

A Traveler's Guide to the World of Hallow

Hallow is an enormous filigree of stone and steel, built out of the geological wreckage of an entire planetary system. The inhabitants don't know this, though. Hallow is simply their world, and they experience no more wonderment at the curious shape of its rocky flesh than a woodsman might when he chops trees for firewood. Composed of enormous interleaved plates at varying altitudes, Hallow is clearly a constructed place, built to some immense and perhaps long-failed design. Each plate is enormous, made of rock, and vaguely formed into a shallow tetrahedron, the bulk of a plate's weight being supported by great glyphs carved into the sides of each plate's downward thrust.

Plates and Constellations

Plates are anchored in bizarre tessellations referred to as constellations, which are often as many twenty plates deep and anywhere from thirty to a hundred plates across. The constellations are laid out such that even plates near the center of the massive configuration still receive sunlight, though it may be reflected by enormous mirror arrays.

Each plate is generally fairly close to its neighbors within the "layer" of the constellation it occupies, often roughly a quarter of a mile but up to eight miles in places. Many of these gaps are bridged by immense truss-works that offer an easy means of traveling between plates.

Most plates are fairly uniform in size, about 79 miles in breadth, though the "thickness" of a plate varies with its anchoring in its particular constellation. A fair number of small plates do exist, being just under ten miles in breadth. These are the most uniform, and generally serve very specific purposes. However, a very few plates see expansion across the course of their life time, and have grown to very slightly over 159 miles across.

Layers within a constellation are normally about 79 miles apart, vertically, though in rare constellations, some of this space might be occupied by the shallow forms of the smaller plates.

Constellations are normally no closer to each other than 500 miles and are normally about 1272 miles apart, though this is the loosest of all the various odd rules governing the shape of Hallow. Each constellation has an Angel at its core, which has various implications for the local environment.

Travel between constellations is generally made possible by enormous specialized air-ships, often centuries old. Each ship follows a relatively well-defined route, moving between a few established ports of call.

There's a tremendous amount of cultural variation in Hallow, and the roles of Legend's races vary much more wildly here than in most other settings. As an example, in the constellation of Gabriel alone, there are four different major races of dwarves ranging from the ancients with earth-elemental heritage and flying mountains to the caravaners with their glass-crafts and powerful magic.

Angels

At the core of each constellation is the last remnant of direct divine interference in the world of Hallow, enormous arcane engines referred to as Angels.

Angels are not to be confused with devas, solars, or planetars, which may still exist in the outer planes but are extremely rare in Hallow, along with most other outsiders. Angel is more of a term of convenience, though, as these are in fact machines of distant and divine origin, imbued with immense and alien intellect.

Each Angel is alive, after a fashion, and sentient. While not the source of magic, or natural law, they exert near-complete control over it within their respective constellations.

An Angel provides the power that is necessary to keep its constellation afloat, and also provides a strange catchment field that saves anything which tumbles off the edge of a plate.

Physically, Angels are made of heavy volcanic glass and steel so light as to be no more than a smoky translucency, soft as gauze and as enduring as their alien will. Angels come in a wild variety of shapes, almost none of them humanoid. They are, however, quite uniform in their rough dimensions. All Angels measure approximately 636 miles along one axis, and 318 miles along two other axes.

Each Angel is honeycombed by hundreds or maybe thousands of miles of passageways, rooms, and strangely accessible mechanisms, representing the physical projection of its cognition.

The Constellation Of Gabriel

The Constellation of Gabriel is composed of thirty-three layers of thirty-three plates each. The constellation is extremely unusual in that it has not expanded in living memory, and has been present across the course of known civilization throughout the entire expanse of Hallow, a claim that only six other constellations can make. Further, all of the plates found in the constellation are either the large or small flavor of plate, which is unique among all of the constellations. This means that despite its lower plate count, Gabriel is still roughly possessed of as much habitable surface as most other mid-range Constellations.

The landscape of the plates in Gabriel's Constellation is considerably less diverse than most. It is composed almost uniformly of savannas, rolling light forests, cities, and huge inland lakes. Interestingly, most of these lakes roll off the sides of the plates, and rely on the catchment field Gabriel projects. This is a feature considered unique to Gabriel's Constellation, though in truth it is found intermittently elsewhere on a few other distant constellations. These waterfalls are often hundreds of miles long, plunging past and onto other plates before finally smashing into the invisible border of the catchment fields.

Weather in Gabriel's constellation is fairly uniform, being mostly sunny with an even climate split into a rainy season and a dry season. The exception is the lightning monsoons which strike yearly during the height of the rainy season, where entire plates are scourged by supernaturally ferocious thunderstorms. This constrains the height and architecture of most of the cities found within the constellation.

The City of Bron

Towering along the edge of a plate, the metropolis of Bron is the only dwarven port within twenty days flight. Sitting on a slim crescent of fertile land, it serves as a point of contact for the vast but secretive forge-communes of the desert that forms the interior of its island. Over the last five centuries, the humble farming community has exploded upward and outward, with sprawling farms stretching as far as thirty miles out from the city and with the strange and majestic curvatures of dwarven architecture arching skyward. Built into and against the great sky-carving peaks of engineering, innumerable warehouses and immigrant communities have sprung up and many airships spend months or years docked at the deep harbor. There, on the flat blue backdrop of the endless sky and in the enormous arcane furnaces of the city, the great slow crafts of four nations are practiced with the grave diligence of mastery.

Streets

Streets is the eldest of the many suburbs of Bron, and was once not particularly different from a scattering of towns dotting the few inland waterways. It has long since been deeply integrated into the sprawling chaos of Bron, and is now a fairly gentrified metropolitan zone. Its most notable feature is a single creaking windmill, built to a tremendous scale and surrounded by small outbuildings, which lies in the center of a disorganized little town. The Streets windmill is further distinguished by its inexplicable construction; the entire windmill is made from some form of basalt, shaped with magic long-since forgotten, and completely indestructible in contemporary times. This bizarre construction extends to the blades of the windmill, which are formed of

vast paper-thin blocks of stone. Despite the fact that the windmill at Strees has survived everything from the attacks of wayward titans to a divinely wrought pyroclasm, the deep deserts hold countless ruins of the same construction, most shredded by what appear to be claw marks of tremendous scale.

The Iron Halls

Below Strees stretches an enormous catacomb of the same material, with a large array of arcana buried in its stony depths. This sprawling warren once served as an impromptu laboratory for aspiring adepts, but became a proper academy for magi almost three centuries ago. With this transition, the majority of the treasures either transitioned to teaching tools, or were hidden deep in the school's vaults.

Blackstone Inn

Made of the same heavy basalt as the windmill itself, salvaged from a number of nearby ruins and crudely fitted together with iron, the Blackstone Inn is tremendously popular with the more refined adventuring crowd. One of the few buildings in the area built to the scale to accommodate Titans, it has large cellars that hold a tea-house popular with the academic set. There, separated by paper walls and black-lacquered oak beams in basements connected to nearby ruins by long tunnels, countless feuding research teams argue by way of messages carried by waitresses and the occasional hapless bystander. Above them, the tavern proper has three stories above ground, three barkeeps, and three effectively separate restaurants inside it. The main room is a single long-house style feast hall, with a number of long tables laid diagonal across the room. Smaller round tables are set out among the benches, but even these have at least eight seats. Parties that cannot fill an entire table should expect to have the company of strangers during busy hours. The upper floors look down onto the feast hall area via two levels of terraced balcony wrapping the edge of the hall, with the private rooms of the inn having their doors face onto it. These doors are heavy, solid, and soundproof, and give onto the only lodgings in the Inn, as it lacks common-room style sleeping arrangements. On the roof, there is a small teppanyaki restaurant enclosed by glass trellises. Despite

being protected from the elements, it is traditionally open only during summer.

The Sceaduwe Agora

Twelve blocks from the Blackstone Inn, the Agora is one of the largest open air bazaars in Bron. Centered around one of the smaller airship docks, the Agora is a direct point of sale for many trade goods, some of them exotic, some of them illicit. It's also one of the fastest ways to get robbed in Bron, and there are plenty of old legends about djinni thieves who rule the bazaar in secret. Adding to the mysteries and tall tales is the Thorn Gate, a huge wrought iron structure embedded in the ground in the center of the market. Only about a quarter of the gate is exposed, and its doors have long rusted shut. Oddly enough, attempts to excavate the Gate simply cause it to sink deeper into the ground. Excavation was eventually halted for fear of the gate plunging down through the island and it now sits at the bottom of a large depression, where it provides shade for some of the most exclusive shops in the Agora.

Rouch

The great lighthouse off the shore of Bron has long been its own small community of artisans and academics, forming a small floating archipelago that stretches like another embracing arm of Bron's harbor. Contributing to this is the fact that it serves as the only viable dock near the city for the great sky fortresses of the High Dwarves. These Skyholds require huge moorings impossible to accommodate in a traditional harbor without completely halting all traffic. Each year, a different Skyhold visits Bron and docks at Rouch in what is called the Great Rotation. This unbroken and unaltered pattern of arrival and departures stretches back almost two centuries.

Thanaak

Every dwarven forge is named. Dwarves, in fact, have their own names for most of the major non-dwarven forges. Most forges have fairly intricate names, but the very finest foundries are named simply for the twenty-seven dwarven words for Forge. Thanaak sits in the depths of Bron, and is often called its heart. Legend has

it that the growth of Thanaak has been the growth of the city, with many insisting that the first kindle of the old smelters there marked the moment that Bron was birthed as a city, and the death of the hamlet it had been.

Onlien

Onlien is the Skyhold currently docked at Rouch, where it will remain for the next 8 months. The great tethers of arcane fire that would normally anchor it to the sky are quieted, visible only at night as thrumming arcane glyphs along the craggy faces of this floating mountain. In its deep places the movement of commerce is swift and steady, as the High Dwarves organize swap meets, bazaars, and more formal auctions throughout the great halls and foundries. Onlien is ancient even among Skyholds, and its hidden city has become so vast that it has spilled out from the caverns and onto the broad slopes of the mountain itself, bringing with it a verdant dusting of farms. There are even a few terraced monasteries set high on the slopes where the arcanists practice their art.

The City of Far Aday

A huge city, under the enormous wing of an Angel. While the city is massive, its size is constrained by the fact that only the shadow of the wing keeps it safe. For unlike the rest of the constellations, the plate it is on, and the neighboring plates, are plagued by Lightning Monsoons throughout the entire rainy season, and much of the dry season. The enormous arched surface of the wing seems to eat up the gargantuan electrical discharges, cycling them away and serving as a silent guardian of the town.

The City of Tu'Ring

A lesser city on one of the smaller plates, which is dedicated to it and the surrounding infrastructure. The plate seems to have been actually designed to support the City, which is very old and located on one of the first plates in the entire constellation. Tu'Ring is notable primarily for being the most technically sophisticated city in any Constellation, using arcano-

mechanical devices to provide a rough simulacrum for difference engines, public transport, and mass farming. Food shortages are unheard-of and immense servitors, presumably the product of Gabriel's endless dreaming, maintain what is effectively a welfare state. Tu'Ring is the one place in Hallow where it is impossible to starve, and everyone is assured of shelter. As a result, the atmosphere in Tu'Ring is fundamentally different, relying on a system of barter rooted in services and reputation rather than necessary goods. This is not to say that Tu'Ring is a Utopian meritocracy, as the servitors do not interfere with temporal affairs except to insure minimum physical standards of living. They do nothing to halt intellectually oppressive regimes, and though Tu'Ring is currently ruled by a generally benign aristocracy of arcanists, signs of serious corruption are beginning to show.

A note on the Technomancy of Tu'Ring

Almost all arcano-mechanical devices made in Tu'Ring function only within the confines of the plate that holds it. Many other cities are fairly advanced (relatively speaking), but they moved along more traditional lines, and do not benefit at all from the advances made in Tu'Ring.

The Constellation Of Bleak

This constellation is named rather exactly: a blasted, tumbling jumble of plates with sparse natural flora and fauna. Pioneers eke out a living here mostly through mining and trade, as patches of fertile earth are few and far between. Bleak's constellation is full of cracks, broken links, and a catchment field that leads straight to Bleak himself, a burning, arching furnace.

This constellation has a few things going for it, chief among them the fact that ancient arcana works here. However, very few people care to remain and make use of this, for while the servitors of Bleak have very few roles, the most important of these is to conscript those who pass a certain level of skill and training (level 7) into direct service by Bleak. Most are whisked away to the engine itself for unknown purposes.

There is always a dry crackle in the air, and a howling

wind. In some of the deeper crevasses, the stone noticeably gives off heat, particularly the closer you are to the center of the constellation. The minerals mined here often prove useful in alchemy and artifice.

Fair Ett's Mine

It is difficult to tell how big the Mine is, considering it exists as a warren within a cracked plate (or possibly a series of plates), hidden from outside eyes. It is equally difficult to tell why it is called a "mine," since nothing seems to ever come out of it, only in.

It is common knowledge that Fair Ett's Mine is den of thieves, a community founded solely on surviving by larceny, particularly from other constellations. How this is organized is a close-keep secret, but there are rumors of powerful mages hiding within the warren with goals of their own and access to transportation.

Rockfell Ford

This community, not more than 3 to 5 plates (depending on the route) away from Fair Ett's Mine, is an enormous market, spilling not only over its plate, but also into the surrounding truss-works. Here, goods from various constellations are exchanged, and it is through this market that much of the food and necessities of the surrounding plates are introduced. From here, caravans are also chartered, taking essentials as well as trade to people in more remote corners of the constellation.

The Constellation Of Her Lady's Secrets

Her Lady's Secrets consists of dense, sylvan islands on its outermost layers, butting up to remote, beautiful monasteries. Below this level lies seven levels devoted to the storing of tomes and other vessels of information. The constellation's primary residents and custodians are an order of tattooed monks devoted to the written and spoken word.

The column Her Lady itself exists as a vault of unique information and, well,.. secrets. Her Lady also

acts as the only means of transitioning between levels, because the catchment field complicates ship travel. Unfortunately for any would-be library raiders, Her Lady is constantly adapting, making it impossible to accurately establish where you will exit the column. The deeper you want to go, the harder it is to get there, and the less likely you will find your way back to the "surface" again.

Suggested Reading And Influential Art

The excellent *Roadside Picnic* by the Strugatsky brothers. This is probably one of the strongest influences, despite the fact that this is really supposed to be a fantasy setting. I'd recommend it to almost anyone.

Perdido Street Station by China Mieville

The Culture novels by Iain M. Banks

The inimitably striking portrayal of the supernatural by H.P. Lovecraft

Voltaire's ruminations on Deism

Cory Doctorow's portrayal of a post-needs society in *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom*

The works of Gustave Moreau

The works of Zdzisław Beksiński

The work of Monet and Pissarro from 1867 to 1878