

# All Is Rot and Woe

Five hundred winters ago, the world shook and split asunder. Cities crumbled, and flames licked the skies. The Cataclysm, they called it, a reckoning brought forth by the hubris of sorcerer-kings, dabbling in eldritch powers best left forgotten.

Few survived the destruction and those that did clawed their way through a harsh, unforgiving new world. Warlords rose to power, ruling with iron fists over the scattered remnants of humanity. They turned to dark gods, offering blood sacrifices in exchange for protection.

For centuries, humanity struggled to rebuild. Resources were scarce, and raiders prowled the broken lands. But as the years passed, trade routes were established, and new technologies developed. The warlords' grip on power began to loosen, but banditry and savagery still runs rampant across the land.

Yet, in the ruins of the past, whispers of ancient magic began to surface. Sorcerers delved into forbidden knowledge, seeking to harness the power that destroyed the world once before. And from their ranks, new warlords emerged, wielding eldritch might and carving out their own kingdoms.

Evil priests also rose to power, leading their followers in brutal raids, sacrificing the innocent to appease their dark deities.

Now, the world is a grim and dark place. Warlocks and sorcerer-kings vie for power, and banditry and savagery are a constant threat. The memories of the Cataclysm still linger, a reminder of the fragility of civilization and the danger of playing with powers beyond human understanding. And the people live in fear, fortifying themselves against the constant threat of war and destruction.

## A New World

Welcome to Helkara, a dark and perilous world where danger lurks around every corner and death is always just a blade's edge away. Here, the strong survive, and the weak fall prey to the many dangers that threaten to consume them.

In this world, you will take on the role of a brave adventurer: an outlander, a warrior, a sorcerer, a bandit, and others. You will journey through the ruins of the old civilization, explore the wild, and brave the dangers of the dark and twisted places.

The road ahead will be fraught with danger and filled with the blood of your enemies. But fear not, for with your sword arm and your spell casting, your name may grace the lips of storytellers and bards across the land.

You will face bandits, warlords, and cultists, all seeking to bring you to your doom. But you will not falter, for the fire of adventure burns in your soul. You will journey to the Necromancer's Domain, brave the dangers of the Undercity, and explore the ruins of the old civilization.

You will be tested, but you will emerge victorious. You will be feared, but you will be respected. You will be a legend, a hero of Helkara.

# 10 Things to Know About Helkara

Helkara is a fantasy setting like no other. Before you begin a Helkara campaign, here are some things that you should know about the world, its people, and events.

## 1. Helkara is a brutal, grim world.

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The world of Helkara is plagued by corruption, cruelty, and fear. It is a dark, dangerous place where the strong prey on the weak and the gods are seen as unpredictable and malevolent forces. In this world, survival is not guaranteed, and choices carry weight, making each decision and action of the players important and potentially life-altering.

## 2. The gods are dangerous, alien entities.

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In the world of Helkara, the gods are not benevolent beings to be worshipped and revered but rather mysterious and frightening entities that are often more trouble than they're worth. They are seen as aliens because their true nature is unknown, and their motives and desires are beyond the comprehension of mortals. Interactions with the gods can lead to both blessings and curses, and many who seek their favor end up losing everything they hold dear. The fear of the gods is a palpable force in Helkara, and it is said that even the bravest of heroes tremble at the thought of drawing their attention.

## 3. Sorcerers, necromancers, and priests are usually evil tyrants.

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Sorcerers, necromancers, and priests in Helkara are usually evil tyrants who use their powers to control and manipulate others. They are feared and respected but also reviled for their cruel and selfish actions. The sorcerers use their powers to control and manipulate, while necromancers raise the dead to do their bidding. Priests, who have a direct connection to the dangerous gods, often use their divine powers to further their own agendas and maintain control over their followers. This creates a world where trust is difficult to come by, and those with magical abilities are often viewed with suspicion.

## 4. Magic is rare, deadly, and often leads to catastrophe.

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Magic is a force that is both highly sought after and greatly feared in Helkara. Those who possess the ability to wield magic are often seen as powerful and dangerous, with many

viewing their abilities as a threat to the stability of the world. This is because magic has a tendency to have unintended consequences and often leads to disasters, whether through the negligence of the practitioner or through the sheer power of the magic itself. As such, those who use magic are often viewed with suspicion and mistrust, and many nations have strict laws regulating its use and practitioners.

## **5. Humans are the only humanoid race.**

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In Helkara, the existence of other humanoid races is a myth or a legend, with humans being the only dominant species. Non-human races, such as elves or dwarves, are considered rare and elusive. These races are known for their distrust towards humans, often keeping to themselves and avoiding any interaction with human society. This makes playing a human character the only option for players in Helkara, as the other races are not open for players to create characters from.

## **6. Monsters are rare and extremely dangerous.**

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Monsters in Helkara are not just creatures to be defeated for experience or loot, they are dangerous and unpredictable forces of destruction. They are rarely seen and when they do appear, they wreak havoc on the land and its inhabitants. These beasts should be approached with caution, as they are nearly impossible to defeat without a well-coordinated effort by multiple powerful adventurers. The few survivors of monster attacks are often left traumatized, forever changed by the encounter.

## **7. The lines between good and evil are blurred.**

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The concept of good and evil is not as clear-cut in Helkara as in other fantasy worlds. Some characters may appear to be doing good deeds, but in reality, they have hidden motives. On the other hand, some characters who appear to be evil may have a reason for their actions, which is not always clear. This blurring of the lines between good and evil makes the world of Helkara a complex and intriguing place where players must be careful in their alliances and decisions.

## **8. Technology is relatively simple.**

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Technology has not advanced much beyond that of the bronze age, with many relying on hand-made weapons, armor, and tools. This simplicity of technology leads to a more primitive, dangerous way of life, where survival is always a top priority and battles are fought up close and personal. Despite this, a few scattered pockets of knowledge and skill have emerged, leading to the creation of powerful magical weapons and other wondrous technologies.

## **9. Hope does still exist in the world.**

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Despite the bleak conditions, pockets of resilience and hope can be found among the survivors of the various communities and cultures in the world of Helkara. They believe in a better future and work towards it, despite the constant challenges and obstacles that threaten their existence.

## **10. Players must work together (and with others) to succeed.**

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In this world, survival is not guaranteed and choices carry weight, making each decision and action of the players important and potentially life-altering. Characters must build armies, earn the trust of the common folk, and be wary of external threats to succeed in Helkara. Working together, forming alliances and pooling resources are key to success and survival in this brutal and dangerous world.

## **The Helkaran People**

The history of the Helkaran humans is closely tied to the Cataclysm that struck their world long ago. Helkarans believe that the Cataclysm brought about massive changes to the planet, causing the sun to shine for long days and causing darkness for even longer nights. During the long days, the heat of the day became intense, and the Helkarans were forced to adapt and live in the Gloaming, the twilight region near the planet's north pole.

The Helkarans believe in a concept known as the Endless Cycle. According to their beliefs, upon death, the souls of Helkarans are transferred to new bodies in a form of reincarnation, perpetuating the cycle of life and death. This belief in the Endless Cycle gives the Helkarans a unique perspective on death and the afterlife, providing them with a sense of comfort and assurance that they will live again in another form.

Nearly all Helkarans live under the rule of the sorcerer-kings. The sorcerer-kings are powerful magic-users who are revered and feared by the people. Although the Helkarans submit to the will of the sorcerer-kings partly because they fear death and the unknown, they also fear pain and torment wrought by the sorcerer-kings.

Most humans speak a language known as the Common tongue. However, most non-human beings (such as frostbites, goliaths, and narghals) speak the tongue of Those Before, which is called Hermian. The Helkarans have a rich oral tradition, and much of their history and lore are passed down through stories and songs.

Magic is rare among the Helkaran people, and the sorcerer-kings try to keep them illiterate so that they can't learn how to use magic. Inquisitors are tasked by the sorcerer-kings to stamp out heretics and rogue spellcasters, ensuring that the power remains in the hands of the sorcerer-kings.

## **The Great Powers**

In the land of Helkara, eight great powers (also called the sorcerer-kings) hold sway, each vying for control and dominance through strength, magic, and manipulation. Know their names.

### **The Blood Cult of Azathoth**

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—A dark and twisted religion led by a powerful priestess who performs human sacrifices to grant herself and her followers immense power and immortality. Those who oppose them risk being sacrificed in their twisted rituals.

### **The Brotherhood of the Blackened Chain**

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—A powerful and abhorred organization of thieves and bandits that controls the criminal underworld of Helkara, known for their brutal tactics and their ability to infiltrate and sabotage their enemies from within.

### **The Dark Council of Aruthaz**

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—A secretive and powerful group of sorcerers who seek to bring about the end of the world, using dark magic to summon ancient and powerful entities to bring about the destruction of all living things.

### **The Iron Keep of Vrogathar**

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—A tyrannical warlord who rules over a fortified city and controls a vast army of soldiers and mercenaries known for their brutal tactics and mastery of siege warfare.

### **The Necromancer's Guild of Keth'Keth**

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—A powerful organization of sorcerers who have mastered the forbidden art of necromancy, able to raise the dead and control an army of undead soldiers to do their bidding.

### **The Order of the Crimson Blade**

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—A powerful and dreaded group of warriors and assassins, known for their deadly proficiency with blades and their willingness to undertake any job, no matter how dangerous or immoral, as long as the pay is good.

### **The Shadow Council of Norgoth**

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—A secretive group of sorcerers and assassins who hold immense power and influence over the criminal underworld and political landscape. They are reviled for their ability to manipulate shadows and invisibility, striking from the darkness and eliminating their enemies without mercy.

## **The Sorcerer King of Nazgar**

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—A mighty sorcerer whose command of ancient and forbidden magic allows him to bend the minds of his enemies to his will and summon demons to do his bidding. He rules over an empire built on dread and dark magic.

### **Magic of Helkara**

Magic is a rare and restricted power in Helkara. Only the sorcerer-kings and those they trust are allowed to wield magic, and any who attempt to do so without their approval are hunted down by their inquisitors. These powerful spellcasters draw their power from ancient tomes known as scrolls, which have been recovered from the ruins of Those Before.

The use of magic requires the knowledge of special commands and often involves physical gestures called somatic components. Magic is unpredictable and can be incredibly dangerous, leading to devastating arcane disasters. The use of necromancy, in particular, is reviled in Helkara as it is seen as a violation of the Endless Cycle.

Many spellcasters, particularly those who practice the arcane, draw their power from the gods that reside above the world. These practitioners use elaborate rituals to summon the gods; however, the results are often disastrous. The gods are uncaring and alien entities who do not wish to be disturbed, leading to destructive consequences for those who dare to summon them.

In order to maintain control, the sorcerer-kings keep the population of Helkara illiterate, as this makes it more difficult for them to learn magic. This also makes it easier for the inquisitors to stamp out any heretics or rogue spellcasters who attempt to use magic. Despite these measures, there are still those who seek to unlock the secrets of magic, often at great risk to themselves.