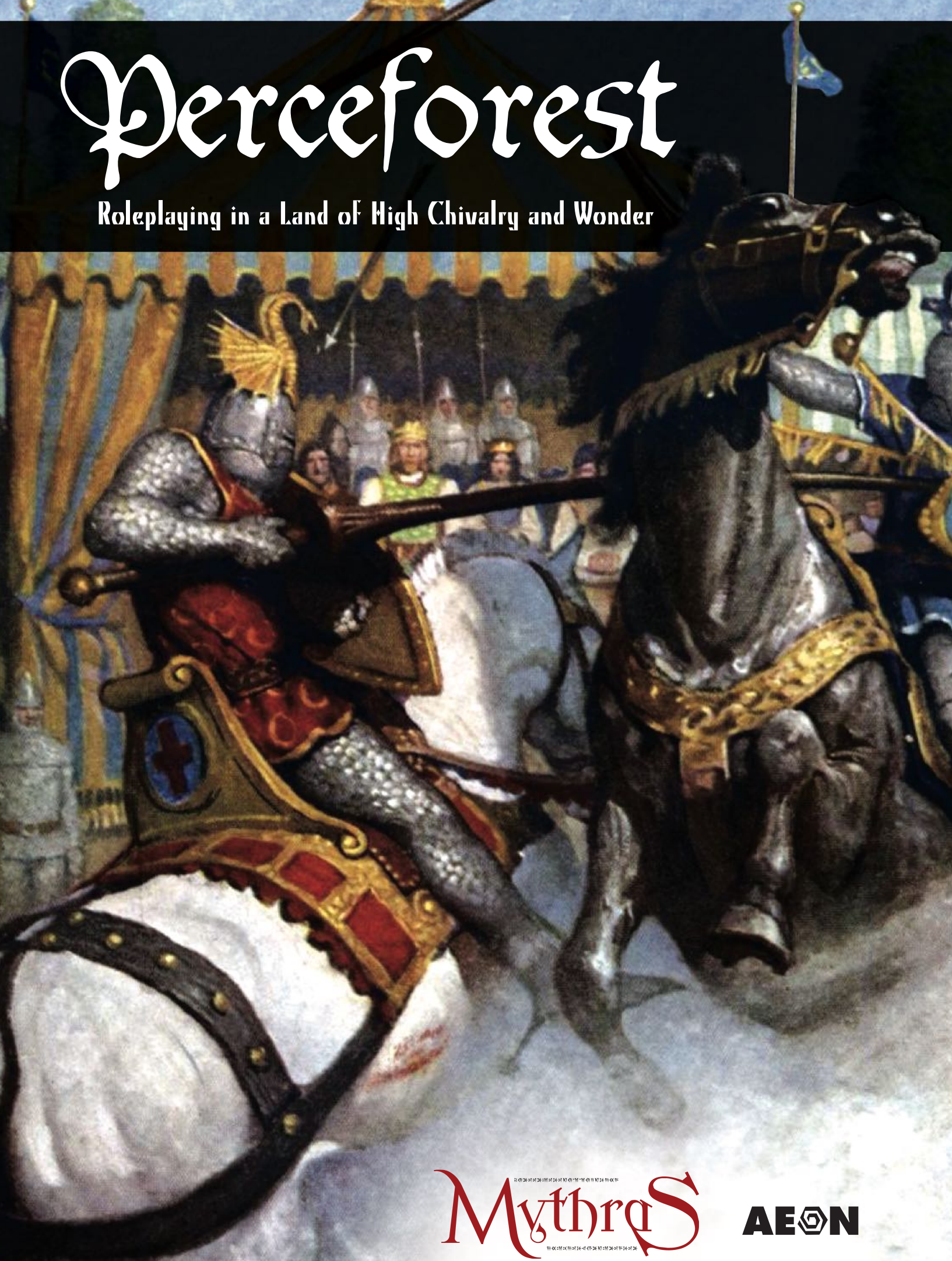
Perceforest

Roleplaying in a Land of High Chivalry and Wonder



Mythras

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PERCE FOREST

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Roleplaying in a Land of High Chivalry and Wonder

MARK SHIRLEY

AEON GAMES

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Chapter One

WELCOME TO PERCEFOREST

Welcome to a new feudal fantasy world called Perceforest. *Be part of a kingdom attempting to expand into The Forest—using steel and/or spell—where the trees fight back; a kingdom is riven by internal politics and in need of a strong leader. Will you survive? Will your honour? Will your domain? Or will all be lost to the brambles and briars as so much has been before?*

The *Perceforest* setting is a fictional world of high chivalry set against the forces of the primal wild. It is based on a vast epic of the same name, written in the fourteenth century by an anonymous author about the lands that would later be known as England and Scotland. The author introduces a vast array of characters: kings, knights, damsels, sorcerers, and even the occasional talking animal. At the heart of the narrative, two brothers conquer the Isle of Britain, wresting it from the control of an evil enchanter-king. The chivalric culture that the brothers bring to the land is under constant threat from internal and external pressures, and the *Perceforest* epic recounts their efforts to create a lasting legacy. Ultimately they succeed, for the descendants of the brothers are King Arthur as well as most of the Knights of the Round Table, who would have been familiar to the intended audience of the original work. The setting described in these pages is that of the *Perceforest* saga, modified and expanded to create a new fantasy world with all the adventure of the original work, but one without the explicit connection to Britain, Arthur, or his Knights.

> *Perceforest* is a setting, not a complete game; you will need a copy of the *Mythras* rulebook to run it with the variant rules given here.

THEMES

The principal theme of *Perceforest* is **high chivalry**. It is expected that one or more players will have knight characters, even if this is not their primary career. Being a knight is more than just being in charge of a horse and harness: a knight is expected to uphold the code of chivalry and act with honour and courage; caution and forethought are foreign concepts. Jousting is very much embedded in the culture of the Twin Kingdoms, and knights look for any opportunity to practice their skills—sometimes just meeting another knight on the road is an excuse for an impromptu joust.

The second theme is **wonder**. *Perceforest* is a world rich in magic, more so than in contemporary tales. There are evil sorcerers and enchanter-knights, damsels steeped in secret lore and witches weaving spells. The land is strewn with wonders—invisible castles, magical swords, men made of iron, and even fish on horseback! Players can have characters such as talking animals, playful badger knights, magpie heralds, or snake magicians.

The third theme of **existential menace** permeates the entire setting. For peasants, this manifests as a fear of the unknown, but knights are not supposed to show fear. A hostile force looks on a civilised land with envious eyes; this force is commonly called The Forest, which is a shorthand term for the primal wild that created all living things save for mankind.

Connected to the third theme is the theme of **colonialism**. A generation ago, the Brother Kings invaded Bretaigné, fought against the native enchanter-knights who held the land in thrall, and either drove them out or exterminated them from their strongholds in The Forest. The Grigoise brought with them the gentle culture that now permeates much of Bretaigne society, along with new laws and the rigorous policy of land clearance that robbed The Forest of its territory in order to plant crops and raise livestock. The player characters are at the forefront of this policy, having been placed in charge of a village and charged with making it prosper.

Sacred kingship is the final theme. The fortunes of a kingdom are tied to the health and character of its king, and when one prospers so does the other. This is reflected throughout all levels of society, even as far as the player character's own domain. As the saga opens both of the Twin Kingdoms are ruled by ailing kings, a state of affairs that results in lawlessness and chaos. As members of the ruling elite, the player characters are expected to take up the fight against injustice and help to keep the kingdom safe until the king recovers.

SOURCES AND LIBERTIES

The *Perceforest* setting draws from a chivalric literary tradition originating in the Low Countries (modern-day Belgium and The Netherlands) in the fourteenth century. It is distinct from the more familiar Arthurian literature of French and English tradition, having a stronger fantasy element. The primary source is, of course, *Perceforest* itself, a massive epic of six books containing over a million words. According to its anonymous author, the characters in *Perceforest* are the distant ancestors of all the familiar figures of the Arthurian Cycle: Arthur, Merlin, Lancelot, Perceval, Tristan, Iseult, Gawain, and the rest.

In addition to *Perceforest*, this setting incorporates concepts from other works from medieval literature, not least the *Roman de Renard* and *The Faerie Queene*. The *Roman de Renard* predates *Perceforest* by a couple of centuries and describes a land where talking animals are the norm. The eponymous Renard is a trickster and a cad of the highest order, and yet still endearing as he pokes fun at society through his actions. Spenser's *Faerie Queene* is later than *Perceforest* by a couple of centuries but describes an earlier time of errant knights and high adventure.

Liberties have been taken with the original source material. This is primarily a setting of high chivalry presented as a fantasy alternative to the Arthurian Cycle, albeit based on an authentic medieval source. While there is a wealth of information from which to draw, it is not in sufficient detail for the normal requirements of a gaming supplement, so the *Perceforest* Cycle has been used as a framework upon which details of the author's own invention have been added. In particular, the antagonism provided by The Forest in a handful of minor episodes in the original material has been developed into a major part of the setting as presented in this book.

The "serial numbers" have been filed off the original *Perceforest* to produce a setting that is more like a fantasy world than a fantastic version of the British Isles. For example, the Twin Kingdoms are called Loegria and Albanie rather than England and Scotland; the Roman gods mentioned in the original sources have been replaced with a different pantheon that still retains the key characteristics; the fictional depiction of Alexander the Great has been altered, and so on.

Further Reading

Primary Sources

***Perceforest: the Prehistory of King Arthur's Britain* by Nigel Bryant** (trans.), 2011, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer: this is the only modern English translation of the complete *Perceforest* corpus. This expensive and weighty book is not at all necessary to play a game, and all relevant setting material has been distilled into the work currently in your hands. That said, there is a wealth of story ideas and plot that goes beyond what could be summarised here. If you are interested in playing at a different point in time, you might want to see if you can borrow this book from a library or find a second-hand copy online. References to this edition are given in Roman numerals, first the book then the chapter. Thus "III.xxxiv" refers to Chapter 34 of Book Three.

***A Perceforest Reader* by Nigel Bryant** (trans), 2012, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer: this contains excerpts from the above book at a much more affordable price.

***The Romance of Reynard the Fox* by D.D.R Owen** (trans), 1994, Oxford: Oxford University Press: not the only version of the *Roman de Renard*, but a complete and unabridged edition free from Victorian censorship.

***The Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser**, 2006, London: Routledge. If you struggle with the verse, there are several excellent prose versions.

Secondary Sources

***Dictionary of Medieval Knighthood and Chivalry: Concepts and Terms* by Bradford B. Broughton**, 1986, New York: Greenwood Press: an invaluable resource for terms and definitions.

***The Hunting Book* by Gaston Phoebus**, 1974, London: Regent Books: a translation of a fourteenth-century treatise by the Count of Foix, and an excellent source of hunting techniques.

***Boutell's Heraldry* revised by J.P. Brooke-Little**, 1970, London: Frederick Warne and Co: there are a lot of good sources for heraldry, but this is the one I like.

Fiction

***Uprooted* by Naomi Novic**: I encountered this superb work of fiction after starting this project and was struck by the parallels between my version of *Perceforest* and the world Novic creates in this novel. It has undoubtedly affected the development of this work; I hope not too egregiously.

***Mythago Wood* by Robert Holdstock**: a wholly different milieu to *Perceforest*, set in mid-twentieth century England, although it evokes the menace of the primal woodland which is so central to the present work.

***The Red Knight* by Miles Cameron**: Many of *Perceforest's* themes are shared with this book, not least chivalry and wonders.

PRONUNCIATION

The language of the source material is mostly Norman French, a dialect distinct from but similar to modern French. Pronounce the names in the setting as in English or French, as you prefer. For what it's worth, the author uses the following pronunciations:

- "-é" as "-ay", so Estonné is "Ess-tonn-ay", unlike Lyriope which is "lear-ree-ope".
- "-oit" and "-ois" as "-oy", but "-oise" as "-oyse". The additional e at the end of the word indicates that the consonant should be pronounced.
- "g" as in "goat" before a, o, u, and consonants; but as in "giant" before i and e.

GLOSSARY

assart: as a verb, the process of converting wasteland (forest, heath, etc.) into tillage. As a noun, the land claimed in this manner.

Bretaigne: The people of the Island of Bretaigné (q.v.)

Bretaigné: The island currently divided between the Twin Kingdoms (q.v.)

gentle, *gentleborn*: the gentlefolk are the aristocratic people of the Twin Kingdoms. All gentleborn belong to a House (q.v.)

House: one of the aristocratic families of the Twin Kingdoms. There are six Major Houses (the House Royal, House Arbrun, House Bélin, House Brennantes, House Gorre, and House Leir) and a number of Minor Houses.

luiton: an elf, brownie, or goblin, depending on its demeanour. Luitons are naturally invisible and highly magical beings.

Mauvaise Lignaige: the "Evil Clan"; a vast family of enchanter-knights that held Bretaigné in thrall for over a century. Their power was crushed by the Brother Kings.

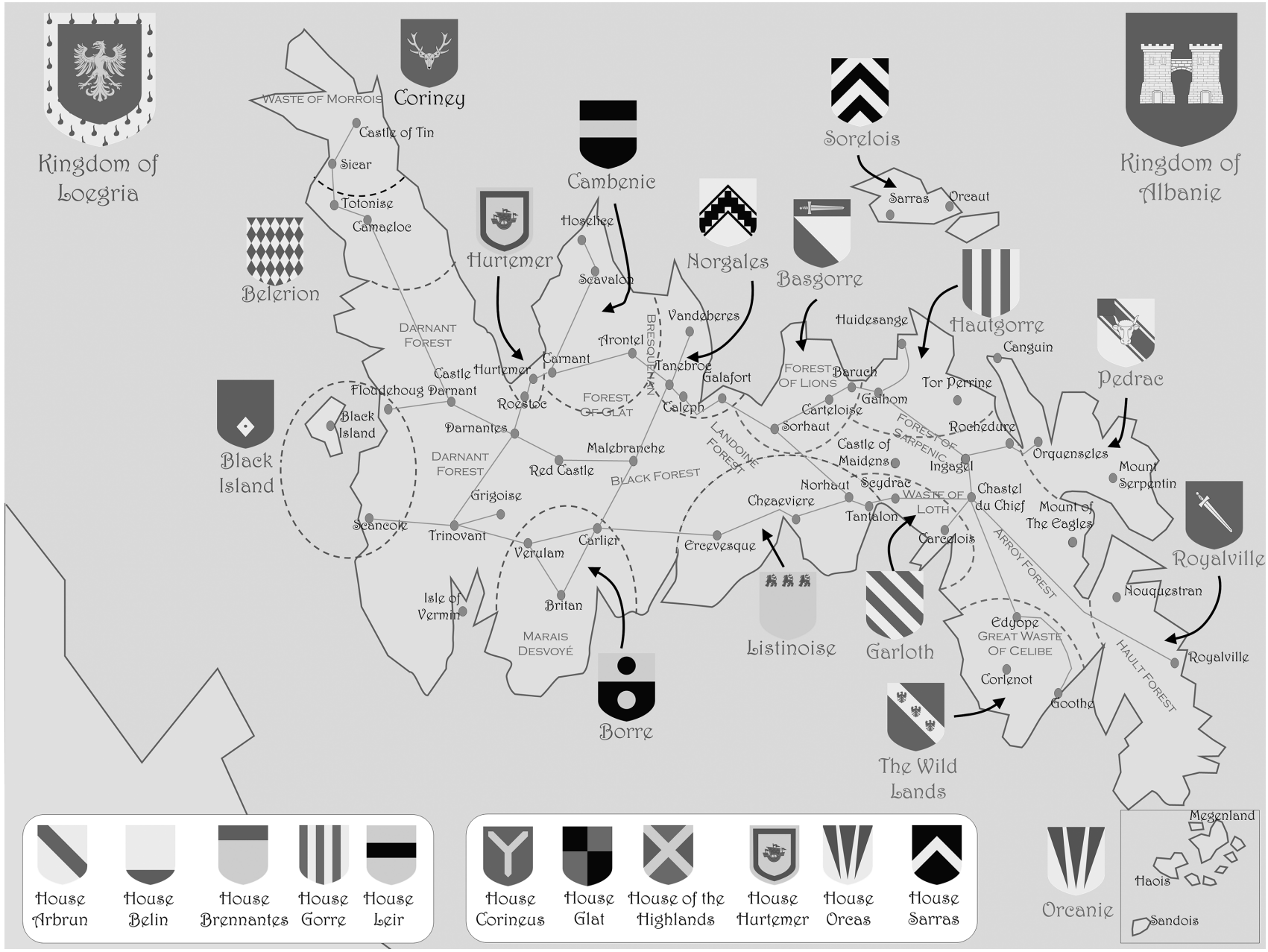
simple, simpleborn: the simplefolk are the common people, yeoman farmers and craftsmen.

Twin Kingdoms, the: Kingdoms of Loegria and Albanie, ruled over by the brothers, King Perceforest and King Gadifer respectively.

virgate: the land needed by a simple household to keep them fed for a year. Equals 20 hectares.

The Lands around Bretaigné

Brtetaigné


Kingdom of Loegria
Coriney
Waste of Morrois
Castle of Tin
Sicar
Totonise
Camaeloc
Belerion
Hurtemer
Cambenic
Hoselice
Scavalon
Norgales
Basgorre
Sorelois
Sarras
Orcaut
Kingdom of Albanie
Hautgorre
Pedrac
Canguin
Huidesange
Tor Perrine
Rochedure
Orquenseles
Mount Serpentin
Mount of The Eagles
Royalville
Nouquestran
Royalville
Darnant Forest
Castle Hurtemer
Carnant
Arontel
Vandeberes
Tanebroc
Galafort
Caleph
Roestoc
Forest of Glat
Bresquenan
Forest of Lions
Baruch
Gaihom
Carteloise
Sorhaut
Forest of Sarpenic
Castle of Maidens
Ingagel
Landoine Forest
Black Forest
Black Island
Floudehoug Darnant
Darnantes
Malebranche
Red Castle
Grigoise
Scancole
Trinovant
Verulam
Carlier
Britan
Isle of Vermin
Marais Desvoyé
Borre
Ercevesque
Cheaeviere
Norhaut
Scydrac
Tantalon
Waste of Loth
Chastel du Chief
Carcelois
Arroy Forest
Listinoise
Garloth
Edyope
Great Waste of Celibe
Corlenot
Goothe
Hault Forest
The Wild Lands
House Arbrun
House Belin
House Brennantes
House Gorre
House Leir
House Corineus
House Glat
House of the Highlands
House Hurtemer
House Orcas
House Sarras
Orcanie
Megenland
Haois
Sandois