

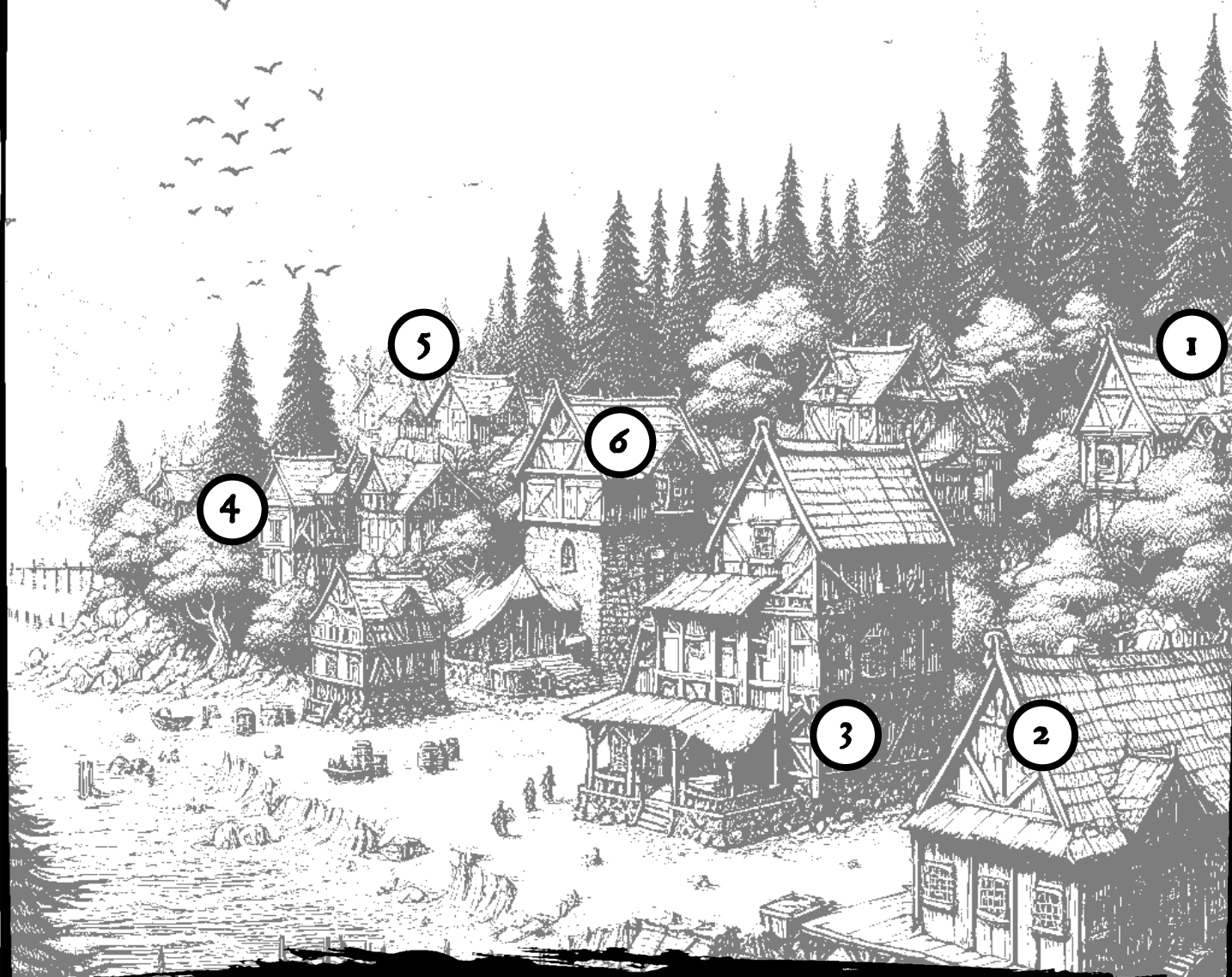
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JOURNAL



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A STARTING TOWN



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INTRODUCTION



FOREWORD

Hey, everyone!

Every campaign needs somewhere to start the adventure. That's what this issue is all about: building a quick and easy area for my players to explore.

I don't need much for the first session. A starting settlement, some NPCs, and an idea of what's happening in the town! I'm happy to start playing as soon as possible, with only a small tool-set and my **Map**, **Inspirations**, and **Themes** to guide me.

I don't think about overarching campaign plots and story arcs at this point. Like the old adage: No plan survives contact with the enemy and I'm sure my players will de-rail any initial ideas I introduce, so I don't burden myself by devoting time to planning something that may never come to fruition. I'll simply take it one step (and one game) at a time.

Of course, I'll drop in a scattering of adventure hooks, but I won't know what makes my players bite until after the first game.

But that's another story.

-DMG



WHICH TOWN?

I need a place for the player's characters to call home.

Given how much I enjoy drawing overland campaign maps and dungeon maps, my passion doesn't truly extend to maps of cities and towns. To me, it seems like a lot of work for something that the players may only casually visit on occasion. However, I do like to make the effort for the starting town or city of a new campaign setting, drawing the player's back here to get the best use out of it that I can.

An easier option to mapping a town is to create a theatre-of-the-mind settlement simply by grabbing a picture of a town and labelling it like a map. Often, this method allows players to better visualise the settlement and it alleviates the burden of mapping for me. Nevertheless, I think a starting town needs a map, so I'll create one.

I decide to make the town of Lamros the starting town. Its position on **The Golden Coast** is fairly central and looks like the most isolated. With the sea blocking travel North and East, it only leaves westward and southern routes for exploration. This means I've got a definite idea of where the players might travel in their first few adventures.

If I'd chosen somewhere like Medeia, the players could go off in any direction. There are seven locations within a couple of days travel from Medeia (including the temptation to find out what's down the southern road, taking them completely out of the area) compared to only three from Lamros. Giving players too many choices just leads to analysis paralysis, plus limiting their choices more than halves any preparation I need to do before setting the characters free in the world.

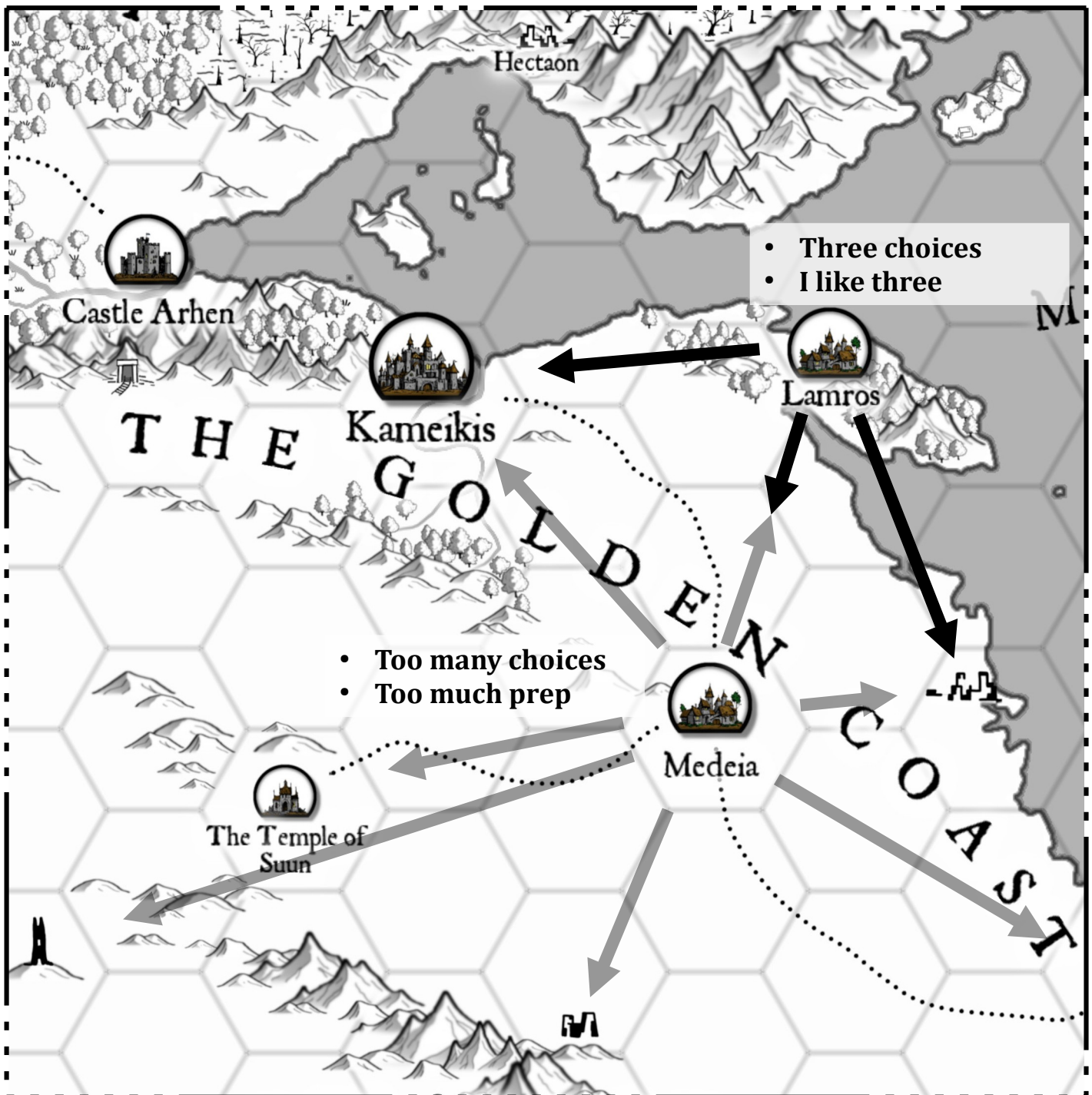
REGIONAL MAP

I also anticipate the PCs staying within 1 or 2 hexes of Lamros for the first few sessions, so I can leave thinking about additional locations until later in the campaign.

What I'm doing is creating time for myself. Time to let the setting breathe; time to determine where the players want to explore; time to create

the locations and adventures that the players take an interest in.

The last thing I want is the setting running away from me, so I need to pace exploration. I need to always be two or three steps ahead of the players. Plus, I don't want to spend too much time developing areas that the players may never visit.



LAMROS



JUST ENOUGH TO GET STARTED

I believe there should be three (here comes that rule-of-three thing again!) fundamental elements to any settlement:

- **A place to stay**
- **A place to pray**
- **A place to pay.**

These elements break down like this:

A Place to Stay: Adventurers need somewhere to stay, whether that's an inn, the house of a relative or friend, an abandoned building, stable, barn, or any number of places that player's characters can call home.

A Place to Pray: Many fantasy campaign settings offer some kind of supernatural power to players, so the members of my gaming group playing characters like clerics, wizards, paladins, sorcerers, or druids need somewhere to study and devote time to their practice. This could be a church or temple, wizard's tower, the back room of a local emporium, the cellar of an abandoned building, or some ancient standing stones in a nearby copse. I'll tailor this place to fit as many characters as have requirements, adding a couple of types for extra flavour if necessary.

A Place to Pay: Once the characters roll out of their first adventure loaded with treasure (or perhaps before they set off on it), they're going to want to spend some time buying or upgrading their starting equipment. They might want to pick up some potions, supplies, and grab a horse for the journey ahead. This place could be a blacksmiths, general goods store, a marketplace with stalls, or a seedy fence down a back alley.

That's pretty much all I'll need to give my players everything they'll initially want from a village, town, or city.

Of course, the town can be expanded upon later, adding additional places (such as public, governmental, or military places) as and when they're needed.

However, while I would normally follow this plan, I want to do something different with this campaign.

I'm going to let my players create the settlements they visit!

For the town of Lamros, I'm going to determine there are six locations of note. I'm going to create two of them myself, then leave the other four for my players to determine during play.

The locations I'll introduce are:

- **Karamos Kain's Hall** (Longhall; governmental; home of the town leader)
- **Laird the Blacksmith** (Forge; place to shop; expert smithy of great renown)

These give me two NPC's to introduce and use to seed some starting quests.

Undoubtedly, my players will ask about other places in town. When they do, I'll throw the question back at them. Seeing as their character's have been living in the town for some time, they should know some of the establishments and people who live there. I'll let them tell me what the places are and allow them to come up with the names of NPC's running them.

I'm not sure how this will go down, but let's see...

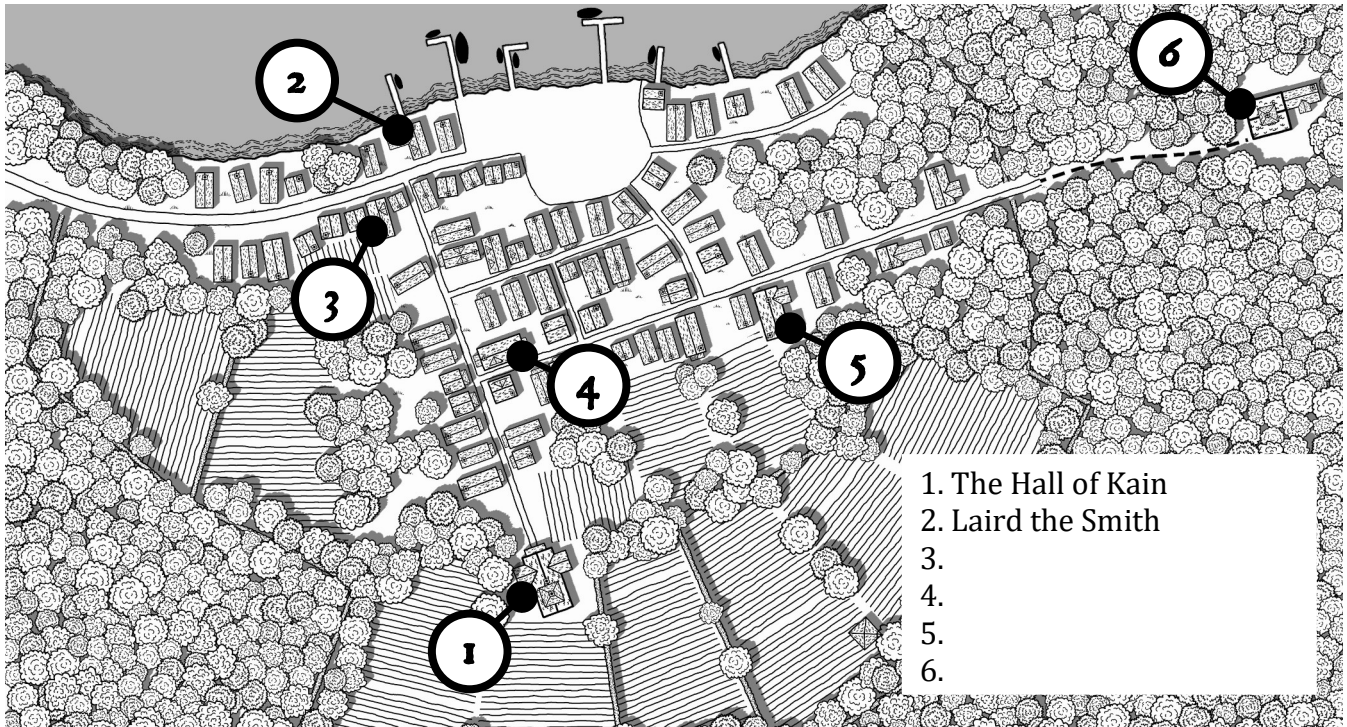
Finally, I need a reason why the town exists.

Thinking about my **Themes**, I'll draw on **Violence is Power** to describe Lamros:

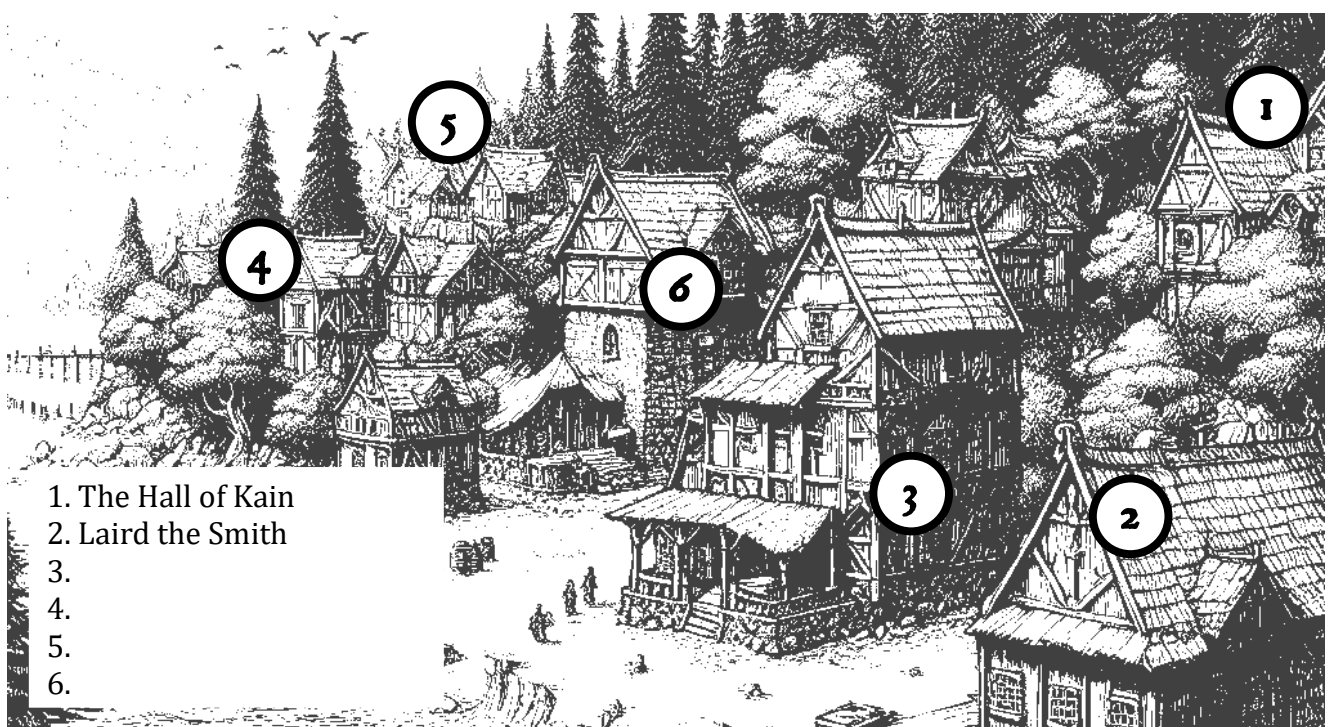
LAMROS MAPS



"Lamros was founded by the members of the Sworn Swords mercenary company. After years of fighting for the highest bidder, the Sworn Swords amassed a small fortune and used the gold earned to build a town where the members could retire and raise families. The discovery of an iron mine nearby allowed the town to prosper, producing some of the finest weapons and armour in the region."



A traditional top-down map of Lamros



A Theatre-of-the-mind map of Lamros

NPCs

WHO LIVES THERE?

Now I need to flesh out the town a little so I understand what's going on and have some other details on hand in case I need them. These details will be Major NPCs, Conflicts, and Names

Major NPCs

Major NPCs are characters I want the PCs to get to know and be the source of quests and information. I only need a few details on each: covering description, their wants, and their fields of knowledge or interest.

Description: I find that giving NPCs a few keywords to describe their appearance, quirks, mannerisms, or notable features is the easiest way to bring one to life in the minds of my players. They also help me to role-play the NPC at the table. I don't know how important the NPC will become to the campaign, so I can always elaborate further on them at a later date.

Wants: Wants determine the motivations of an NPC. They also focus what the NPC talks about to the players. Wants can be short or long-term in nature, and can change on a whim. Recycling a NPC's wants will change their behaviour and give them something new to talk to the PCs about.

Knowledge: This represents what areas of expertise the NPC is skilled in. It's what the PC's can question the NPC about, gathering insight, information, or training from them on the topics they specialise in. Knowledge also determines where an NPC's proficiencies lie. If I ever have to make rolls for them, I'll give the highest chance of success to rolls revolving around their areas of expertise.

With these three things I can describe who the NPC is and what they look like, know their motivations and expertise, and understand what they like to talk about. I'll reinforce these NPC with some of the setting's Themes and give each one a related quest to hand out.

I don't foresee combat with any of the NPCs happening, so I don't need to spend any time creating stat-blocks for them. If it does, I'll simply use the stat-block of an appropriate level monster re-skinned and my players won't be any the wiser!

For Lamros, I need Karamos Kain and Laird the Smith, but I'm also going to create a third NPC to drop in just in case I need one.

Example NPCs

Karamos Kain

Mercenary Captain; leader of Lamros; aging, grey-hair, muscular build, thick beard, bald head.

- **Wants:** Lamros to prosper; safety for the townsfolk
- **Knowledge:** War, tactics, mass-battles, weapons, leadership
- **Quest:** Destroy the black locusts plaguing Lamros

Laird the Smith

Retired mercenary quartermaster; large man; thick, bushy beard, greying hair, many battle-scars.

- **Wants:** Good ore to forge
- **Knowledge:** Blacksmithing, battle, drinking games
- **Quest:** Delve deeper in the mines for new veins of ore

Calla One-Eye

Clever merchant; city connections; wiry fellow; eye patch; black hair; hooked nose.

- **Wants:** To get rich doing deals with the highest bidder.
- **Knowledge:** Negotiation, streetwise, money contacts, trade routes.
- **Quest:** Offers lucrative pay for relics recovered from ancient ruins.

CONFLICTS



WHAT IS HAPPENING IN TOWN?

Conflicts are the stories that are currently affecting the settlement. Player characters can take sides in them, either helping or hindering one side or the other.

Conflicts can lead to multiple adventures before they're resolved, and can play out regardless of whether the PC's decide to get involved. This adds a sense of the world being alive – events happening around the PCs, rather than being instigated and driven by them.

Each time the PCs visit the town (or after an appropriate amount of time has elapsed), I'll advance the conflict in some way. Perhaps my PCs will witness the progression directly, or perhaps they'll hear of the development while talking to an NPC. Either way, the conflict needs to appear to exist and live.

I like to create two conflicts for each settlement: The active conflict and the secondary (background) conflict, with only one playing out at a time.

I give each conflict a short description, along with detailing the opposing sides in the form of an **Enemy** and an **Ally**. Each conflict also needs a **Consequence** that will come to pass if nothing is done, the outcome influenced by character actions or a random roll. Once the current conflict is resolved, I'll introduce another. I usually give early hints at these potential secondary conflicts through interactions with the NPCs involved.

It also depends on what interest the PCs take as to whether or not I create more detail for the conflicts. For now, a basic outline of each conflict will do.

Black Locusts

Swarms of black locusts have recently ravaged the town's crops, leaving the inhabitants short on food supplies.

Enemy: A diabolic sorcerer is sending the locusts. Not to attack Lamros specifically, but plaguing The Golden Coast in general.

Ally: Karamos Kain; Wants to secure food for the townsfolk to replace that lost to the locusts.

Consequence: The townsfolk will starve without help

Swords For Hire

A seedy merchant is hiring people to search ancient ruins for artifacts, offering a very good price for particular items.

Enemy: A noble of Kameikis who hired the seedy merchant to do his bidding

Ally: Laird the Smith; knows the dangers of the ruins; could provide better arms and armour

Consequence: Many hired townsfolk are dying in the ruins

FINAL DETAILS

NAMES

I find having a list of random names is an essential DM trick. I don't want to try and predict everything that might happen in and around Lamros, nor can I predict what the players might want to do or who they might talk to. So, having a list of NPC names handy means that I can drop one in to cover any situation. A list of ten should be enough to last quite a while.

Once I've created the names, they can be used anywhere - not just in Lamros. Once I've used a name, I'll cross it off the list.

Thinking of NPC names isn't easy, so I usually turn to Gary Gygax's *Book of Names*, *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*, the end credits of TV shows and movies, or any source where I can find inspiration for names. I don't use random name generators because (in my experience) I have to spend time generating loads until I get an interesting, memorable one.

I like to use a form of old English naming conventions. They're easy to come up with, are understandable to my players (no difficult pronunciation), and fairly memorable.

Everyone has a given name: e.g. John.

Surnames are derived from professions, relationships, or physical features and are used to distinguish between people with the same name: e.g. John Butcher, John John's Son (Johnson), or Hook-nosed John. Unique surnames are typically reserved for the aristocracy, nobles, or those of famous descent: e.g. John Jahros.

I use the same technique to create names for dwarves, elves, etc. Obviously with a more cultural distinction such as Khorun Battleborn, or Elandil the Wise

These little tricks allow me to come up with useable names on the fly, but having a pre-made list saves me the trouble at the table. So, when I'm done, the list looks something like this:

- Tallman Weaver
- Dorgun Hunter
- Black Bill
- Reina Cook
- Old Fargis
- Harman Tom's Son (Thomson)
- Harman Hooknose
- Davis Ironshield
- Ballamy Farmer
- Treacherous Marl



Lamros

"Lamros was founded by the members of the Sworn Swords mercenary company. After years of fighting for the highest bidder, the Sworn Swords amassed a small fortune and used the gold earned to build a town where the members could retire and raise families. The discovery of an iron mine nearby allowed the town to prosper, producing some of the finest weapons and armour in the region."

NOTABLE INHABITANTS

- **Karamos Kain:** *Mercenary Captain; leader of Lamros; aging, grey-hair, muscular build, bald head.*
 - **Wants:** Lamros to prosper; safety for the townsfolk
 - **Knowledge:** War, tactics, mass-battles, weapons, leadership
 - **Quest:** Destroy the black locusts plaguing Lamros
- **Laird the Smith:** *Retired mercenary quartermaster; large man; thick, bushy beard, battle-scars.*
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 - **Quest:** Delve deeper in the mines for new veins of ore
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 - **Wants:** To get rich doing deals with the highest bidder.
 - **Knowledge:** Negotiation, streetwise, money contacts, trade routes.
 - **Quest:** Offers lucrative pay for relics recovered from ancient ruins.

OTHER NPCs

- Tallman Weaver, Dorgun Hunter, Black Bill, Reina Cook, Old Fargis, Harman Tom's Son (Thomson), Harman Hooknose, Davis Ironshield, Ballamy Farmer, Treacherous Marl.

CONFLICTS

• Black Locusts

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CONCLUSION



THE FIRST TOWN

The home base could be anywhere players can find a modicum of help and safety. Somewhere they can take a moment to relax, gather information, research spells, or resupply.

Rather than a town, it could be a travelling caravan, a cavern complex, a ship, or even a pocket dimension.

By the end of this process I have:

- **A map of the base that allows my players to visualise the settlement and imagine it in their minds eye.**
- **A list of people and places that can be found in the settlement, so players know what they can get from it in the form of equipment, items, information, rumours, and other resources.**
- **A number of quests and events that should give the players something to do and allow them to witness a “living” environment.**

Next time I'll look at developing the wilderness that surrounds Lamros and create the first dungeon for my players to explore.

Until then, let your imagination go wild!

-DMG