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Assignment 4

**Deiscea**

**Great Cairn of the Southern King**

**-Setting Design Document-**

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# 1. Deiscea and the World of Akhar

## 1.1 Deiscea : An Introduction

Deiscea is a land that is part of the greater overall fantasy world of Akhar. The world of Akhar takes place on a single giant continent with only a few islands around it. The continent itself is covered in a huge desert, the Akhar, that goes across most of the northern hemisphere. Between the desert and the south coast lies a band of habitable land where huge cities and massive civilizations lie.

*Map of Deiscea*



In the world of Akhar the technological level is similar to that of 16th century Renaissance Europe, but with more advanced technology in some places due to the existence of magic. Magic plays an important role in the world, and is treated as a science with restrictions on who can use magic and how it can be used, varying heavily

depending on culture. Magic comes in two major forms: enchantments, attaching magic spells to an item, and alchemy, making potions that allow spells to be casted.

## 1.2 The Geography of Deiscea

Deiscea is part of the continent and is a large peninsula that sticks out of the south-east end. Deiscea is a huge single temperate forest with only a few cities and very few permanent settlements. The giant forest plays a major role in Deiscean culture and religion. Deiscea is a lush, damp temperate forest that stretches from the border mountains in the north to its coasts. A near continuous green canopy covers the ground in shadows and the forest floor is usually foggy and dense with bushes and shrubbery.

The climate is very mild, and while it rains often, it is usually not heavy rain. Generally the weather is cool and foggy but not very cold and there is little variation between seasons but occasionally it will snow during the short winters. Apart from the stone highways, the rivers which run across Deiscea serve as key landmarks and routes to travel for both the people and wildlife.

## 1.3 The Culture of Deiscea

Deiscea is a mono-cultural land ruled over by an extremely strict set of spiritual beliefs but filled with many sub-cultures and its own micro-conflicts. The core belief that society in Deiscea is built on is a strong fear of the forest, in the Deiscean language referred to as Muirfais. The Deiscean people believe the forest to be a living entity, not just in a spiritual sense, but as a true intelligent being.

This is based more off of reality than myth, with the forest being a place of intense magical energy and many tales of misfortune told about any who chop down trees or destroy the land without reason. This is one of the reasons for Deiscea's tiny

population and lack of major settlements despite it having the space and resources to support millions of people. The danger of the forest to those who anger it has led to southerners developing a unique culture and way of living.

The main restriction of life in Deiscean culture is the prohibition on the use of live wood, except wood harvested through special ceremonies meant to not anger the forest. Thus wood is a rare resource, leading to a large majority of southern objects being made up of stone, metal, bone and cloth. Deadwood is usually reserved for fires alongside mosses and other tinders. Nearly all permanent buildings are made up primarily of stone, brick and plaster, but the majority of Deisceans live a semi-nomadic lifestyle.

Nomadic Deisceans live throughout the forest, travelling through areas controlled by their own clan, split up into groups of families with set camp grounds they travel between throughout the year. Usually at least once a year the nomads will gather at their clan stronghold to organise and plan the year ahead, and deal with any issues or breaking of laws. While travelling, the nomads will live in tents made up of various large pieces of cloth and carpet, with leather covers for the rain. These are held up by rope tied to nearby trees and occasionally expensive carved wooden poles.

Due to the mild weather, most Deisceans wear linen tunics, usually in their clans colours or patterns, with blankets worn as capes or cloaks to be used for colder weather. Armour and weapons are usually short and light to be easily carried through the dense forest, with bows and axes popular weapons for hunting and war. Long pikes and spears are the preferred weapons by Deiscean warriors but aren't general self-defence weapons.

Politically, the various clan territories of Deiscea are self-ruled and fully independent, with the traditional clan leadership deciding on the law of the territory.

Currently the external politics of Deiscea as well as the neutral non-clan cities on the coast are ruled by a council of clan representatives called the Overclan or the For'chlann, which only rules by the common consent of the major clans and cannot infringe on inter-clan issues. Within Deiscea some clans are more patriarchal than others but generally women are relatively equal and it is near universally agreed that women should learn to fight and be warriors before they settle down and start a family.

## 2. The Great Cairn of the Southern King

### 2.1 The Story of the Great Cairn

Deep in the north-eastern heart of the forest, sitting just below the canopy lies a huge cairn, a building made of stacked stones without any mortar, created by the first and only king of Deiscea, King Beirheart. The Great Cairn is more than just a monument but is actually just the top of a massive underground complex, built for both religious purposes and to hold the many relics and artefacts of Deiscean history.

King Beirheart came to power during a time of war by usurping the Overclan and declaring himself the ultimate lawmaker and authority, and using his influence to lead an army of soldiers from all the clans against the invaders. His attack was successful, and having defeated the enemy he gained even more prestige and cemented his rule.

After a calm rule of twenty years he finally retired and set out two last decrees, one cemented the modern borders of all the clans in his hope to stop future inter-clan wars, and to build the Great Cairn. The Great Cairn was to fulfil many purposes, it was to be his place of retirement and his eventual tomb, but it was also to be a great temple for all of Deiscea to use in their worship of the forest. Unknown to most it was also to

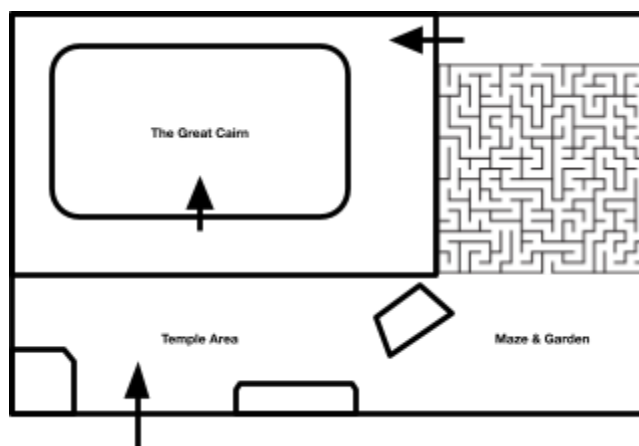
be a place of magical experimentation for Beirheart who would spend the rest of his life exploring the magical energies of the forest and collecting arcana.

Beirheart earlier in life had discovered information on an ancient tomb of some sort, that he believe to be a place of great magical significance, laid deep underneath the ground. He used the construction of the cairn to reach this tomb and study it. He discovered it contained a trapped magical spirit of great power, and knowing how dangerous it was, he decided to keep it sealed. He then set out to use the cairn to defend this ancient tomb, and to keep out anyone who tried to reach it.

## 2.2 A Description of the Great Cairn

The Great Cairn is part of a huge walled compound with many smaller buildings and temples surrounding it, with the main central cairn standing as a huge rectangle of stone. The roof is mostly flat and like the rest of the structure is undecorated, appearing as a giant pile of stone covered in mosses and vines. The actual entrance to the Great Cairn lies behind an inner wall in the compound, where a large iron gate covers the stone archway leading in. The gate is opened by a simple weight mechanism nearby, in the middle of a small hedge maze as a challenge to anyone trying to enter.

*The Great Cairn Compound*



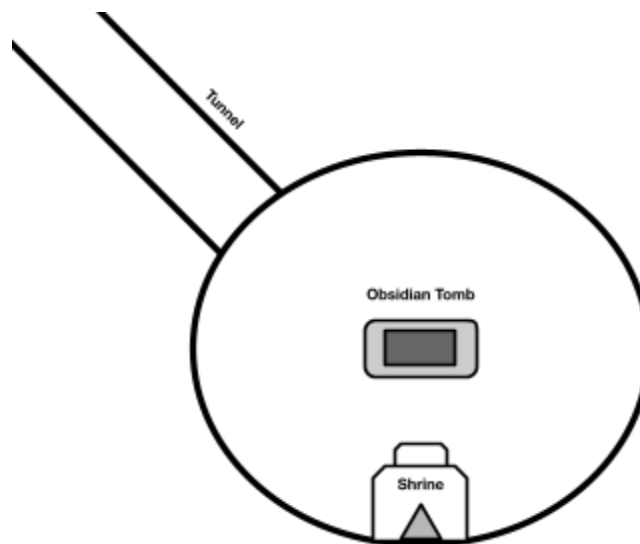
### The Floors of the Great Cairn:

1. Entrance: A maze-like network of tunnels and hallways in the cairn structure, with small alcoves in the rocks where offerings are left. The rooms here were used for rituals and storage, and to confuse strangers seeking to go down in the tombs
2. Priest Quarters: This floor was dedicated living space for the priests and other people working at the various temples and shrines across the compound
3. Crafters Area: Dedicated to providing for the needs of the hundreds of people living in cairn, this area included ovens, a forge and various workshop rooms as well as the main canteen and kitchen
4. Barracks: Another floor of living quarters but this one was only for Beirchearts close retinue and personal warriors, it tended to be more luxurious than the priests floor. It plays a secondary role as a guard post before the deeper levels
5. The Court: This floor was Beircheart's bedroom, private quarters and his court where he addressed his retinue and followers. It also allowed Beircheart to keep an eye on the entrance down to the tombs below where his laboratory was located
6. The Ossuary: The first level of the tombs, a place where the bones of loyal followers and soldiers of Beircheart are piled in crevices in the walls

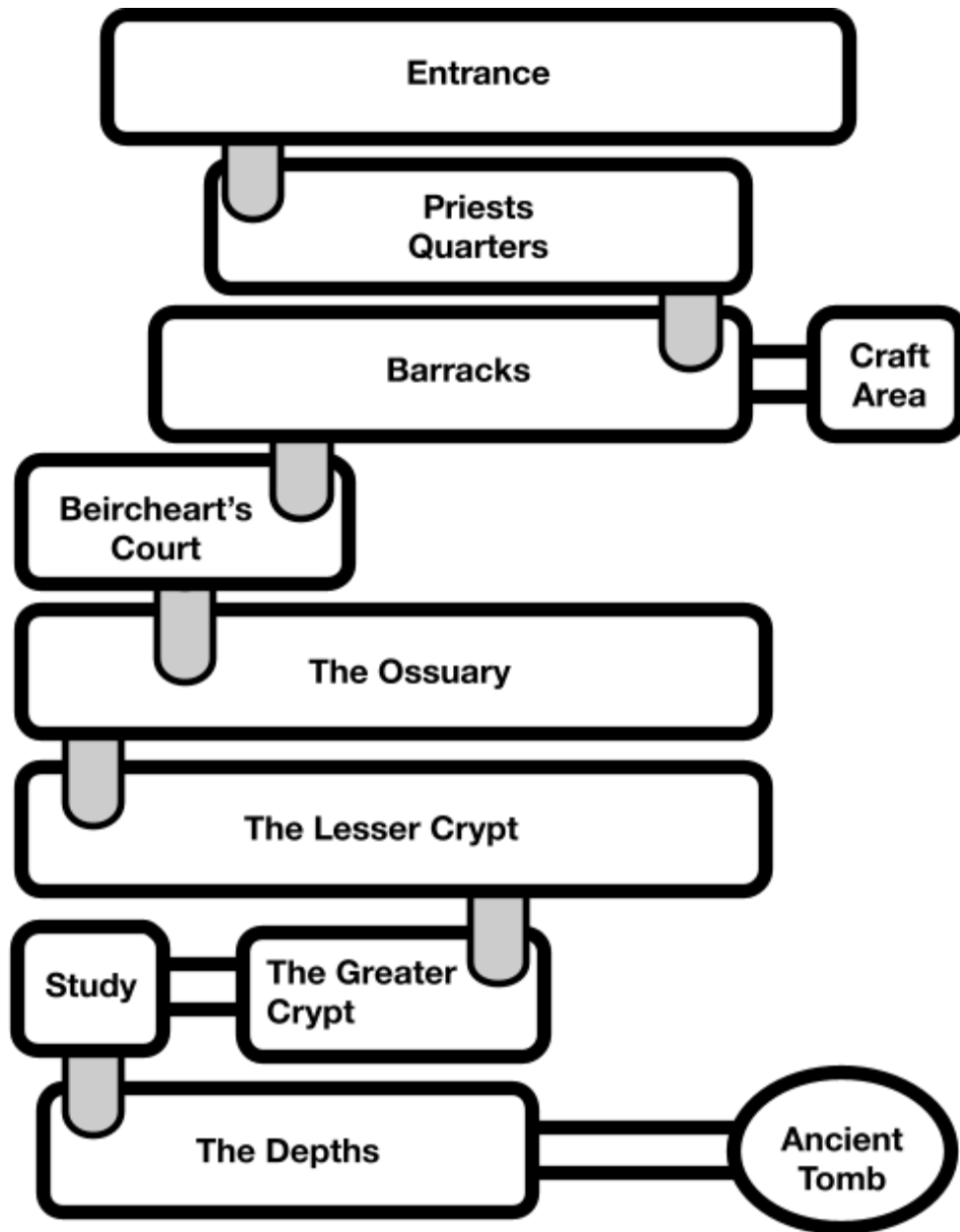


7. The Lesser Crypt: The burial site of many of Beirchearts most powerful and loyal supporters, mostly the soldiers who had come with him to the Great Cairn and his lesser advisers
8. The Greater Crypt: The final resting place of Beircheart himself, where his tomb takes up the central space, surrounded by the tombs of his most closest friends and followers
9. Beirchearts Study: The secret laboratory of King Beircheart, where he did his experiments on magic and took extensive notes on various subjects. Only Beircheart himself ever entered her while he was still alive and it contains his entire life's work
10. The Depths: A series of tunnels and shafts dug out underneath Beirchearts laboratory as part of the original construction of the Great Cairn, their main purpose was to find the ancient site buried beneath the Great Cairn
11. The Ancient Tomb: Deep underneath the cairn and built in ancient times, unconnected to the surface. Here lies a single large obsidian topped coffin and a strange shrine

*The Ancient Tomb*



*The Great Cairn Layout*



## 2.3 The Story: The Cairn is Silent No More

Three hundred years after Beirchearts death, only the occasional pilgrims visit the cairn to leave offerings and meditate at the outer walls. Most of what lay inside the cairn has turned to dust, and no one has entered since the last burial there.

A group of mercenaries led by a team of researchers from a northern university, are exploring the cairn in secret knowing that their actions will not be approved by the Overclan. They have passed through the upper stories and have been exploring and documenting the tombs and Beirchearts laboratory. The head of the research team, has found the ancient tomb beneath the cairn and in his attempt to break open the big obsidian lid of the coffin, unleashes the spirit within which kills him and the others who are with him.

The Great Cairn and its history is very important to the narrative as it is the secrets hidden within that have led to the researchers entering in the first place, and the unleashing of the spirit which kills the expedition.

## 3. Micro Locations

### 3.1 The Micro Narratives of the Great Cairn

The story contains many smaller narratives which are explored through small objects and the locations explored throughout the story.

Firstly the description of the nearly hidden entrance to the Great Cairn is important, showing how overgrown and nearly hidden the stones that mark the entrance are. This tells the readers that this place is not regularly travelled to and is an

abandoned space. A brief mention of a few snapped branches indicates that here has been recent activity, but from the overgrowth it is not regular.

There is a narrative within the order that the cairn is explored and revealed, starting top to bottom, hinting at how the space was used before it was abandoned. Particularly the order of the various crypt levels, with the highest being stacked bones, indicating lower status burial, than the level below with individual coffins, and the final level with a single large sarcophagus indicating that this is the main significant person buried here.

Also throughout the description of the various floors and rooms, there are repeated signs of life such as footprints or a door kicked in to show the journey taken by the mercenaries. This includes a small micro narrative of the tomb of King Beirheart which has gold lettering on the side, with one letter slightly chipped and a broken chisel below it showing a failed attempt to break the letter out and steal it.

Finally the lowest level, the ancient tomb, uses many different observations to tell the overall story, but also tells the story of its discovery through the description of the winding shafts mined out in the earth to find the tomb, showing that it was completely sealed until the builders of the cairns dug in. This differentiates between the expedition exploring the cairn and finding the tomb, and the original building of the cairn where the tomb was dug to but not opened or tampered with. This shows that the cairn was built to protect or cover the tomb, and not to exploit or experiment with it like the recent expedition was hoping to do.