

Fallen River Trading Camp

The Fallen River Trading Camp is where Rezeans meet the outside world. Horse merchants and diplomats from foreign kingdoms rub shoulders in the town, seeking the privilege of a Rezean horse or to hire mercenaries or scouts from the clans. There too, Rezean travelers return to their clans with news and stories of the lands they have seen and trade goods to enrich their families.

Fallen River is a seasonal river. For most of its length, it is wide and shallow, but in the 50 miles before it flows into the sea, it cuts a great ravine in the plains. The trading camp is a short walk from the sea, and seaborne visitors drop anchor nearby and approach the camp by rowboat. The ravine's red and yellow sandstone walls tower far above the camp's cluster of corrals and semi-permanent tents. The sky is a narrow blue strip, and the camp is almost always in shadow. During the trading season, the river is a muddy stream, enough to water horses in but not the wild waters it becomes during storm season.

The camp is wild and noisy during trading season. Horse corrals surround the merchant tents and beyond them are the Rezean campgrounds; Rezeans come into the trading town during the day but retreat to their own tents at night, except for the guards watching over the horses. The few permanent buildings of yellow sandstone belong to the nations that have treaties with the Rezean clans: Aldis and Lar'tya. Fallen River is as close to a capital as the Rezeans have, and it is the location of the mercenary charter house, where those who wish to hire Rezean mercenaries gather. Most of the other structures in the town are tents, merchant wagons, canvas booths, and temporary structures of timber grass.

Rezeans are not inclined toward written laws or clear-cut paths of authority but have learned to make an exception for foreigners who cannot seem to live without them. Rezeans experienced in dealing with outsiders, usually former mercenaries and scouts, act as guards and emissaries within the Fallen River Trading Camp. Foreign diplomats discover, to their dismay, that the Rezean contacts they made one year at the camp may not show up in the following one.

The Rezean guards concern themselves mostly with the safety and safe trading of horses. They provide grudging assistance to the envoys and diplomats negotiating treaties with one clan or another and try to make sure hot-headed Rezeans looking for excitement as mercenaries aren't taken advantage of by unscrupulous people looking for naive soldiers. Overall, though, the guards have little concern about who does what, so the camp has a reputation for danger and excitement, a reputation that tends to exceed the reality. The guards do not interfere in fights among foreigners, unless they threaten the safety of the horse corrals or the Rezean camps.

Horses are the reason the camp exists, but they are far from the only items of value sold and bought during the trading season. Rezean mercenaries negotiate contracts at the Fallen River charter house and merchants from all over come to trade dyes, weapons, and other crafted goods for exotic pets like miniature plains deer or great

plains eagles, along with rawhides and intoxicating blue-trumpet-flower paste.

With trade money flowing freely, the camp is visited by performers of many types during trading season to encourage coin to fall into their own pockets. Thieves and other criminals also follow the money and the horses; the value of Rezean horses makes the risk of getting caught seem worthwhile. Rezeans usually drag foreign horse thieves to death behind their own steeds.

When the rains start to arrive, the camp is abandoned fairly rapidly. Everyone is aware that flashfloods are a risk in the deep ravine, and no one wants to linger to see them.

Wintering Grounds

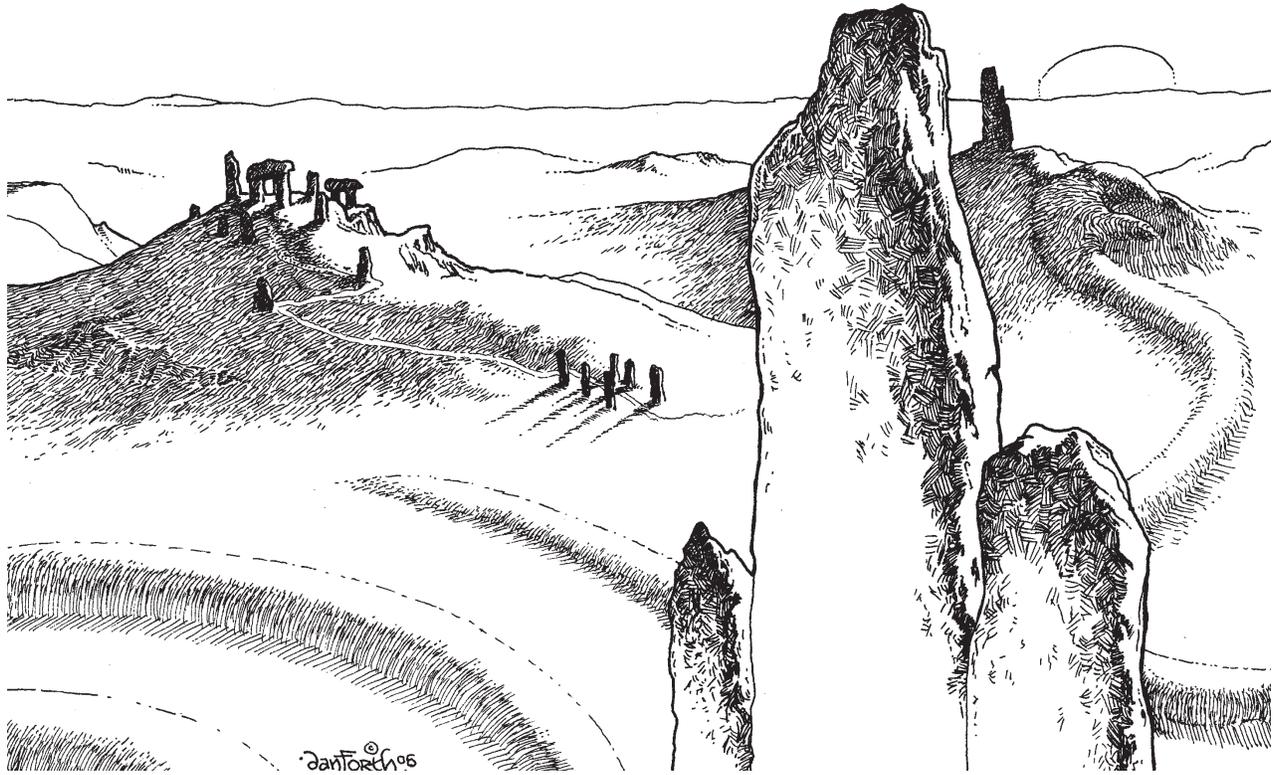
During the storm season, Rezeans abandon the unprotected plains and camp at traditional wintering grounds. Each clan has adopted prehistoric ruins to mark its winter territories. The ritual center of each clan's winter homeland is a great monolith. The nine Rezeans chosen by Braniel led their clans to these wintering grounds.

The wintering grounds are near the center of the plains, where worn and ancient hills rise from the endless, flat horizon. Scattered about these hills are strange earthworks: spiral-shaped mounds; sun patterns of standing stones; mounds that, viewed from above, take the shape of great serpents or birds of prey. Each of the nine clans lays claim to one of these earthworks, and they spend the winter maintaining them. At the center of the monolith region is a circle of standing stones cared for by all the clans. The area around the stones is called Jessa's Ride and is used by the clans' witches for rituals and by their chieftains for rare inter-clan meetings.

Few outsiders know of the existence of the monoliths; the majority of the stones are worn to faint traces buried under stands of timber grass, and not all of the monoliths are claimed by a clan. There are a dozen or so scattered over several hundred miles, ignored and unexplored.

The greatest of the ruins is the alabaster spiral marking the Ifalla clan's wintering grounds. The spiral begins as nothing more than scattered ice-white stones buried in the grass but rises gradually in a tightening circle to the center, where the Ifalla spiral rises to twice the height of a mounted rider. The power there amplifies certain arcana, a fact exploited by the clan's witches. Arcana users get +5 on Heart Reading, Nature Reading, Scrying, Second Sight, and Visions checks when in the heart of the Ifalla spiral. On midwinter night, the bonus is +10. Well maintained by the Ifalla, the spiral has no Shadow taint. All of the Khana travel at least once to the Ifalla spiral, hoping to gain a vision of Jessa's plan for the clans.

The Tennir-al wintering grounds are marked by a huge sunburst of standing stones, each too massive for any team of horses or men to move. The tops are scored with deep claw marks, for griffons come to the Tennir-al in the winter and take their traditional title of horses. They roost on the standing stones during their visit. These monoliths have power over beasts; anyone within the circle of standing stones can use the Gentle Beasts arcanum untrained.



The plains are slowly consuming the Kamala clan's earthworks, a serpent mound. It is a raised outline of sterile red clay that, from the sky, forms the image of a gigantic snake swallowing an egg. When the clan was largely destroyed, its mound was abandoned, and other clans have avoided the Kamala wintering grounds since then. Most believe that Kamala ghosts haunt the grounds, and the clans find it heart-wrenching to see the dwindling numbers of the Kamalan horse herds. Abandoned and ill maintained, the mound has begun to attract the attention of Shadow-aligned creatures hoping to use the unclaimed energies for their own ends. A few darkfiends have taken shelter at the mound, and the old Kamala horse herds, left to run wild, are being hunted and killed. The Kamalan earthwork is tainted with Shadow and is considered a corrupt place (see **Corruption** in *Blue Rose*, page 126).

Old Kingdom Ruins

The Sorcerer Kings once ruled over the plains of Rezea. Their reach there was limited but fearsome. They occupied the few Old Kingdom sites in the realm. The long years and the hard weather, as well as the ancient battles that destroyed the Sorcerer Kings, have wiped out most traces of the sorcerers and the Old Kingdom, but some prominent ruins persist from the ancient days.

The Stone Forest

Deep within the plains, where no tree should grow, the Stone Forest looms up from the grass. It is not a forest of gentle breezes or cool green shade. No birds sing from its branches, and few creatures live within it. The trees of the

Stone Forest are leafless, black obsidian with branches that cut like knives and chime softly in the winds of winter.

Every thinking creature of the plains shuns the Stone Forest. It sickens those who remain within its shadows for too long, and even brief travel within brings foul dreams. There is no food, and any water is brackish and foul. The ground beneath the trees is thick with blue trumpet flowers, which grow in scarce patches on the rest of the plains. Their flowers are huge, easily the size of a man's head, the blue so dark it seems black. It is clear whatever poisons the Stone Forest has also tainted the flowers. The tribal witches shun them, except for those few who are tempted by Shadow and seek visions of power and death. The dreams of the Stone Forest can be deadly.

The first few days within the shadow of the Stone Forest are disturbing. Travelers hear odd noises, and the shadows of the trees seem to shift and stir restlessly in the corners of tired eyes. The more time spent within the forest, the deeper the sense of being watched, and the presence of a looming evil waiting for a moment of weakness. Then, some dark night, when even the stars seem alien, the fears of the forest wake.

Very few have survived when the forest wakes, and their tales of horror are hair-raising. There is no separating friend from foe when the forest wakes; travelers turn their weapons on lovers, family, and even themselves. Overwhelming fear poisons every breath. The entire forest is a corrupt place (see **Corruption** in *Blue Rose*, page 126).

No one knows the cause of the Stone Forest, only that it has been there, looming in nightmares and stories, since the Shadow Wars. Some witches and Aldin scholars speculate that a shadowgate from the Old Kingdom is buried beneath the forest and was corrupted by the Sorcerer Kings. The