

## The Shard of Wizardry

It is said by those who know, or care, or care to know that the world was once a very different place. Once you could wander the hills and mountains, plains and valleys and even the rivers and oceans and meet men and women who practiced many different kinds of magic. Followers of now banished gods wielded fragments of their power as unsubtle clubs. Others clutched other-worldly, insubstantial beings to their own souls and found power there. Yet others found strange understandings of the universe and used them as power. Wizards knew and followed the rules of the universe itself and bent those rules to their own purpose.

And for an eternity they shared the world, these wielders of magical might. But one day the sharing ended and war became the norm. A mighty war, such that we, living in these days cannot imagine. And the Wizards in their might destroyed the other users of magic and banished the gods themselves. But with this victory and banishment came a great destruction and the world was rendered unrecognizable from what it had once been.

But the Wizards built themselves a great city, a lonely fortress - Maripose. And there they sit and rule the world.



### Maripose, the City of Wizards

*Shall I sing to thee of Maripose?  
Storm-wracked, sea-girdled  
City of Wizards?  
Built o'er-night on a pillar of basalt  
Torn from the heart of the world*

Maripose is the great city of Wizards built after the end of the War of Magics. It serves to separate them from the rest of The Shard of Sorcery resting as it does on an immense, perfectly circular pillar of basalt six key miles

across that rears half a key mile above the stormy surface of the Only Sea. The only connection between it and land is a bridge made of rainbows.

After they had destroyed the other practitioners of magic and banished the gods themselves the Wizards were wearied. Being desirous of a refuge safe from the rest of the world they created Maripose. Uniting their magics they pulled a great circular plug of basalt from the heart of the world in the Only Sea and built a city atop it. From this island fortress they rule the world. They keep watch on the world and make sure that no one rediscovers any of the lost forms of magic. They ignore the practitioners of folk magic as being beneath their notice but if anyone is found to be practicing mysticism or animism or even worse dares to worship any god their wrath is swift.

Maripose is fairly self-sufficient but every ten years a tribute is demanded from the subjects of Maripose. This tribute can take many forms but the most feared is the youth tithe. This involves a demand for 10 youths of unmatched beauty, five youths and five maids. Amid much grief and gnashing of teeth the ten set out for Maripose and are never heard of again.

## **The Only Sea**

*Angry, ever tossing, never still*

The Only Sea is the only large body of water in The Shard. Its inhabitants are an angry race of merpeople who wage never ceasing war against the land folk in general and the Wizards of Maripose in specific. They are angered at their separation from the rest of their kind and the other seas of the lost world.

## **The River of Grass**

*Flowing from the mountains to the Sea*

*The River of Grass is no land for man.*

The River of Grass is a vast plain that runs from the Mountains at the End of the World to the Only Sea. It is inhabited by fierce herds of centaurs and solitary minotaurs that are said to herd men on the River. It is said that to leave the Path of Skulls is to invite sure death or an even worse fate.

## **The Path of Skulls**

*Safe road for tribute but do not leave the path!*

The Path of Skulls was built by the Wizards. It leads from anywhere of note in The Shard to the City of Maripose. Near important locations like the entrance to the Bear's Lair the road bed is a solid surface of what appears to be white cobbles. Farther away from important places only the boundary markers of the path are white cobbles the centre part of the Path is just beaten dirt. The cobbles are in reality the tops of skeletal warriors who will rise up and attack anyone who dares set foot on the path without the permission of the Wizards.

## **Cities and other Settlements of the Shard**

And these are said to be the cities and other settlements of the Shard.

### **The City of Shadows**

This is the city closest to the Valley of the Bears. Built on a steep hill it is ringed by a mighty wall that serves to keep the ogres and giants of the Mountains at the End of the World at bay. The streets are narrow and crooked and little light finds its way to the ground. The richer you are the higher up in the city you live. The street teem with shadows that seem to have no origin. The locals ignore these shadows but they make visitors feel uneasy. At the very top of the city-hill is the king's palace. But no king is to be found in the throne room and all that can be seen on the throne is a misshapen shadow that even the locals prefer to avoid.

### **The City at the Centre of the World**

This city sits abreast the Path of Skulls and dares demand a tribute from all who travel the Path. For some reason Maripose accepts this. The king of the city is an ancient man who claims dominion over all the lands he surveys. He sits on a diamond and gold throne at the very pinnacle of the tallest tower in a city of tall towers. Anyone ascending to his perch can see seemingly for ever but the king himself is blind.

### **The City at the Edge of the Sea**

In any other world this would be a city of sailors and a port of renown. But here in the Shard of Sorcery the city turns its back on the Only Sea and instead gazes out across the River of Grass. Instead of a harbour and piers the city has a solid wall of alabaster facing the Sea and relies on caravans travelling to the foothills of The Mountains at the End of the World to trade with the farmers who live there.

### **The City of Dust**

Once there was a city whose inhabitants decided to reject the claims of the Wizards. They turned their emissaries away empty handed. For a year and day nothing happened but then overnight the city sank into a huge dust pool that is said to reach down to the Underworld. No one from the city has ever been seen again but occasionally strange objects float to the surface of the dust and the whirling dust devils that plague the site make ghostly mirages of the lost city in dust.

### **The Fort**

Deep in the Sea of Grass to the south of The City at the Centre of the World is The Fort where merchants trade with the centaurs and minotaurs for various products. Most notably cheese and meat.

### **The Tower**

This mighty tower reaches to the sky, impossibly slim and impossibly tall. No one knows who inhabits it but creatures are seen flying from its heights.

### **The Fisherman's Rest**

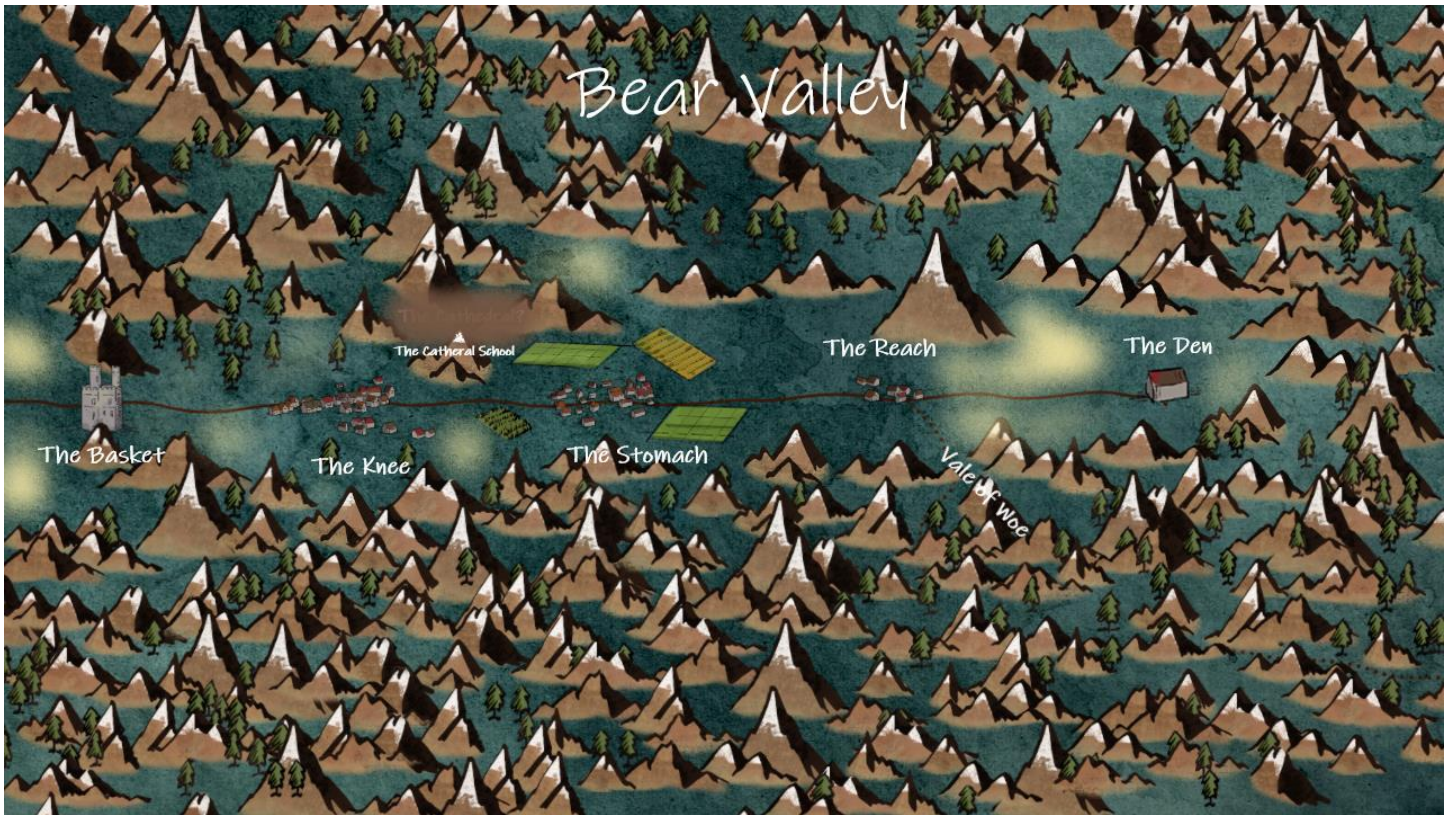
A gigantic fisherman dwells here casting his nets into the Only Ocean and pulling a rich haul out. This he trades with The City at the Edge of the Sea.

### **North and South Oases**

The north and south oases are where the minotaurs (north) and centaurs (south) congregate when they need to trade or discuss matters. Humans are not welcome.



# The Bear's Valley



*Tricky, trinky, trasket  
Ne'er dare disturb the basket  
Lest you wake the Old Bear*

*Children's rhyme in the City of Shadows*

A steep Alpine valley in the Mountains at the End of the World is known as the Bear's Valley. It is ruled by a now sleepy, but formerly formidable creature known as the Old Bear. The only entrance to the valley is through the fort known as The Basket, thus called because it appears to be woven from solid stone trunks and branches. There are five settlements in total in the valley, The Basket, the Knee, the Stomach, the Reach and the Den which is the Old Bear's lair. The valley is roughly 120 km long with each settlement located roughly 30 km apart. In cross section the floor of the valley is a shallow bowl 30 km across. After that the walls start rising more steeply in moderately wooded hills until they reach the heights where the mountains proper start. Here and there the mountains encroach closer on the valley and it narrows in spots.

In the mountains around the valley live fierce ogres and giants but they remember long-ago thrashings at the paws of the Old Bear so they behave themselves for the most part. Recently though they whisper that the Old Bear has become weak so they begin to grow bolder. The followers of the Old Bear love their ruler but few have seen him of late.

## The Basket

The Basket is a large three story structure that appears to be woven entirely out of large branches or small trees made of stone. The walls are at least 30 cm thick. Its dimensions are roughly 30 m long x 16 m wide x 8 m high. The spaces between The Basket and the valley walls is filled with a mix of dirt, rocks and gravel defended by downward pointing wooden stakes. Since the only entrance into The Basket is through a trap door in the roof visitors into the the valley have to either climb up a ladder let down by The Basket's garrison or be hauled up in a basket. Then they have to repeat the process on the other side. The Basket sits abreast a narrow neck of the valley right before it widens into the valley proper. The Basket is always garrisoned by 20 members of the militia and usually 2 or 3 Bearkin.

A bowshot from The Basket up the valley is the small village also known as The Basket. The buildings here are mostly stone in homage to The Basket and every available surface is carved to resemble wood and basketry. Roughly 100 people live here. They mostly grow food for the garrison. (Of course the garrison spends most of their time helping grow the food as this end of the valley is quite peaceful. The ogres and giants don't usually bother this end of the valley since they prefer to avoid the River of Grass and The City of Shadows.

### **The Knee**

The Knee gets its name from the enormous leg bones from a giant that spans the valley here. The huge petrified leg bones extends from the living rock on one side of the valley, angles up at a 45 degree angle ends in a knee joint and then angles back down into the solid rock on the other side of the valley. Since the valley is at least 100 metres or so across at this point the suggested size of the being the leg once belonged to is almost unimaginable. Nothing so tall has ever been seen in the valley. A watch post has been built atop the knee cap which is easily big enough to support a small house. Getting up and down involves a long rope ladder climb or if you're really in a rush you can slide down one of the leg bones by hanging from a harness draped over the left leg bone. (There's a large pile of hay at the bottom but this only lessens the impact a bit).

The buildings here are mixed stone and wood and are carved to fancifully depict giants and ogres cavorting and fooling around. Everyone knows that should a giant or ogre be pursuing you if you somehow manage to get to The Knee before being devoured the ogre or giant will stop chasing you and admire all the pretty carvings. Each one tries to recognize themselves in the carvings. The garrison makes good use of this fact. Sadly this doesn't hold true elsewhere in the valley no matter how good the carvings are.

Roughly 300 people live here and they make their living herding sheep.

### **The Cathedral School**

More or less part way between the Knee and the Stomach is a twisty path that leads to a clearing known as the Cathedral School where dwells a sorcerer known as [Hermont the Elder](#). He teaches all the children of the vale their letters and numbers and some of them he tutors in more arcane or obscure skills!

### **The Stomach**

The Stomach is the only spot in the valley where wheat can be grown so the 2 windmills used to grind grain into flour are found here. (There is an amusing tale told here about the near-sighted giant and his arm flapping lover. It's usually left until after the younger children have been sent to bed). The bulk of the rye, barley and oats grown in the valley are also sent here and vast caverns have been carved out of the bedrock to store food stuffs. Especially the beer brewed here. This is the largest settlement in the valley and over 500 people live

here. They spend their time producing foodstuffs like bread and beer and arranging and organizing food stores. The beer produced here is an especial favourite target of ogre and giant raids.

The buildings here are primarily constructed from wood and are elaborately carved with every foodstuff produced in the valley and some that haven't been seen here in living memory like wine and seafood.

The mountain stream known as The Leap descends from the eastern mountain slopes here and ends its run in the supposedly bottomless hole known either as the Old Bear's Folly or the Piss-pot. A water wheel has been erected over the hole which provides power for grinding flour. A net is strung over the Piss-pot to prevent accidents. Occasionally very strange objects are found in this net.

## **The Reach**

The Reach is so called because the walls of the valley here are deeply scored with claw marks. Legend claims that the Old Bear reached all the way from The Den to mark the walls as a warning to the ogres and giants. Here can be found the entrance to the Vale of Woe the long narrow valley that leads to the Court of the Ogre Duke. The inhabitants of The Reach raise cattle and work leather. There is only a small population of herders but the bulk of the Bearkin live here to guard the mouth of the Vale of Woe. The people live in tidy little wooden houses intricately carved with depictions of cattle and their life spans. Long ago the mouth of the Vale of Woe had a stout wooden wall across it but the ogre resented this and kept smashing the wall. Only the ruins of the wall remain. Only 75 to 100 people live here of which a quarter are bearkin.

## **The Den**

The Den is a single, enormous wooden long house. The longhouse is built into the end of the canyon. The longhouse is covered with carvings depicting the life of the Old Bear all lovingly carved and stained. The carvings start around the massive doors in the south wall and extend almost the entire way to the mountain-side. The very last section of wall that was carved has been defaced by savage claw marks.

For a generation few have seen the Old Bear and he is represented by his regent, an outsider with a perpetually sour disposition known as the Old Man. He may complain almost constantly but he takes his duties very seriously.

## **Stories about Old Bear**

### **The Vale of Woe and the Duke's Court**

The Vale of Woe is the name of the long, narrow twisty canyon that rises from the floor of the Bear's Valley all the way to the Court of the Ogre Duke. Since it is the main way ogres get down to the valley floor it once had a sturdy wooden wall across its Bears Valley end. Many years ago a mighty giant led an invasion of ogres down into the Valley and the wall was destroyed. After a great struggle the giant was slain by Old Bear and his ogres were driven back. All that remains of the giant is his bare skull, roughly 20 feet across, which is tightly wedged in the walls of the Vale facing the Valley. The skull is far enough up the Vale that it cannot be seen from the Valley. The rest of the giant's bones are long gone. You have to pass under the mighty skull to proceed up the Vale. The Vale is narrow and dark, barely wide enough for an ogre to touch both walls with his arms out stretched (roughly 16 feet in width). All along the Vale stakes have been erected. At the end closer to the Valley the stakes hold the skulls of dead ogres. Further up the valley the ogre skulls are replaced by human

remains. Under foot the path is strewn with the grisly remains of the ongoing struggle between the ogres and humans.

At the end of the Vale is a large bowl shaped clearing known as the Court of the Crimson Duke. Here on a sturdy throne of the rough-chiseled stone blocks sits the Ogre Duke. The Duke is the biggest, toughest and meanest of his kind and rules with an iron fist. Behind him in the wall of the Vale is the only reason why humans have any peaceful dealings with the Duke at all. The reason? An enormous chunk of obsidian embedded in the wall.

## **The Magicians' War and Old Bear**

*This is one of the many tales that is told of the Old Bear.*

Long ago there were four groups of magicians who practiced different arts. Their arts required very different ways to approach magic and they often disagreed on the best way to do things. Mostly magic at first but then other things as well. At first only regular words were thrown around. But things slowly got worse and they went from regular words to magic ones. From there it was a short step to war. A simple word but the horrors of a magic war are impossible to imagine. Many, many people died and the land changed in ways often unimaginable to us.

Old Bear found our ancestors frozen in a snow bank and licked us back to life. No one knows where Old Bear came from. Was he one of the four groups of magicians who had sickened of the death and decided to quit or was he one of magical beings who had never sided with the four groups. Whichever is true Old Bear saved us as a people and led us across the war-torn land to safety in his den.

Finally the four magicians groups tired themselves of their war and they made peace. The world was divided into four, each group getting their own portion and somehow they managed to physically separate the four portions. Once this had been done Old Bear led us from his den and after an epic journey found us this valley to dwell in.

## **The Old Bear and his Friend**

*This is one of the many tales that is told of the Old Bear.*

It was a beautiful day. A day meant for sitting on a river bank and fishing. A day meant for sharing a jug of mead with your best friend. So that is just what Old Bear and Pico<sup>1</sup> were doing. They had been sitting all day basking in the warmth of the sun and drinking. And just like a man would be and an old bear might be they were quite drunk. And just like a man would and an old bear might they were boasting.

Pico beat on his chest with one hand and said, "I am such a good fisher, drunk as I am, that I can still spear the fattest salmon in the river!" Saying so he stood up. After he had swayed back and forth a bit he made a casting gesture as though throwing a spear. When there was no splash he looked surprised. Old Bear chortled deep in his chest and passed Pico his spear. Pico bowed low in his gratitude, almost falling into the river, and standing again he flung his spear into the river. He quickly reeled it back in and pulled it out. There on the end caught in the barbs was a plump, fat salmon! Old Bear roared his approval and cuffed his friend on the back

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<sup>1</sup> Pico is mentioned in many of the old tales of Old Bear. High on the mountainside north of The Reach is a massive cairn that is said to be the grave of Pico.

nearly plunging him into the river. "My turn now", he said. He got up on all fours and squinted into the river. Suddenly he scooped with his paw and the bank was covered with flopping salmon. Pico cheered his friend on.

Ever since that day though the river has had no salmon in it.

After they had dealt with the fish they went back to their drinking. They drank some more and when they were through another pot Pico smashed it and stood up. "I have to pass water," he declared. "But I am so mighty I will piss right across the river. Watch this." Sure enough he stood there and a mighty stream of water shot across the river much to the distress of some ducks dabbling there. Again, Old Bear roared his approval. He shook himself and stood up. "I cannot claim to aim so well but let's see what i can do". So he squatted to make water like a bear does. And what a water he made. The stream of urine was so mighty that he cut a deep well right there beside the river. In fact the well was so deep and wide that suddenly the bank crumbled and with a mighty roar the river changed its course and flowed down into it. If the ducks had been upset before they were even more upset when their quiet pond disappeared into the underworld. Pico and Old Bear looked at each other sheepishly, then shrugged and guffawed.

Ever since that day the river has dove underground and no one knows where it goes.

Sitting there with their legs dangling down over the lip of the deep well Pico struggled to think of another contest he could challenge his friend with. Finally he had it. "Old Bear, I, drunk as I am can still weave the most beautiful basket you will ever see!" Saying this he gathered an armful of reeds and started his weaving. Sure enough he did so while all the time Old Bear sat there watching bleary-eyed. It was indeed the nicest basket a drunk had ever woven. Well Old Bear couldn't let this challenge pass. He looked around and didn't see any reeds as Pico had harvested them all or the river had dragged them down the well with them. Then he spotted a forest that had been turned into stone during the Magician's War. Just the thing. He ambled over and grabbing a bunch of trunks he started flexing and bending them. After he had softened them up he began to weave them together into a huge basket. When the basket was finished he carried it to the mouth of the valley and dropped it across the opening to keep the bad people out.

Ever since that day the mouth of the Bear's Valley has been blocked by The Basket.

And Pico and Old Bear looked at the baskets they had woven and laughed and laughed and then went back to their drinking with their arms around each other's shoulder.

## **The Old Bear and the Ogre Duke**

*This is one of the many tales that is told of the Old Bear.*

Back in the days when you grandpa's grandpa was still tugging at his dam's teat the Duke of the Ogres...Why a duke? Well the ogre leader had heard from a man, probably a duke hisself, that dukes were better than kings so the leader of the ogres is always calling hisself a duke. Well back then the Ogre Duke decided that he and his people had had enough of hiding from the Old Bear. There was plenty to eat down here in the Valley and the ogres were tired of being scared and sick of eatin' mountain goats and the odd lost hunter.

But.

But, they were still a little cautious and a lot scared so instead of barreling down the mountain like an avalanche grown legs they decided they'd sneak down and have a look around. So all the ogres got together



and came slowly and cautiously down the mountain all lined up behind their Duke. So cautious they was that they didn't even eat anyone they came across, and they came across plenty of unsuspecting people cause you never saw no ogres coming a sneakin' down so quietly before or since. And all these people, when they saw the ogres up and hightailed it for the Old Bear, a yellin' and a hollerin'. And the Ogre Duke and his people, they let them go 'cause they wanted to see what was a gonna happen.

And the closer they got to The Den the more people they had a runnin' afore 'em. When they came to the Reach the ogres was surprised by the great gashes in the rock on the valley's side. The Ogre Duke shrugged and they came on a goin'. Way past The Reach the ogres came to a dark cave across the path. This puzzled 'em cause they'd never heard of no caves along the path tween The Reach and The Den. They scratched their heads and shrugged and went in. That cave smelt awful funny and got warmer and smellier as they went in. Finally, the Ogre Duke decided it was too damn dark and they turned around and went back.

Once the last ogre had gotten out they heard a snap loud enough to crack a glacier and turned around. There in front of 'em was the head of a huge bear. They'd been down the gullet of the Old Bear hisself. The Old Bear yawned and stretched and his arms reached as far as The Reach and his claws deepened the gashes there. Well you never saw no ogres run as fast as those ogres did that day. And since then the Ogre Duke keeps his folk up in the mountains and we stay safe down here thanks to the Old Bear.