"Mind your manners and watch your purse, my boy. Sarthar have a delicate sense of honor, and they’re quick to draw steel when you offend it."

On the shores of Lake Sarn stands the city-state of Sarthel, the largest and most prosperous city remaining in the heartland of old Nerath. The city’s foundries and workshops produce jewelry (especially silverwork) and goods known for hundreds of miles around. In this dark and doubtful age, few cities thrive as Sarthel does . . . but a deadly threat lies hidden in the very heart of the city.

Gold is king in Sarthel, and the city is constantly humming with trade and speculation. The city’s noble families own mercantile empires that bring in raw goods from places as close as Therund or as far as the Free Cities of Zembar. Dozens of guilds of artisans compete fiercely to turn out the finest jewelry, silverware, blades, and clothing. Trade is a bare-knuckled affair, and more than a few commercial rivalries between noble families or guilds are resolved with duels or riots. The people of Sarthel are notorious for their quick tempers, and they see rivals and competitors as their worst enemies.

Sarthel is a surprisingly old city, dating back two thousand years or more. It first grew to prominence as a provincial capital in the tiefling empire of Bael Turath. Many of the city’s cellars, sewers, and streets date back to those early days.
Centuries after the Turathi overlords of Sarthel were overthrown, the city-state fell under the influence of a rising new power: the human-dominated Empire of Nerath. Unlike other towns and cities of old Nerath, Sarthel weathered the wars and plagues that brought down the empire, protected by its sturdy walls and defensible location. Much of the surrounding area was devastated, but Sarthel survived more or less intact.

In the hundred years since Nerath’s collapse, Sarthel has slowly established itself as a regional power and center of civilization in an otherwise wild and desolate land. Some of the city’s lords eye the smaller, scattered towns of the Dragondown Coast only a hundred miles to the east and dream of making Sarthel into a republic—or a kingdom. But Sarthel now faces a dark and deadly peril: The city lies in the grip of the Iron Circle, a secretive and powerful cult dedicated to the worship of Asmodeus, Lord of Hell.

Sarthel’s Power Structure

In most times, the business of Sarthel is business. All of that rivalry and competition continues on the surface, giving Sarthel an appearance of normalcy—but now someone is pulling the strings. The cult known as the Iron Circle controls many nobles and city officials, giving the secretive High Adept Tynaron power over the city.

The Council of Lords

With the collapse of imperial authority a century ago, the leading noble families of Sarthel established a Council of Lords to govern the city. The council consists of the ranking noble in each family, but it rarely meets as a body—many of the lords are content to delegate authority to the High Seneschal. Instead, the lords use their position on the council and their influence over the civic bureaucracy to jockey for the best mercantile licenses and most important civic offices. Many of the powerful noble families are fierce enemies.

House Avrul is considered the foremost noble family of Sarthel. They control the routes to the rich southern land of Nath Mornal, Sarthel’s largest and wealthiest trading partner (and incidentally home to the Citadel of Iron’s Grasp). Likewise, Avrul controls many of the highest-ranking positions in Sarthel’s army. The self-styled Duke Aron Avrul, who also holds the position of Marshal of Sarthel, leads the house. He was a formidable soldier in his youth, but Avrul’s days of discipline and deprivation are behind him; now well into middle age, he takes the field only if he has a luxurious pavilion in which

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to sleep and scores of servants to provide for his comfort.

House Padumor is an old foe of the Avruls. Its commercial interests are strongly allied with the city’s silversmith guild and jewelers guild. In a city where nobles are noted for their prickliness, the Padumors are the worst of the lot; just about every Padumor is an expert duelist looking for a reason to take offense. Their ancient matriarch, the Comtessa Verna Padumor, nominally rules the Padumors. However, practical leadership of the house now rests with Verna’s son Hordan, soon to be the Comte Padumor.

One of the smaller families is House Imbran, noted for its half-elf heritage. The Imbrans are in the olive and olive oil trade, and they also deal in fine leather from the outlying ranches. More important, Lord Bandor Imbran—a dignified young half-elf noble only thirty years of age—has taken it upon himself to expose and uproot the Iron Circle at any cost. Lord Imbran is one of the few leaders in Sarthel who suspects just how far the Iron Circle’s chains reach, and he greatly fears that the cult will soon move to elevate one of the larger families to a throne, raising a tyrant to rule over Sarthel. He is quietly seeking trustworthy adventurers to lead the crusade.

The High Seneschal

Stern and sharp of tongue, the human mage Klaran Meitor currently holds the scepter of the High Seneschal. He is an intimidating figure: a scowling lean, balding man with a stiff black beard peppered with silver and gray. Klaran was appointed to his position ten years ago, and to date he has successfully ignored all but direct orders from the Council of Lords, keeping the city running better than it has in decades.

As High Seneschal, Klaran Meitor oversees a nepotistic civic bureaucracy in which various relations of the council houses fill the most rewarding offices. The nobles of Sarthel have spent centuries fighting over which posts their nieces, nephews, and distant cousins hold. That much Meitor could handle with ease, but now the ever-present corruption in the ranks of the city officials has a direction and a purpose. Meitor has already survived two assassination attempts from Iron Circle minions, and he knows all too well that he can’t trust the officers and officials who report to him—some among them are certain to be secret members of the Iron Circle.
The Iron Circle

While the city lords squabble and the civic officials line their own pockets, the true power in Sarthel now lies in the hands of a secretive society known as the Iron Circle. Scores of Sarthel’s most powerful and influential citizens have been drawn into the society.

At one level the Iron Circle operates completely in the open—its banner flies above an old keep on the outskirts of town, which is now known as the Iron Tower. Warriors in crimson mail and black-robed adepts guard its ramparts, and they also patrol the streets of Sarthel. The Iron Circle claims to be a military entity that desires nothing more than to bring peace, order, and justice to all lands. Within Sarthel’s walls, the organization is reasonably well behaved, and from Sarthel, Iron Circle companies march forth to seize strongholds in the borderlands and bring lawless areas under their rule.

Beyond the ordinary rank and file of the Iron Circle lies a secret order of “knights,” who are initiated into the true purpose of the order—the worship of Asmodeus and the spreading of his dominion over the world. When gathering together, the initiates disguise themselves, guarding their identities beneath masks of crimson cloth. Even if a city leader is revealed to be a member of the Iron Circle, the cultist cannot betray any of his or her fellows, because he or she does not know their identities.

The Adept of Chains

The master of the Iron Circle in Sarthel is a powerful human adept known as High Lord Tynaron. Unlike most of the other cultists, he knows each member of the Iron Circle in the city, since he requires all cultists to unmask in his presence unless he instructs them otherwise (to keep other cultists present from learning each other’s identities). Tynaron is a short, stocky man of about fifty years, clean-shaven, with silvered hair and noble features. He is intelligent, with a natural magnetism sharpened by years of experience in manipulating and intimidating others.

Tynaron harbors a secret not even his closest minions suspect: He is a damned soul, sent back from the Nine Hells to work more wickedness in the world. His eyes glow with a fiery light when he becomes angry, and he is armed with hellish powers to advance Asmodeus’s purposes in the mortal world. With a word, Tynaron can summon dark hellfire or infernal chains of red-hot iron to scourge his enemies and intimidate his followers.

**High Lord Tynaron**

Medium natural humanoid, human

XP 1,200

HP 228; Bloodied 114
AC 25, Fortitude 23, Reflex 22, Will 22

Speed 6
Resist 10 fire, 10 necrotic

Saving Throws +2: Armor, Points 1

**Traits**

- **Lashing Chains**
- **Aura 2**

Protoplasmic chains surround Tynaron in battle, flailing at nearby foes. Enemies within the aura cannot shift, and any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 5 damage.

**Standard Actions**

- **Brazen Rod** (fire, weapon) + At-Will
  
  **Attack:** Melee 1 (one creature); +16 vs. AC
  
  **Hit:** 1d10 + 5 damage, and ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).

- **Hellfire Bolt** (fire, implement, necrotic) + At-Will
  
  **Attack:** Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. Reflex
  
  **Hit:** 2d6 + 7 fire and necrotic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of Tynaron’s next turn.

**Triggered Actions**

- **Chains of Dis** (fire, implement) + Recharge
  
  **Effect:** Close burst 3 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +14 vs. Reflex
  
  **Hit:** 2d8 + 5 damage, and the target is restrained and takes ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends both).

- **Rebuke** (fire)

  **Trigger:** An enemy within 3 squares of Tynaron hits him with an attack.

  **Effect:** Close burst 5 (one ally in the burst). Tynaron slides the target up to 3 squares, and the target gains 20 temporary hit points. Until those temporary hit points are gone, the target’s melee attacks deal 5 extra fire damage.

**Minor Actions**

- **Infernal Command** (fire) + Recharge when first bloodied

  **Trigger:** Close burst 5 (one ally in the burst). Tynaron slides the target up to 3 squares, and the target gains 20 temporary hit points. Until those temporary hit points are gone, the target’s melee attacks deal 5 extra fire damage.

**Skills**

- **Bluff +15**, **Insight +14**, **Religion +13**
- **Str 15 (+7)**, **Dex 14 (+7)**, **Wis 18 (+9)**
- **Con 18 (+9)**, **Int 17 (+8)**, **Cha 21 (+10)**

**Alignment** evil

**Equipment** brazen rod

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**Sample file**

Nerathi Legends: Sarthel, City of Silver

April 2011 | DRAGON 398
Exploring Sarthel

Sarthel consists of three sprawling rings nestled against the lakeshore, all sheltered within the formidable city wall. The outermost ring (the farthest from the lake) is known as the Wall Ward. It’s home to many of the city’s warehouses, stockyards, trading houses, and foundries. The middle ring, referred to as the Low Ward, is where most of the common people live, along with the hundreds of stores, workshops, taprooms, and other such businesses catering to the general public. The innermost ring, close by the lakeshore, is called the High Ward. It’s where one finds the city’s temples, the counting houses, the manors of the noble families, and many of the civic buildings. The wards are not clearly delineated and bleed into one another.

Alamarid Palace

More properly described as a citadel than a palace, the Alamarid is the seat of the city government. It was formerly the palace of the Nerathan lord-governor who ruled Sarthel, but since the passing of the empire, it has served as the meeting place of the Council of Lords and the palace of the High Senechal. The Alamarid sits on top of a low, rocky hillock at the north end of town, overlooking the lakeshore. It is finished in a warm, honey-yellow marble quarried at the north end of town, overlooking the lakeshore. It’s where one finds the city’s temples, the counting houses, the manors of the noble families, and many of the civic buildings. The wards are not clearly delineated and bleed into one another.

The Dark Maze

Beneath Sarthel’s streets lie the foundations and hidden vaults of the ancient Turathi city that once stood here. Much of this older work serves as the sewers for the Sarthel today, but isolated cisterns, buried catacombs, secret tunnels, and more mark the area beneath the High Ward and Low Ward. The upper reaches of this labyrinth serve as a refuge for gangs of thieves and bands of smugglers, and they are haunted by a number of monstrous scavengers. The lower depths are home to buried Turathi shrines and vaults, many of which still hold ancient treasures—and monstrous guardians.

Pelarbin

Despite its location on a dune cape, Sarthel is not a port; the River Blackfall is too navigable between Lake Sarn and the Gulf of Kul. Instead, Sarthel’s commerce and trade moves southward to the small town of Pelarbin on the coast. A good stone road runs 15 miles through a wide saddle in the coastal hills, linking Sarthel to its seaport. Pelarbin is exposed to storms from which Sarthel is protected, and the steep sides facing the sea have long prevented it from growing anywhere near as grand as its neighbor. Many Sarthar trading houses and firms maintain docks and warehouses on Pelarbin’s wide strand, linking Sarthel to distant lands.

Temple of the Golden Flame

The largest of Sarthel’s temples is the Temple of the Golden Flame, which stands in the grand Temple Square near the center of the city. The temple is named for a dancing jet of holy fire that springs from a large brazier in its central dome. According to the temple priests, the flame marks the spot where a vision or manifestation of Erathis appeared and bestowed her blessing on the city. The Golden Flame is a pantheistic temple, but Erathis is regarded as a first among equals and revered as the special patron of Sarthel.

The temple is home to a dozen priests and acolytes, plus guards, scholars, and servants. The head of the temple is the Hierarch Yasmina Nagal, a human woman of sixty who attained her position through the work of House Nagal. Despite this, she is careful not to allow family considerations to govern her decisions. Yasmina is struggling to deal with a sharp decline in the public’s interest in the temple; the Iron Circle has recruited many of her worshipers, and it has worked to discredit others by exposing bribery and scandal (some deserved, some seemingly manufactured).

Beyond the Walls

Sarthel lies in a high, semiarid plateau between the Draco Serrata Mountains to the north, and the lower Golden Hills to the south. Mines and quarries dot the foothills of both ranges. This upland is known as the Sarn Plateau, and it extends from the lowland forests of eastern Therund to the plain surrounding Lake Sarn. Much of the plateau is dry grassland, broken by copses of hardy trees. It’s thinly populated, with widely scattered ranches and mines in the mountain foothills. The ground is not especially fertile, except in the valley of the wide Blackfall River. This ribbon of farmland extends fifty miles or more from Sarthel, and its villages and freeholds feed the city. Small garrisons of soldiers guard the more important villages and outposts; the region within a day’s travel of the city walls is well patrolled and reasonably safe from bandits and monsters.
Once one travels more than ten miles or so from the city, or leaves the cultivated region along the Blackfall, the land quickly reverts to wilderness. To the north, the rugged heights of the Draco Serrata pose a formidable obstacle to travel between Sarthel and the small towns of the Dragondown Coast. Eastward lie the broken ridges and forest-choked vales of the Kulgard Peninsula, a region infested with hungry manticore tribes and warlike gnolls.

The arid plains and dry woodlands east of Lake Sarn were once settled, but the area was virtually depopulated a hundred years ago in the great wars that marked the end of Nerath. Bloodthirsty reavers from Winterskull ravaged the isolated towns here again and again. Today, travelers following the old imperial road from Sarthel to Avankil at the mouth of the Blackfall pass through a dry, desolate region of abandoned farmsteads, ruined keeps, and ruthless bands of outlaws.

About the Author
Richard Baker is an award-winning game designer who has written numerous adventures and supplements, including Manual of the Planes™, the Dark Sun® Campaign Guide, and the Gamma® World Roleplaying Game. He’s a New York Times bestselling author of Forgotten Realms® novels such as Condemnation, the Last Mythal trilogy, and the Blades of the Moonsea series. Rich is currently the Design Manager for the Dungeons & Dragons® game at Wizards of the Coast.

ADVENTURES IN SARTHEL
Heroes looking for adventure in Sarthel won’t have to go far. Here are a few ideas.

Vendetta: Open feuding breaks out between two rival houses. The heroes are hired by one house to counter the mercenaries employed by the other, and they’re asked to strike at the other house’s holdings and assets.

The Dark Maze of Sarn: The heroes find an entrance to a previously unexplored portion of the Dark Maze.

Infiltrate the Iron Circle: Lord Bandor Imbran hires the heroes to infiltrate the secret society and discover its true purpose by pretending to sign up, and then working their way up through the ranks.

Bring Down the Iron Tower: The High Seneschal hires the heroes to investigate a series of mysterious disappearances. The trail leads into the secret ritual chambers beneath the Iron Tower, where the unfortunate captives are magically dominated and smuggled out of Sarthel to a life of slavery in the south. The heroes must fight their way in and confront the cult’s hidden leader.

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