

Daria

- [Darian Names](#)
- [Darian Towns](#)

The Kingdom of Daria spans all the coastal lowlands from the River Jarlsblut in the north to the Peaks of Dawn in the south. Once, Daria claimed all lands to the Druidwash, but these ambitions were smashed in the Twenty Years War. After this stinging defeat, King Kron ordered the construction of a huge wall, as high as four men and 40 feet thick, running from the River Jarlsblut to the lake. Kron declared the wall a defense against further attacks by the barbarian Ambrians, and ever since then, Daria has isolated itself from Ambria completely, as the wall was built with no gates.

Since the time of the Twenty Years War, Daria has been ruled by a series of petty despots, each of whom has used the army more for terrorizing the populace than harassing neighboring Kingdoms. The current king, Zephrahm IX, is of a somewhat different mold, however. He rules Daria with a proverbial iron hand. Zephrahm has capitalized on Daria's strong military tradition, and has tripled the size of the army since ascending the throne 10 years ago. With the help of the Royal Wizard, Sarador, he currently plans to use Ambrian prince Evren's refusal to marry his daughter as an excuse for invading Ambria. It is rumored that when the Darian armies march southward this time, they will have dark, sorcerous creations of Sarador marching alongside them.

Roleplaying Synopsis

Daria's warlike and expansionistic nature suits it well for playing the villain in a campaign. It combines the militaristic totalitarianism of Imperial Rome with the oppression of late Czarist-era Russia. The culture is vaguely Slavic. Daria is not a nice place, but perhaps it could be, if Zephrahm and Sarador were removed from power somehow. Daria makes a good setting for espionage and covert adventures, as the government is very suspicious about foreigners, and PCs (especially those from Ambria) will have to watch their step. Daria can also be a more overt enemy if the GM decides to have Zephrahm declare outright war on Ambria.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

Daria is primarily composed of coastal lowlands. These are covered by grain fields and a few small deciduous forests. The climate is very hot in the summer, very cold in the winter, and is always humid.

Some of the areas along the seacoast and Lake Bellora are very marshy, and home to swarms of mosquitoes and biting flies. Large wildlife is uncommon except in the Peaks of Dawn, where there are fewer humans. The climate there is also cooler and drier, due to the higher elevation.

LIFE IN DARIA

The lifestyle of the average Darian is marked primarily by thankless toil. The earth is not especially

fertile, and the peasants must labor from dusk to dawn in order to make a living. As a result, few Darians have the time or energy to foster a rebellion against their oppressive rulers. The King rules through the military, which traditionally has been kept in line through fear of the Royal Wizard. This loyalty is reinforced by superstitions that one will not sit in honor with his ancestors in the afterlife if he betrays the King. Many Darians have attempted to escape the dismal farming life of the peasantry by moving to Darius or Ulgrad, Daria's large port cities. Most of those who do, however, simply exchange one type of poverty for another. Daria's cities are crowded, polluted, and disease-ridden. The sprawling slums are criminal havens, and even the middle-class shop districts are run-down in comparison with their Ambrian and Irolon counterparts.

About the only chance a commoner has to escape his lot in life is to join the military. The Darian army is very well-trained and equipped. Officers are accorded a great deal of respect, and even foot soldiers are given many privileges. A soldier may take any food and clothing he needs from commoners, even though the army is paid well. While the general populace may grumble about this, most accept it, as they accept most misfortune, as yet another necessary hardship of life.

Darians practice ancestor-worship, and tend to be very superstitious. Organized religion is discouraged (and is less dominant than other nations), as the monarchy considers it a threat. Magic is similarly discouraged. Practicing magicians must possess a royal license, and only magicians completely loyal to the king are ever granted one. Player characters must therefore be careful to avoid revealing any magical ability in public, as they may face fines and imprisonment.

PLACES OF INTEREST

Darius: the capital of Daria, Darius is a burgeoning city of 500,000 citizens. The city is centered around the Royal Citadel, a fortress-like structure made of black granite. More fortifications are also being built at the present time. The city's buildings are generally ugly and utilitarian. The only exception is the tower of Sarador, the Royal Wizard, which is a 350' tall obelisk of black and white marble. It can be seen from anywhere in the city.

Sarador is a cool, calculating man who aids King Zephrahm to the best of his ability, but many Darians suspect he has darker secret motivations. The King himself is a devious and petty man. He cares nothing for the citizenry, and would gladly have the entire population of a city killed if it would assure him a place in the history books.

Ulgrad: Much like Darius, Ulgrad is a sprawling city of dull, functional buildings. Somewhat smaller (pop. 300,000), Ulgrad's only fortification is a small keep. While the Darian army garrison provides some deterrent, the navy is not nearly as good, and Ulgrad is consequently a favorite target of Dornican pirates and Brondheim raiders. This may change, however, as Zephrahm has chosen Ulgrad to be the staging ground for his campaign against the Dwarves of the Peaks of Dawn.

Vlaskarov: Vlaskarov is a small city (pop. 60,000). It is somewhat more pleasant than the other Darian cities, as it is built on the shores of Lake Bellora. Much of the city is actually built on piers extending out into the lake. Under the docks is a city beneath the city. Smugglers run a thriving black market here, with goods brought across the lake from Ambria. Almost anything can be bought here, for a price, and healthy bribes see to it that the city's guard looks the other way.

Kron's Wall: 25 feet high, and 40 feet thick, Kron's wall is an excellent barrier to invasion, as no gates exist. This actually comforts the Ambrians, who consider Kron's Folly to be as much of a barrier to attacking Darian legions as Ambrian armies. Sarador has promised King Zephrahm that he can

move an army past the wall without compromising Darian security, though how he intends to perform this feat has not been spoken of.

The Peaks of Dawn: These low mountains are similar to the U.S. Appalachians, but with fewer forests. They are mineral rich, and the home to a great deal of wildlife. More malevolent monsters are driven out by the hill Dwarves which live there (see below). The Dwarves of the Peaks of Dawn: Nonhumans are normally frowned upon in Daria, and many of those which attempt to settle down and live there end up disappearing . The only nonhuman group of any size is the Dwarves of the Peaks of Dawn. These sturdy Hill Dwarves immigrated to the area after a long exodus from the Drakor Mountains, which they felt were becoming infested with orcs.

The Dwarves mine the region, and are excellent warriors and craftsmen. They also claim all of the low mountains as their own, and brook no incursion to their sovereignty. Their existence has been a thorn in the side of the Darian kings for 500 years, but a dedicated effort to drive them from the hills was never attempted until the time of Zephrahm IX. The King currently has dispatched an entire legion (25,000 men) to hunt down and kill any Dwarves spotted. Many border skirmishes have already occurred, with inconclusive results, but since the entire Dwarven population numbers no more than 10,000, it is only a matter of time before they are driven away or exterminated.

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