

SALTMARSH REGION

The land near Saltmarsh is safe for travelers, as are the roads that cut through the region. Small farms and manor houses dot the area, many maintained by army veterans who were granted land by royal decree. A number of small halfling villages are scattered around the area, located just off the main roads. Such locations consist of several farmhouses clustered around a pub that provides a warm welcome to visitors who come in peace. Once one journeys off the beaten path, however, a variety of threats emerge from the swampy wilderness.

Map 1.2 shows Saltmarsh and the surrounding area, where all of the following sites and features are located.

ROADS AND PATHWAYS

The roads around Saltmarsh are heavily patrolled, part of the crown's effort to make its influence felt in the region. Travel along these thoroughfares is usually safe, with most encounters involving merchant caravans, guard patrols, and fellow travelers. Small farms and manors cluster near the roads, relying on passing guard patrols for their safety. Where these settlements grow more widely spaced, bandit raids become more likely. Travelers on the road meet 1d4 caravans per day and have a 5 percent chance of being the target of an ambush by 2d4 **bandits** led by a **bandit captain**. In addition, each day on the road a party passes 1d3 small villages or manors. There is a 25 percent chance that any such location is inhabited by halflings. Otherwise, the location is a human enclave.

POINTS OF INTEREST

Beyond Saltmarsh are a number of locations that characters can visit. Providing in-depth detail in for all of them is beyond the scope of this book, but enough information is provided to create a foundation for further development.

ABBNEY ISLE

This island south of Saltmarsh is the featured location in the adventure *Isle of the Abbey*.

The island is the site of a small abbey that was long ago abandoned by the order of monks that built it. Since then, various outlaw gangs and monsters have claimed it as a lair.

BURLE

Burle is a fortified outpost that is always on guard for monsters emerging from the Dreadwood. It serves as a key stopover point for travelers venturing inland from the southern coastal region. The community is dominated by a small keep set atop a hill that overlooks the forest it borders. A few farms cluster around it, the locals relying on the royal garrison to keep them safe from marauders.

Burle's most distinctive feature is the small copse of trees that grows in the middle of the keep. An ancient **treant** named Wander Root dwells in the keep and acts as an informal ambassador between the humans of Keoland and the wood elves and good-aligned fey of the Dreadwood. Years ago, the knights of Keoland helped the denizens of the forest defeat an incursion by cultists worshipping elemental evil fire. Since then, the elves, the treants, and the crown of Keoland have observed the Wild Flame Pact—a treaty that calls for mutual defense against the Dreadwood's horrors.

The outpost is commanded by its castellan, Kiara Shadowbreaker (LG female half-elf **knight**), who has led many successful raids into the Dreadwood. Kiara is a grim figure, always cognizant of the threat posed by the forest's denizens. She sees trouble behind every piece of news, and she keeps the warriors and rangers headquartered here ready to fight at a moment's notice. She is especially keen to hear news about the Scarlet Brotherhood. Kiara is convinced that the organization poses



a dire threat to the region but has failed to uncover concrete evidence of its meddling. She suspects that Duke Feldren of Seaton has been compromised by Scarlet Brotherhood agents, and she surreptitiously seeks to hire spies who could investigate him in search of proof.

Burle provides a safe resting place before and during expeditions into the Hool Marshes or the Dreadwood. Kiara offers a bounty equal to 5 gp per Hit Die for any aberration, elemental, or outlaw slain in the region. She keeps a bounty board just outside Burle's gates, which occasionally offers larger rewards for the capture or killing of specific monsters or criminals.

DWARVEN MINE

Dwarven prospectors have toiled in this new mine for the past three years. Soldiers from Keoland's royal army are stationed here for security alongside dwarf fighters from the Copperlocks clan. Travelers in need of shelter can rest on cots in the guard towers that surround the place, but only those with business related to the mine are allowed inside the gates without supervision.

The mine is a broad shaft dug into a steep hillside near the shore. Stone walls encompass it, with two guard towers overlooking the main gate and three other towers spaced evenly around the perimeter. The inner area contains a small village with warehouses, workshops, and houses, all erected during the time when the excavation was beginning and enormous amounts of stone became available for building.

The laborers also took the time to build a tavern, the Miner's Respite, and spend their off hours there drinking, swapping tales, and gambling. The game of darts has become an obsession among the bored miners and soldiers, and anyone with real skill at the game has a chance of talking their way past the guard at the door to engage in a match.

HAUNTED HOUSE

This abandoned house is the center of the action in *The Sinister Secret of Saltmarsh*. Use the description from that adventure for this place.

The haunted house can be a useful location for smugglers who operate in the Saltmarsh area. Gellen Primewater relies on this drop point to conduct much of his business.

LIZARDFOLK LAIR

This location is featured in *Danger at Dunwater*. Use the description from that adventure for this place.

The lizardfolk here view the area around the swamp as their domain. They threaten intruders to warn them off, attacking only those who insist on remaining in the area. The lizardfolk are not only guarding their territory, they are protecting a **young black dragon**. It has ordered them to keep its existence secret while it seeks to build an army of followers and one day emerge to conquer the surrounding area.

SAHUAGIN FORTRESS

This rocky outcropping sits atop a submerged fortress occupied by the fearsome sahuagin. This place is fully detailed in *The Final Enemy*.

This lair is an underwater stronghold maintained by the sahuagin. From here, they prey on passing ships and plot to grow in strength to the point that they can lay waste to Saltmarsh. A total of thirty **sahuagin**, a **sahuagin priestess**, and a **sahuagin baron** lair here.

SEATON

The folk of Saltmarsh point to Seaton as an example of the fate they want to avoid. For years, Seaton was about twice as large as Saltmarsh and enjoyed prosperous fishing and shipping industries. When King Kimbertos Skotti turned his attention south to deal with the Sea Princes, his admirals chose Seaton as the location for an important military port. Today, Seaton has been transformed from a robust fishing town into a drab fortress. Seaton's harbor is heavily fortified, and a large garrison of naval ships, infantry, and cavalry serves as the primary defense point for the region.

Duke Marik Feldren (CN male human **knight**) rules over the town in his capacity of governor of the southern province that includes Seaton. King Skotti actually granted Marik's older brother, the war hero Obertus Feldren, governorship of the province. But the affable duke's reign was short-lived, for he fell ill and died a year later. The title fell to Marik, a sheltered hothead eager to surpass his brother's legend. He considers the natives of the region as cowards who hid away in their isolated villages while the north suffered its losses. He further believes that his brother, who had a genuine fondness for the local fishers and traders, was laid low by traitors in service to the Sea Princes.

Duke Feldren intends to raise taxes to fund an aggressive expansion of the royal navy and launch raids against the Sea Princes' domain. The Scarlet Brotherhood, for its part, is delighted by Duke Feldren's plans to keep the pot stirred. If the opportunity arises, the Brotherhood might plant evidence of plots against him to feed the duke's suspicion of the locals and, with luck, spark civil unrest that tempts the Sea Princes into making incursions into the area.

TOWER OF ZENOPUS

The wizard Zenopus once dwelled in this tower on the cliffs outside Saltmarsh. He built his lair next to the remains of an ancient graveyard rumored to be haunted.

One night, the tower was engulfed in a fiery green aura. A few brave folks from town investigated the tower and found it abandoned. The door at the base of the cellar stairs was covered with strange symbols and wrapped in silver chains. An explorer tried to open the door, but a jolt of lightning from the door's runes nearly killed her. Shortly afterward, strange spirits and capering fey were seen atop the tower. After a few travelers went missing nearby, the town council asked a Keoish galleon to bombard the structure with catapult fire until it was battered into rubble.

Since then, the ruins have been largely forgotten. The exception is Keleddek the Unspoken, the town wizard, who used magic to open the cellar door and found that the passages led to a hidden sea cave. He uses the cave as a meeting point for smugglers. He has recruited several **goblins** to keep watch over the place, along with a trained **giant constrictor snake** he raised from a hatchling. The goblins barricaded several passages leading deeper into the dungeons after losing several of their number to **ghouls** and **giant rats** that emerged from the depths.

Keleddek is loath to tell anyone about his secret stronghold, but he can't shake the idea of following the deeper passages for the chance of unearthing Zenopus's lost secrets. If the characters earn his trust, he might take them into his confidence. The details of the deep dungeons are left to the DM's invention.

GEOGRAPHIC FEATURES

The lands around Saltmarsh are filled with peril, since much of the region is untamed wilderness. Even though the Kingdom of Keoland has grand ambitions, its focus in the south remains on the sea. The crown does its best to make sure the roads are safe, but otherwise it is generally content to leave the monsters and vicious tribes of the wilds alone as long as they remain in their habitats.

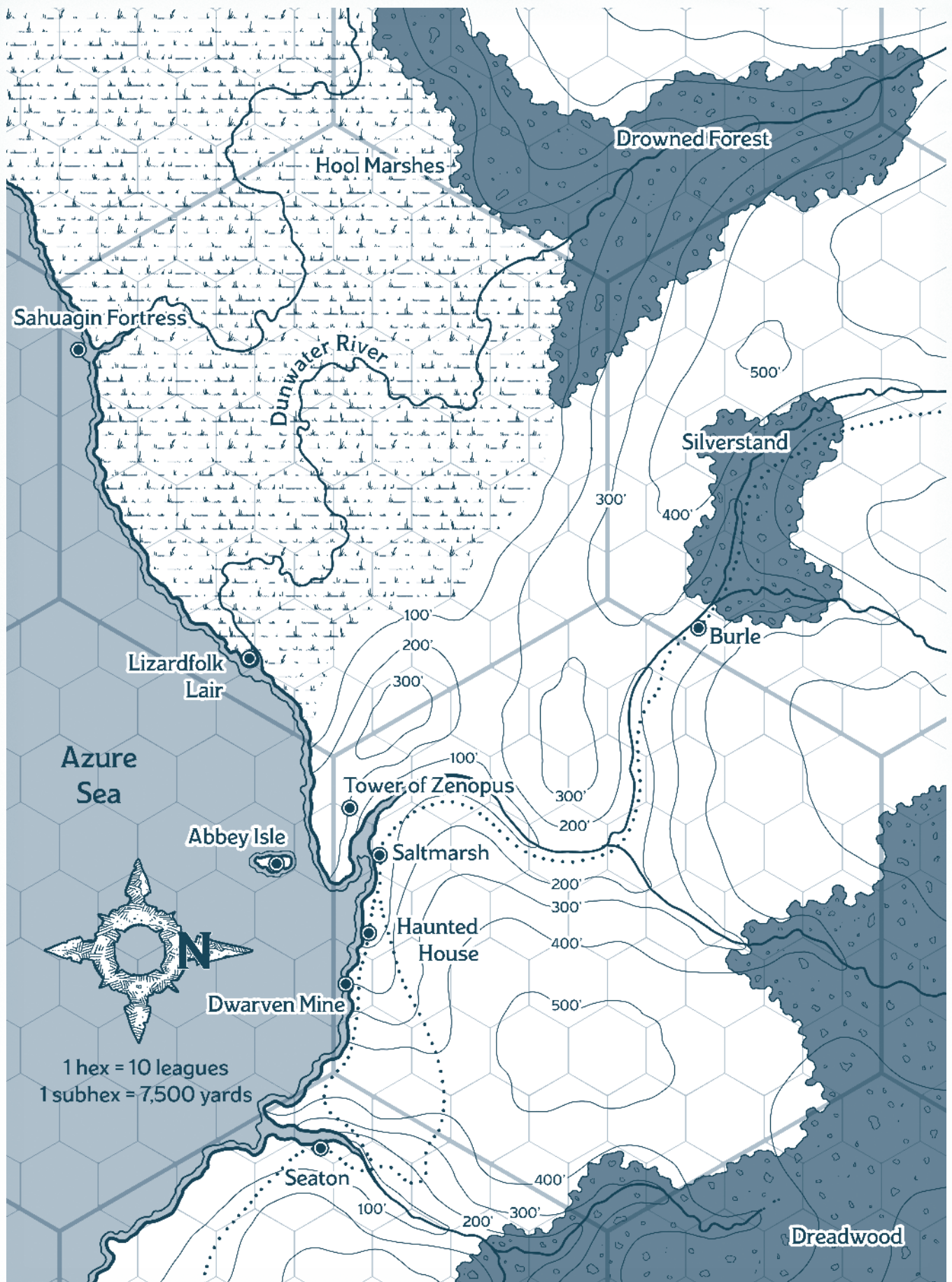
THE DREADWOOD

Long a home of horrid monsters and vicious raiders, the Dreadwood hides within its borders a multitude of terrors. Keoland maintains ranger patrols that sweep through the outer reaches of the forest periodically, while several wood elf clans dwell at its edge. The two forces are generally successful at keeping the monsters of the Dreadwood in check, but at times a threat that avoids them or overcomes them emerges to wreak havoc across the land.

The inner depths of the Dreadwood are a place where the planar bindings between Oerth and the Shadowfell are thin. Undead creatures and villainous monsters that seek to tap into the essence of the Shadowfell thrive deep in the forest. Its innermost reaches mingle with that dark realm, forming a warped mirror version of the Dreadwood that extends into that plane.

One of the Dreadwood's most powerful denizens is a truly ancient **night hag** named Granny Nightshade, who dwells in the deepest depths of the forest. She commands magic as well as a mighty wizard does and has struck bargains with several dukes of the Nine Hells. Her twisted fortress, Castle Spiral, stands at the nexus point between the Shadowfell and Oerth, and from its gates emerge **skeletons**, **zombies**, **shadows**, and other horrors to threaten the land.

Granny Nightshade counts **jackalweres** as her foremost minions, and she has also acquired the services of **goblins**, **orcs**, **hobgoblins**, **ogres**, and **trolls** over the years. **Green hags** bound to her service act as baronesses who enforce her will over their section of the forest, and an elite guard of twenty-three **oni** acts as her personal messengers and enforcers. She keeps three consorts, powerful **vampires** that struggle among themselves for her favor.



MAP 1.2: SALTMARSH AND ENVIRONS