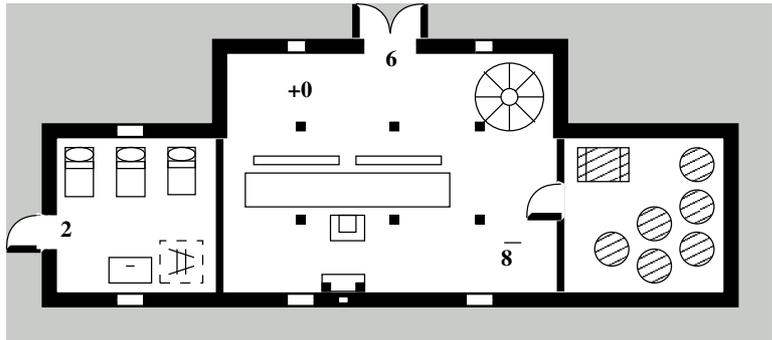
The ground floor houses three men-at-arms in one wing. The meeting- or council hall is located in the center. The second wing contains a storage room.

Second Floor

One wing contains the sleeping quarter of three soldiers while the other consists in the kitchen which also serves as sleeping room for a cook. The central area is occupied by the sergeants'

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1 mm = 1 Foot



INTERIOR MAP

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quarters, from which a small section is separated by a curtain in which the servant of the house sleeps. A small bank is occupied by a guard who makes sure that no-one enters the private chambers of the lord.

Third Floor

These are the private rooms of the lord. Previously he and his wife used the outer room and his son the one that contains the stairs. But his wife has been dead since four years now and his son is out “acquiring fame” as a knight somewhere far from Azadmere. All rooms are therefore exclusively used by the lord himself.

No intrigue without love

The eldest daughter, Lasia, of Baron Kophar generally lives with her aunt in Duryn. With 18 years of age she is ready to be married. Several motions have been made by knights of the vicinity, but she has not been promised to these. It is clear that the baron attempts a political marriage. He may also think to discipline the apparently haughty girl. Jermain of Ardwyn would also favor a political marriage and is contemplating to wed the girl to close in on the barony.

One Shoran Haudy of Hydd is madly in love with Lasia and she took more than a liking to him as well. However, Shoran’s father does not approve of him asking for the hand of the baron’s daughter, saying that Shoran should first prove his worth and stand against the perils of the world (or at least of Hârn) before thinking about marriage.

Lead-in

There are several possible ways that the GM can enforce the situation and let the PCs come into this scenario.

Lasia is currently staying at her father’s place to prepare for a wedding with Jermain of Ardwyn. He has had enough of the reluctant daughter. In desperation the woman throws a letter out a window from Caer Habe when the PCs pass by and begs them to deliver the writ to Shoran Haudy of Hydd. She promises the players that Lord Haudy will reward the messenger. Thereafter she will vanish from the window. The letter will contain a small bag containing a few pennies for the messengers. In the letter (if it

is indiscreetly opened by the PCs) she writes of her desperate situation and either asks Shoran to do something or gives herself up.

Shoran’s father has died recently and the heir is not only in a better financial position but also has the freedom to actually ask for the hand of the baron’s daughter. He will ask the PCs to help him avoid the wedding of Lasia with lord Jermain. This may be combined with the PCs delivering the letter. Since there is no seal to break, Shoran will not notice any premature opening, also accounting for the fact that he is excited. On the contrary, he will show the PCs the letter if asked, to proof his case on grounds of true love.

Shoran knows that Jermain is a serious contender and politically the more likely candidate. The only chance he sees is that some incriminating facts can be assembled against the head of clan Ardwyn of Mercin. These can be used to make the baron reject the man as husband for his daughter. He also knows that he is trying to maneuver the PCs into a tough spot. He is willing to spend a lot of money on his last straw (he is truly in love), but tries to hide the fact as good as he can. He will initiate bargaining with a fair deal.

There are quite a lot of stories around about Lord Ardwyn, most of which Lord Haudy knows of. The history of the ancestors of Lord Ardwyn is known, but no recent outbreaks of ambitions were noted. The most troublesome rumor about Jermain is, that he is supposed to have enslaved some dwarfs below his manor, that mine metal for him. Of course this would be a serious scandal and anybody claiming this in the open had better have some solid evidence. But even if this is not true, some unnatural sources for the riches of Lord Ardwyn must exist, right? Many people say so.

The time for this quest is limited until wedding-day comes; the last day to prevent that dreaded event. Lord Haudy expects discreet inquiries and brute force is not an option, since this would discredit him with the baron (or he would be forced to say, he has never seen the PCs before).

Rumors and hints

The baron or his servant will tell anybody who is interested that the wedding of Lasia and Jermain will take place in 14 days. Until then

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presents have to be prepared, guests invited, some of them from outside Azadmere, and minstrels are expected. The pair is seen somewhat as a mismatch, but still both are considered good mates. There is much speculation about the wealth of Lord Ardwyn and some bold people will whisper that they have heard Lord Ardwyn has enslaved a few dwarfs that mine for him.

Mercin itself is free of the rumor about enslaved dwarfs. Some assume he has magical aid of some sort others just consider him a shrewd manager. His new methods of using the forest are considered a good idea but they are not deemed very successful. The levies on freemen as well as bonded men is high, the reason for this is seen in the requirements of the baron that the lord cannot change. Interestingly, the lord is rather popular with his people, even though he has increased the taxation by a percentage point above those commonly taken in Azadmere.

The marriage is seen with mixed emotions, because Lord Ardwyn is not known to be overly respectful towards women. His first wife has been dead now for a couple of years, and it is suspected that she died of sorrow because she never was allowed to leave the manor. On the other hand it is expected that the lord will turn milder once a female hand is in the house. He has turned more peevish lately.

If questions are addressing the forest, one can find out that something is in the forest and guarded. Soldiers vanish for a while into the woods and take food with them. Children have followed the guards and can point out the cave, where they go. Parents would never have consented to such adventure, of course, and in the presence of adults from the village children will most likely not talk about it.

A female herald presently stays in Mercin with unclear orders. She says she is here to keep alive a contact between Lord Ardwyn and a lord in Kaldor. The two had met long ago. She is open for investigations in the surrounding area but is rather tight about anything else. She resides in the village inn.

The truth

Obviously, Lord Ardwyn tries to marry for political reasons. If he marries the daughter of the baron, he has to “take care” of the three sons and the barony is his. This has to look like one

or several accidents. If he achieves this, he (his wife, that is) will be the legitimate heir. Two of the sons are traveling right now, so it should not be difficult to hire killers to do that job. For the father and his eldest son he has not hired anybody yet and they seem to stay in Azadmere. Presently a member of the Crimson dancer resides in Mercin to negotiate these murders. An agreement has not been reached and talks are still underway, though.

The known wealth of the manor can be attributed to the fact that Jermain has acquired 5 gargun-hyeka on a raid against Zhakom some time ago. This event took place 6 years ago and has since been forgotten, even though everybody remembers the raid and the trophy Lord Ardwyn brought along. What is not commonly known is that the garguns are still alive, guarded and provisioned by Jermain. The are digging in a small mine which yields small amounts of silver for the lord. Of course all of this is conducted under cover from both humans and dwarfs, which implies that the quota of silver from this mine is lower than could be expected. Nevertheless, it suffices to increase the income of the lord noticeably.

Recently one of the gargun has died and old age is noticeable with the others. Probably none of them will live longer than two years from now. Jermain therefore thinks that now is the time to go ahead with his political plans. He is contemplating the assassinations of the two male members of the Kophar clan after the wedding. He has started negotiations with a member from the Crimson dancer.

The sympathetic feelings the populace has for lord Ardwyn despite his high taxes is due to an old inheritance, that already saved the manor for his grandfather. It is a ring that will let the wearer appear more charismatic and likable in a very subtle manner. The ring with its small, somewhat dull emerald just has to be shown to take effect. In dire straits the ring can be used to avoid attacks on the person wearing the ring, which will use up one charge. The attacker will be overwhelmed with pity for the bearer for one round and cannot attack him. Presently the ring contains three of ten charges. The family knows a trusted dwarven mage, who can increase the charges of this ring somehow so that in principle there is no shortage of them. Should the ring however lose its last charge it will become

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a non-magical ring and is no longer rechargeable. This will be noticed as the ring will lose its saturated hue and will look as a normal emerald ring.

Should the PCs find out about the cave, any official questions about the cave Jermain is guarding will be answered evadingly. He says he has experimental agricultural potions and tools that will increase land quality or the yield of an acre. He may even produce one tool or the other which may look somewhat more modern than anything else that is used in Azadmere. Anybody with a sound knowledge in agriculture will note that they are practically worthless. All other questions are either ignored or answered to the effect, that this is his land and he will not tolerate intrusion into the management of his domain.

The assassin Shlea from Orbaal, who is willing to strike a deal with Jermain, is scouting the countryside to evaluate how much she can get from lord Ardwyn. She travels under her real name but with false origin and wrong heraldic sign (Kaldor). She has told the innkeeper in Mercin that she would “conduct business” for those interested. She doesn’t expect any answers from here but she has made this offer with twofold meaning nonetheless. The inn keeper is not part of the Lia-Kavair, but has promised to forward Shlea’s offer to potential customers. Whether he is interpreting the offer correctly is open.

Lord Ardwyn pays 3 ranking guards and 6 normal guards to keep peace and order on his estate. They are stationed in one wing of the manor itself. This number is rather high in comparison to the other manorial fiefs. But the ranking guards have enough to do with the cave, so the remaining guards take care of the manor and the ford. The ranking guards are rather loyal (but they may be bought for a high to very high price), while the normal guards do not trust Lord Ardwyn too much – and vice versa. This is due to the secret that the lord shares with the ranking guards but not with the normal ones. The normal guards are therefore not reluctant to spread rumors, even though they know little. One cook and one servant are part of the household, too. Both have been with Lord Ardwyn very long and are very loyal. They are nevertheless not part of the conspiracy and do not know about the cave.

Activities

During the time before the wedding takes place several activities take place in and around Mercin. For more general activities see the local map notes.

Jermain Ardwyn will be looking after his garguns every two or three days. He is rather nervous about them but he is also very careful that he is not being followed. If in doubt he will rather miss a visit. Only he and his three ranking guards are initiated into the secret. If he notices that he is obviously observed he will send one of the guards to banish the observer from his estate, if possible. Finally, the foolhardy or notorious will be arrested.

One shift with the garguns lasts for a week. Generally one guard will be on duty. The new guard brings along his new rations. If possible, the change of shift should be held secret, but guards are not a seldom sight in the vicinity of Mercin.

The sister of the order of the Crimson Dancer conducts long walks throughout the neighborhood which also take her to the vicinity of the cave. She would band up with the PCs, if they ask her and care to find out more about the cave. Once a week she will be on tour throughout the neighboring estates to compare the living standards. The negotiations with Lord Ardwyn take place infrequently. If Shlea is in the wilderness or in her room and thinks she is alone, she will pray to Agrik for about an hour.

Once a week Jermain will inspect some of his peasants huts outside of the palisade wall. One of his ranking guards will accompany him. This is generally a quiet business. Jermain will also inspect some of the craftsmen in the village.

Of the three ranking guards, one will sit in the inn for a couple of hours. They will observe the behavior of the common guards which are off duty. For this reason many of them will be found only in other villages in the vicinity when not on duty. The normal guards will not talk of internal things, if a ranking guard is present. (This does not mean they will do so freely in the absence of them.) If a ranking guard suspects something, he will not leave the bar before the guard in question. The ranking guards are clever enough not to get drunk themselves and remove drunk guards from the inn.