

## ●BRETONNIA●

Brettonnia is a vast land, upon which the mark of Chaos is less apparent than (for instance) the forests of the Empire. The foundations of the nation were laid over 1,500 years ago, when Gilles le Breton led an army from the burgeoning city of Gisoreux on a campaign of conquest which was only concluded some 70 years later by his grandson, Guillaume Barbenoire. With only the occasional dynastic crisis, Brettonnia has been ruled by a system of absolutist monarchy ever since. Lacking any obvious external threat, the Kings of Brettonnia have had little difficulty in maintaining their stranglehold on the nation, although decadence and complacency have combined to ensure that they could never entertain any serious thoughts of expanding its frontiers. Over the years, they have assisted the Burgomeisters of Marienburg in their gradual secession from The Empire, regarding the Wasteland as a potential buffer between them and any expansionist attempts from the East.

### *Geography:*

Brettonnia stretches from the coast of the Middle Sea in the north to the Irrana mountains in the south, and from the coast of the Great Western Ocean to the Grey Mountains in the east. The rolling hills and serene valleys of Brettonnia produce abundant crops and fine wines, whilst the forestlands provide solid timber and good hunting. In the south-east of the country lies the Loren Forest, location of the major Wood Elf settlement, although this fact is disputed amongst Bretonnians, and since the Elven King and Queen go to considerable lengths to deter visitors, it is largely avoided by the prudent.

**The River Brienne** begins its 1200 mile journey to the sea amongst the fast-flowing mountain streams of The Vaults. From here it flows almost directly westward through the wild domain of the Loren Forest, and the largest single Wood Elf realm. The river assumes considerable proportions within the Loren Forest, fed by numerous forest springs and small rivers flowing from the Irrana mountains to the south. By the time it reaches the city of Quenelles, it is over 100 yards wide, and the bridges at that city are divided into spans supported by piles sunk into the bed. Quenelles lies 800 miles from the sea, but is still accessible to normal sea-going vessels, although the river above Quenelles is shallower, and transport is normally by flat barges. From here to the sea, the river is swollen by numerous large tributaries so that at its mouth it is several hundred yards wide. The city of Brionne lies on the north bank, whilst the south is marshy and uninhabited.

**The River Grismarie** is also about 1200 miles long and draws waters from the west facing side of the Grey Mountains. At its source, the river flows through the north edge of the Loren Forest, and many Bretonnians regard the river as strangely enchanted. Its course takes it directly through a great lowland bowl, towards the Gisoreux gap, where the river is joined by the Ois and continues westward to the sea. Above the Ois, the Grismarie is navigable by large barges as far as Parravon, but sea-going vessels are restricted to the lower reaches and the wider, deeper Ois tributary. The river is crossable by ferry at Moussillon, but the only bridges on its entire length lie at Parravon and to the east of that city.

**The River Morceaux** rises in the central highlands of Brettonnia and follows a course through rolling chalk hills to its eventual destination on the west coast. The wine of the Morceaux valley is said to be the best in Brettonnia (if not the whole world). In summer, the rolling chalk hills of the area are covered with vines, the produce of which is processed locally before being sent downstream to the merchants. The Morceaux is navigable by sea vessels only as far as the city of Bordeleaux, 50 miles upriver, beyond which it incorporates a system of locks designed to permit access by barges and small craft. Although a small river compared to the Reik or even the Brienne, it is still an important waterway.

**The Ois** flows directly through the Gisoreux gap from its sources amongst the Grey Mountains and the Pale Sisters. Below the bridges of Gisoreux, the river is navigable to sea-going vessels, being especially deep and slow-flowing, although not especially wide.

**The River Sannez** courses northward from the Pale Sisters, supplemented by the numerous spring-fed streams of the region. Couronne's famous hot-springs and mineral waters join the Sannez and swell its bulk considerably below the city, and no doubt are an important contributor to the valley's remarkable fertility. From Couronne to the sea, the Sannez is fully navigable to ocean-going vessels - even though it meanders round in a great arc from north to south and finally flows westward into the Middle Sea - and the gentle hills that surround its banks provide ample cargoes in the form of local wine. At the coast the river flows through the huge port of l'Anguille, with its famous 1500-foot high light-tower.

**The Pale Sisters** form a northern extension of the Grey Mountains, between which lies the Gisoreux gap, the confluence of all the overland trade routes between The Empire to the east and Brettonnia and the Estalian Kingdoms to the west and south. The mountains are largely barren, inhabited only by brigands and a small number of goblins. Some of the peaks are said to resemble bent old crones, whilst the eternal snow covering gives them shawls, hence the name of Pale Sisters.

### *Politics:*

The elected officials of Bretonnian cities are theoretically responsible to a royal governor, selected by the King from amongst the aristocracy. The position offers social prestige, but few governors live up to their duties. The King (Charles de la Tete d' Or III) is the least caring of an uncaring elite, living in his great palace at Oisillon 100 miles north-west of Gisoreux, surrounded by favourites, sycophants and countless servants. Small wonder that the maltreated urban poor of Bretonnia have a reputation as troublesome, politically ambitious agitators and rogues.

### *The People:*

Perhaps the flippant attitude of Bretonnia's elite to the terrors that surround them may be explained by the relative calm and prosperity of their lands. It is more likely that this is itself a sign of the Chaos that has distorted the very soul of the Bretonnian people. The ruling classes of this land are ridden with corruption, wilfully blind to the decay around them and sordidly decadent in every way. Painted fops parade their finery amongst the mud and dung of the streets, ladies sit like dolls in shining carriages, bedecked in glittering jewels and tall, white wigs, while hiding their ghastly pox-marks and worse disfigurements behind rouge and white powder. The taint of Chaos is less apparent in Bretonnia only because its citizens remain blind to it, unbelieving and unwilling to accept its dreadful implications, hiding their fear behind extravagance and tawdry display.

### *Language:*

The Bretonnian dialect of Old Worlder has many similarities with that of south-west Albion, although Bretonnians are notorious for their inability to pronounce "th" which usually becomes "z". The initial "h" is invariably dropped by native speakers, while "r" is always rolled at the back of the throat.

### *Cities:*

Bretonnia boasts a number of large cities. These are L'Anguille with its famous lighthouse; the wine-trading centre of Bordeleaux; Brionne - the City of Thieves; the spa town of Couronne; the seething melting pot of Gisoreux; Moussillon - The City of the Damned; mysterious Parravon, where death stalks the night-time streets; and Quenelles, where the oppression of the poor by the aristocracy is infamous even by Bretonnian standards.

In stark contrast to the countryside, the cities are poorly administered - money raised for their up-keep is frequently embezzled by corrupt officials, or squandered on frivolities. Whole quarters lie in unattended ruins, fetid offal and rotting corpses block the narrow streets, whilst long-neglected sewers overflow, spilling their foul contents onto the already treacherous pavements. Careless of such filth, the rich, the powerful and the aristocratic hold marvellous parties, glittering balls and all sorts of widely extravagant social functions, dressing in the most expensive silks, drinking the most prized wines in the Old World and exchanging hollow pleasantries whilst all around falls into decay.

**L'Anguille** is widely known for its great lighthouse, an ancient fortress of considerable dimensions and unrivalled height. It is said to have been built by the Elves many years before their wars with the Dwarfs, remaining protected over the millennia by powerful spells and the solidity of its construction. The tower is easily the tallest structure in the Old World, standing fully 1500 feet tall, formed in the shape of a tapering octagon 150 yards wide at the base rising to an octagonal platform 50 yards across at the top. The whole construction is of a strange black stone, and is riddled with tunnels and chambers. The edifice is used as the administrative centre of the city as well as the governor's palace and the barracks for the city's soldiery. Upon the top is a platform bearing a constantly blazing fire raised a further 75 feet from the tower's roof. This can be seen right across the Middle Sea in distant Albion, and must have served the Elves as a great beacon, calling to fleets as they voyaged eastward across the seemingly endless expanse of the Great Western Ocean.

The remainder of the city lies tightly packed within solid walls, neatly divided by the river Sannez. The river banks are formed into solid quays for the large ships that pass through on their way to Couronne. L'Anguille is a trading port of some importance, although overshadowed by Marienburg, whose position on the Reik affords easier access to the heart of the Old World. Like all Bretonnian cities it is poorly maintained, and life for the majority is hard and squalid. Work, however, is easy to find - the wharves and quays shelter dozens of inns where sea-captains and river traders look for a sturdy crew or hired-swords.

**Bordeleaux's** trade is the life-blood of this city, and it is based almost entirely upon wine from the Morceaux valley (see Rivers - above). Good wines are bought and sold - bad wines are bought and drunk (mostly by the local sailors). Even the poor enjoy a bountiful supply of cheap, rough wine. Indeed, "the sober man of Bordeleaux" has passed into folklore as an impossible, or incredible being.

The city is dominated by great houses built by rival merchants, who, in a desperate bid to outdo each other, try to erect as tall and impressive a monument to their financial success as possible. The largest houses are almost castles, and the two largest and most imposing buildings in all Bordeleaux stand here: the Governor's Palace on Towerhill and Bordeleaux fortress on Execution Hill, each surrounded by lesser buildings seeking to emulate their grandeur. Between the two hills lies the great Bordeleaux bridge, spanning the width of the river Morceaux and marking the point beyond which large vessels cannot go.

The south bank below the bridge is mostly dockland, where ships load and unload cargoes into the numerous warehouses. Impromptu sales are held here, whilst the riverside boasts countless inns, vice-dens and other sources of attraction. Amidst the finery of rival merchants, gut-swollen aristocrats and dandied fops, there is little room for the poor who constitute the majority of the population and whose hovels sprawl along the outskirts beyond the two hills and well out of sight of the 'high town'. The twin hills of Bordeleaux afford natural drainage and sewerage, so that the mercantile districts are relatively clean. However, what effluence does not flow into the river flows into the shanty towns of the poor, where disease is rife and the air hangs foully around the decaying buildings. Here human deprivation has reached its most disgusting nadir, where children may be bought and sold without question, where murder is rarely noticed and where the strong rule the weak amidst a petty kingdom of filth.

**Brionne** is sometimes called the City of Thieves - such is the degree of lawlessness - where over half the eleven thousand inhabitants earn their livelihoods directly from the proceeds of crime, and the remainder are supported by its proceeds in some manner. Even the Governor and the local militia are openly involved. The city sprawls upon the north bank of the river Brienne, its quays offering unquestioned refuge to sea-going vessels, whatever their purpose. Pirates and smugglers regard Brionne as a safe-port, where they will suffer no interference so long as they are mindful not to come into open conflict with the Governor's men. The Governor himself has grown fat operating his personal fleet of smugglers, and by imposing taxes on harbouring ships and warehouses. In return for their donation to the city coffers, contributors are left to their own devices, and wharfside warehouses are crammed with loot obtained in every conceivable manner.

**Couronne** is a great spa city, a market place for agricultural produce from the fertile Sannez valley, and a mighty fortress. Here, wheat, wine, and meat from the surrounding areas are traded for luxurious silks and spices bought by traders from Magritta in Estalia to the south. But Couronne is most famous for its numerous springs and natural baths, whose steaming waters are said to have magical powers. On one of these springs stands the greatest temple to Shallya, Goddess of Healing, to which pilgrims hobble, crawl or are carried from every corner of the Old World. Couronne lies upon the gentle sloping hills of the east bank of the river, the west bank sheltering a sprawling and unsanitary suburb, docklands, and countless places of refuge for the lawless and impoverished. The town's watch refuse to enter this area (known as 'the Cesspit'), so that it has become wholly given over to the criminal and downtrodden members of Bretonnian society.

By virtue of its natural springs, the city within the walls is surprisingly clean by Bretonnian standards. Most large houses have their own basement hot-spring and water supply, whose constant flowings disperse the foul air and filth normally associated with Bretonnian settlements. Subterranean culverts direct the waters down into the Sannez in an ever-tumbling cascade, raising the water temperatures so much that the surrounding waters steam, and in winter the docks remain permanently ice-free. In Couronne even the poor have a certain wholesome appearance.

**Gisoreux** is the largest city in Bretonnia, with a population of eighteen thousand. The vast majority are poor, disabled, diseased and politically volatile - indeed, the 'Gisoreux Mob' is a much feared entity, which frequently takes to the street in orgies of theft and violence. The city itself is a strategically important river crossing, controlling the 150 mile gap between the northern edge of the Grey Mountains and the Pale Sisters. It was from here that Gilles le Breton set out to conquer the surrounding states and thus lay the foundations of contemporary Bretonnia. A huge statue of this mighty warrior towers above the heaving throngs of the central market square.

Yet, in spite of its illustrious history and special place among the annals of Bretonnia, the filth and decadence of all Bretonnian cities is especially manifest here. Thieves and agitators are the least dangerous of the creatures that roam the countless miles of disused tunnels and drains beneath the city streets. These "bowels" of Gisoreux in many ways reflect the society that thrives above. Here the darkness of forgotten and crumbling passages hides the doings of Chaotic cultists - usually thrill seeking aristocrats who have become corrupted by their constant pursuit of new experiences, power and exotica. There are many amongst the rich whose tastes for the bizarre extend to the worship of the Dark Gods, and the delvings beneath Gisoreux offer them shelter and seclusion. The labyrinthine passages are also home to many dark and noisome creatures who seek refuge in the blackness, living upon the discarded waste of the city above, or sneaking out by moonlight to prey upon the weak and helpless. Although the worship of Chaos Gods is not openly tolerated even in this pit of decadence and decay, opposition is sluggish and languid.

**Moussillon** has an evil reputation. 'The City of the Damned' some call it, and for those that live within its crumbling walls the title must seem an apt one. Here a once thriving and prosperous city has fallen to the ravages of nature, or perhaps to those unnatural powers that delight in decay and pestilence. Originally the city was not much different from others in Bretonnia, but a series of earthquakes some 50-odd years ago reduced even the houses of the rich to crumbling ruins. Worse still, it was discovered shortly afterwards that the whole area was slowly sinking, and now a miasma of despair hangs over the city, a stinking cloud of pestilence that makes it one of the most unhealthy places to live in the entire world.

The aura of doom is all-pervading, so that even the finery of the lords and ladies is ragged, dirty and irreparable. Yet those that live here care little for the fate that has befallen their city - they have grown used to its squalor and have adapted to it. They stalk the quagmire streets like zombies, soulless and unseeing. In markets they haggle for rotten fruit, at the quaysides they hail ships whose crews look with horror upon the corrupt city, and whose masters hurry along to the coast. Few travel willingly to this city, and those that do prefer to leave as soon as they can. Here, alone in the Old World, the evil of mutation openly walks the streets; inhuman chants to the Chaotic Gods rise unstifled into the sickening air.

**Parravon** lies upon the north bank of the upper Grismarie against a background of steeply rising chalk cliffs. The houses follow the valley floor for some four miles, never attaining a width of more than three or four streets. Many of the houses are cut into the rock face, or have cellars sunk into the soft stone, whilst the towering cliffs are home to thousands of birds whose white droppings pepper the red-tile roofs of this picturesque city. The river is narrow here, and the upper limit for large ships is at the city's northern edge, where small dockland warehouses are cut directly into the rugged rock. The citizens like to think of themselves as simple country folk, and are fairly prosperous, thriving upon abundant harvests of fruit and grain from the surrounding countryside.

Here, isolated from the larger cities of the north, the lords and ladies of Parravon indulge their whim for gardening and plants - pursuits of a superficially healthy nature, far removed from the heights of decadence practiced in Gisoreux and Couronne. Even here the worm of Chaos is at work, for at night the city changes - doors are shut and bolted, windows latched and shutters closed. After sunset the streets of Parravon become strangely empty and an uneasy quiet descends, while the citizens remain indoors, unwilling to acknowledge the stranger's knock and grudging in their hospitality. For Parravon is afflicted by some sinister evil, some weird cavalcade of beasts or demons who stalk the night, breaking into houses and carrying off whole families. Only the aristocracy seem unmolested, and many in the city blame them for the problems. Others curse the city's wizards for their meddling, or talk in muted tones of witches and shapechangers. Yet nothing can be proven, and the lords and ladies of Parravon do much to see that the streets are patrolled, that watchmen guard the night, and that bereaved citizens are recompensed as far as possible.

**Quenelles** lies 50 miles to the west of the Loren Forest on the banks of the river Brienne. The city itself is accessible to seagoing vessels, but beyond it the river is too shallow to allow any but smaller boats and barges to pass. Quenelles is a dark, dirty and squalid place, where houses tumble into each other and where the neglected streets are used as dumping grounds for refuse and filth of all descriptions. The city was once walled, but generations of poor maintenance and widespread disinterest have seen most of the fortifications collapse - frequently destroying adjoining houses. Further building has extended the city beyond its walls, creating a number of dilapidated shanty towns almost as vile as the slums within the city itself.

The aristocrats of Quenelles live in large mansions whose tall, sometimes broken towers look down on the city from the hills to the north. They are as indulgent and decadent as any Bretonnian aristocrats, and have a reputation for cruelty that is notorious even by this country's appalling standards. Unfortunately for the populace at large, the city's Governor and militia leaders are the worst of the lot. Criminality is, of course, common amongst the repressed lower classes, where food is a rarity and money almost unknown. Punishment is severe for those caught, especially if the offence is against the upper classes - mutilation and torture are common for even petty crimes, and branded or disfigured citizens are a common sight in the city streets. The inherent sadism of the city's inhabitants points towards an inner corruption of a most heinous kind, testifying to the gnawing evil of Chaos that is slowly permeating the Bretonnians.