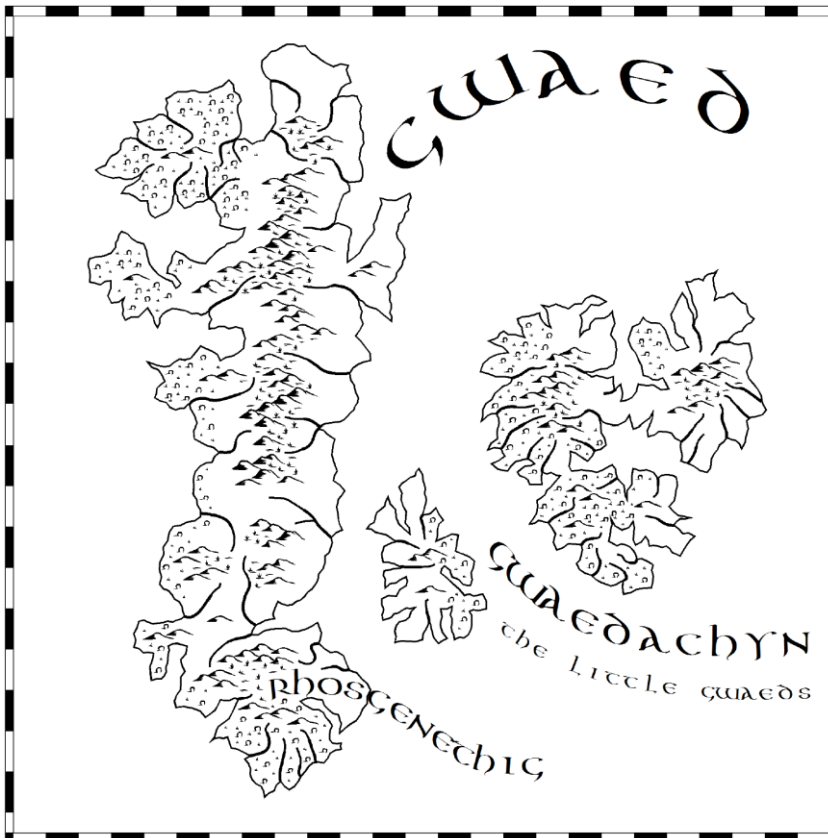


Too rocky to make a safe haven in a storm, and without a Nolgind settlement, Gwaed Island went unremarked by the first mariners to cross the Sea of Tirpal. Later, whalers that returned found the seal colonies unaccountably aggressive compared to those of neighbouring islands. The lack of easy profit relegated Gwaed to a landmark distinguished by the ruddy highlands at its heart and the unique reddish tint it boasts at dawn and dusk. Perhaps this is what has earned it its name, which translates from the Nolgind dialect as 'Blood'. However, Gwaed hides an ancient tragedy, the roots of a tragic myth, and the truth behind a legend.

## HISTORY & MYTH

Gwaed Island was once called Peroc, home of the Peren Nolgind clan. Legend claims it was a land of milk and honey: small but sheltered; with good fishing and excellent sealing. Then a monstrous creature remembered by Nolgind myth as 'The Beast of Blood' crashed onto its shore. Since then, if it is spoken of at all, it is called Gwaed (Blood) Island, for the polluting fluids the Beast spilled across it. Its history is now lost to all but the Cronas of each Nolgind clan.

It is still stocked with the natural bounty it always boasted but there is a strict taboo among the Nolgind which keeps the island inviolate. Its only visitors are the debased clan Hafen to whom it is a sacred place of pilgrimage. Their warriors make an annual visit to the peat bogs of the south, called Rhosgenethig.



### The Beast of Blood

Long ago, a great sea beast visited the Afarezirs. Bigger than any creature the clans had ever seen and coloured like blood it swept through the islands bringing death and destruction in its wake. The Beast was more than skin and flesh so that when it crawled out onto land it took on a new and fearsome form. It had many legs and a scaly shell from which sharp barbs protruded. Many Nolgind died on those barbs as they tried to break through the creature's shell and strike at its vitals.

Only Qulf, Aldrie and some of the other 'Seamost and Dawnmost' islands were spared before the Beast went 'Treewards' to attack the mainland. Sacrifices of thanks were made to the Kuboran gods; but then, to the Nolgind's horror, the Beast returned!

The hero, 'Whale Caller', went out into the Sea and begged aid from Grandfather Whale. At the same time an ancient seer heard the voice of Kadag telling her to heed the warnings from the 'Waters of Ardir'. That warning came when every member of the Whale Cult left their island home in search of higher ground on Ardir.

It was then that Grandfather Whale rose out of the waters and threw himself back into the depths. The wall of water he created smashed the Beast of Blood onto a rocky shore off which is basked and broke it to pieces. Its foul ichor was cast up on the beaches and wherever that foul fluid ran 'children of the beast' were spawned; scurrying and crawling over the island. It is from these low, corrupt things that the 'Lost Ones' grew.

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## GWAED ISLAND 2

### FLORA AND FAUNA

Gwaed's few beaches are fringed by clumps of common dune grasses though they have a very slight pink tint that is most noticeable at dawn and dusk. Looking inland shows all the vegetation to have the same hint of colour, tending to look darker further inland. That may just be a trick of the light and distance enhanced in the low light of dawn and dusk. Every plant found on the island sports a pale red tint to leaves, flowers and/or fruits. Tasting the vegetation causes numbness to the lips and tongue while extended skin contact produces an itchy rash. Ingestion of large amounts often leads to nausea and diarrhea among visitors with extended consumption risking shock and death.

The animals of Gwaed Island are the same as those found across the archipelago but visitors quickly discover they are significantly more aggressive than those found elsewhere. Any encounters reveal the animals to be more belligerent than usual seeking to close with visitors even if that would be an unnatural, or even suicidal, strategy. Those getting close enough to them describe the islands animal inhabitants as having 'a wild and wicked caste to their eyes'; almost as intimidating as their actions.

Most disturbing is the behaviour of the mountain rams. They aggressively butt and gore one another as if competing for a mate, whatever the season. More disturbingly one sealer described a ram continuing to attack even when its rival was driven to its knees. The attack continues until the downed animal was dead. Trampled to a bloody pulp the dead animal was then consumed by the victor. Nowhere else will such perverted behaviour be seen among normally herbivorous creatures.

#### The Hafen

These debased Nolging are the only regular visitors to the island. Their warriors travel there each year to harvest the Gwaedithir to which they are addicted.

#### The Lost Ones

Some say that the Lost Ones raid the Nolging clans and take young children to feast upon or to replace their numbers as their women are barren. Others tell that the women of the Lost bear monstrous children part Beast and part man who live in caves beneath the sea where they seek to rebuilt their Beastly ancestor and raise it again so it can continue its ravaging of the Nolging.

Still others claim that the children of the Lost are eaten at birth and their numbers replaced by children stolen from other islands.

All that is certain is that The Lost are friends of no sane man but a curse upon the garden of delights that the Afarezirs would otherwise be.

#### Rhosgenethig

'Little Girl's Heath' is where Gwaedithir grows; it dominates the centre of this treacherous peat bog. Even the Hafen, who are its only visitors, have forgotten why it was so named.

#### Gwaedeithir

Translated as 'the Bloody Traveller', Gwaedeithir is a variety of the plant, sethima, found across Ham. Gwaedeithir, in contrast is found only in the bogs of Rhosgenethig and nowhere else.

It has a number of unique properties which make it more than a red leaved and berried form of the Ochre Creeper common to marshes throughout the archipelago, and Ham in general.

