



## CHAPTER I: THE LOST DUCHY

**M**ousillon is the Lost Child of Bretonnia, the Land of Despair. It suffers under a terrible curse that renders its land poor, its people fearful and ignorant, and its nobles wicked. Ravaged in recent times by plague, war and abandonment, Mousillon is a grim and ugly place where few sane men go. And yet some do still come to this place willingly, perhaps looking for profit, safety, or adventure. Most such men fail, defeated by

the cruelty of the land and the despair of its curse. But there are victories to be won in the Lost Duchy, for some of its evils can be vanquished with a strong blade and a pure heart. But no matter how many heroes come to Mousillon, perhaps its curse will never be lifted, and the greatest victory to be won in Mousillon will be to escape it before it claims your soul. Let this book be your guide to this evil land.

### — THE PEOPLE OF MOUSILLON —

**T**he division between commoner and noble, prevalent throughout Bretonnia, still defines the communities of Mousillon. If anything, it is more pronounced here, for in Mousillon the peasants are literally dirt-poor, living in hovels in the swampy villages along the river Grismerie or clustered around the ruined wall of the city. The nobles, meanwhile, rule their petty kingdoms with absolute power rare even for a Bretonnian Lord, and they tend towards the cruel and despotic. Since Mousillon is without a Duke, there is no higher authority to which the isolated nobles of Mousillon answer, and they have free reign to deal with the peasants as they will. Many abuse this horribly, for Mousillon itself seems to taint their minds with cruelty and often outright madness—while some are tainted by something darker still. A new and powerful noble has risen in Mousillon, styling himself the Black Knight, and he gathers the support of the duchy's other nobles. Should he succeed in building an army from Mousillon's thugs,

peasants, and even less savoury creatures, he could turn the Lost Duchy into a formidable power base from which to challenge the very throne of Bretonnia.

Mousillon peasants are ill-educated, isolated, and suspicious. They are notorious for carrying disease, especially the dreaded Red Pox, to the extent that a Cordon Sanitaire was set up following the Affair of the False Grail, its castellans tasked with keeping the peasants out of the neighbouring duchies. In truth, very few Mousillon peasants have even left their home villages, and the next village down might as well be another continent for all that most peasants care. This isolation has made Mousillon's peasants extremely suspicious of outsiders and has also left its mark on them physically. A peasant without a hump or strange-set eyes is considered tantamount to deformed in most villages, where even the comeliest lass possesses ears of greatly differing sizes or extra fingers and toes.

Almost all of Mousillon's peasants live in merciless poverty, for there is very little opportunity for them to engage in trade and become merchants, and what little opportunity exists is monopolised by criminals.

Mousillon makes for very poor farming land, since much of it is little more than a swamp fed by the sluggish river Grismerie. Most peasants exist on a subsistence farming level. Of all the resources available in this duchy, frogs, snails, slugs, and other slimy things are the most prevalent. Frogs and snails are the finest delicacies most peasants will ever taste, and the gathering of these creatures is a prestige occupation in the villages. By a very old custom, a lord of Mousillon claims ownership of all snails and frogs within the area of his authority, and to be a lord's principal Swampaire is one of the loftiest positions most peasants can attain. In addition to the glamour associated with swamping, peasants also make do by painting trees with a strong adhesive, so that when birds light on the branches, they become stuck, allowing an easy harvest. As a result, many branches in Mousillon are foully stained with a thick veneer of dark fluid and the tell tale signs of birding: two broken bird's legs ending in bloody stumps, where the body was pulled free.

The City of Mousillon, the walled city that is the duchy's largest settlement, contains a population of beggars, madmen, and criminals. Since Mousillon has no Duke, and the Duke's seat was always the Ducal Palace in the town, the City no longer has any noble authority and is completely lawless. This in turn has made it the heart of Mousillon's biggest industry—smuggling. Once a ship has slipped past the Bretonnian ships patrolling the kingdom's western coast, it can easily sail into Mousillon to dock. Contraband of all kinds comes into Bretonnia through Mousillon, and from there it can be smuggled into countries with more secure ports like Estalia and the Empire. The majority of this is otherwise legitimate cargo that can escape taxes and limitations that would be imposed by using a more law-abiding city. Many merchants use Mousillon to transport their goods, and the merchant's clubs that dominate much Bretonnian trade are often incensed that they do not take a cut of Mousillon's trade as they can in almost all other cities in the nation. Other cargo is outright illegal, like pirates' loot, poisons, forbidden texts, and even captives. Both legal and illicit cargoes are brought into Mousillon's docks where violent gangs vie with one another to offer protection to

incoming ships and take a heavy fee from the crew (although these fees normally add up to less than the legitimate taxes and duties that would be levied elsewhere in Bretonnia). The thugs who run the docks make up one part of the city's population. The rest is made up of peasants who eke a living from the parts of the town reduced to ruins by the siege, or madmen who skulk through the streets begging for food or raving about supernatural horrors. A small minority of the city's inhabitants run hidden shops selling suspicious things from poison to forbidden texts and magical ingredients harvested from obscure monsters, but they choose their customers carefully. Overall the city is a supremely dangerous place, and few but the criminal or insane choose to live there.

The duchy of Mousillon is also haunted by outlaws and bandits, since the lack of coherent authority in the duchy means it is a good place for a wanted man to hide. Such men often find employment with ruthless nobles who use them to terrorise the peasants and enforce brutal or bizarre laws. The image of Mousillon as a haven from the law, however, is false, as an outlaw must contend with disease, draconian nobles, and other hard-bitten killers if he is to survive in the Lost Duchy. There are other hazards abroad in Mousillon, too, not least of which is the walking dead. Mousillon was never free of the Undead even in Landuin's day and with the Affair of the False Grail and the mass graves of plague dead they have become ever more prevalent in the less populated corners of Mousillon. Monstrous creatures bred by the filth of the swamp, bands of feral Mutants and Beastmen, and over-zealous castellans of the Cordon Sanitaire are also adept at killing the unwary.

Finally, it is not uncommon for a Questing Knight to seek adventure and revelation in Mousillon. The whole realm is an affront to the Lady, and there is plenty of evil to vanquish on the path to finding the Grail. Many a Questing Knight has never returned from Mousillon and some of them are still there, tainted by the curse and condemned to become part of the evil they rode out against. But there is always a knight willing to cross the Cordon Sanitaire and seek his destiny. The king is often pressed to declare Mousillon the target of a War of Errantry and to send thousands of eager Knights Errant to cleanse the land. But until that happens, it falls to the lone Questing Knights to seek out the darkness at the heart of the duchy, and give their lives to fight it.

## — SOCIETY —

Much of Mousillon's society resembles the rest of Bretonnia but as reflected in a flawed mirror. In theory, the peasants owe fealty and a tithe of produce to their lord, and the lord in return offers protection to the peasants while himself offering fealty and wealth to the duke. However, this system has broken down in Mousillon. The land cannot provide quite enough to honour the knights of Mousillon, so they often resort to hiring brigands or dabbling in un-knightly pursuits like taking a cut of the contraband that travels Mousillon's roads and waterways. Meanwhile there has been no Duke of Mousillon for more than two hundred years, and without a duke, there is no one for the knights to honour. Many of them show no honour at

all, ruling their personal realms with great cruelty instead of protecting them for the good of the peasantry.

The second great division within Bretonnian society, between men and women, is actually not as extreme in Mousillon. This is mainly because of the extreme poverty and isolation of many communities, including some noble courts. Mousillon's peasants simply do not have the option of sparing their women from arduous or unpleasant tasks (although the occupation of Swampaire is still considered a man's game). Similarly, without any higher authority to enforce the Knightly Code, many nobles in the duchy do not treat women as objects of courtesy who must be protected. Laws of inheritance and conduct are more mutable