

County de Whittemere

The County de Whittemere may be found west of the northern spur of the Valley of Souls mountain range. The land is a mixture of pasture, marsh and thin woods. It is largely unremarkable territory, but suitable for farming. In fact, the region is widely known for the large herds of sheep that graze the low hills, moving over the terrain like strange, thick fog in the morning.

Smack in the midst of the region with the lowest fae population on the continent, the County is the governmental seat for several surrounding human communities, all similar in that they rely largely on farm and trade for their wealth. For those who have traveled much of the continent, the absence of the fae here can be startling. Although it may be hard to believe, until recently the traditions of County de Whittemere had for centuries included a wholesale denial of even the possibility of fae existence. Fairy stories were not told to children, and any discussion of magical creatures, beings, or events was considered to be in extremely poor taste, if not grounds for shunning.

Some tales survive, however, which seem to indicate that the fae were not always absent from this land. At the extreme borders, rumors vary: some say that the manor house of the de Whittemere family was built directly on the site of a former Fairy Garden; another story declares that an overgrown mushroom ring swallowed up an entire elven village; and still another tale tells of a war between two centaur tribes from which none survived, but from which occasional bits of weaponry may still be found when the plows turn up new fields for planting.

These stories, though, almost never traveled to the heart of the county; it was common knowledge among traders that one kept one's stories to oneself when entering de Whittemere. There have been notable exceptions, however. For instance, there was the unfortunate instance of the nurse to the de Whittemere family, who persisted in telling ridiculous fairy stories to their youngest daughter, Gillian. Gillian at one point let slip to her elder brother, Andre, that the nurse had in fact claimed to have fairy blood; it was not long after that the nurse was found dead at the bottom of the rootceller steps, the victim of a most terrible, and certainly accidental, fall. The following morning, Gillian was nowhere to be found, and was not seen again for over ten years.

It was during this time that the fair farming turned poor across the region. The entire County was subjected to unfamiliar heavy rains, warm winters, and rare windstorms. Crops failed, and in the ensuing years trade suddenly became more of a necessity. When more long-ranging trade excursions returned with shocking tales of real fae in distant cities, the folk of de Whittemere were first skeptical, then shocked, then outraged that such horrific creatures should be allowed to live. The Count went so far to send his oldest son out to confirm these rumors. Andre, however, took this as an opportunity to go on "ear-hunts," exercising the most violent possibilities of human insecurity when confronted by the unknown.

Years passed, and the Count de Whittemere died of a sudden seizure. This left the Countess as Regent, and Andre as Count...and yet Andre continued to ride out afield, taking greater pleasure in his "hunting trips" than in the actual government of his lands. This, plus the fact that he and his wife had yet to produce an heir, along with his reputation for rampant womanizing and abuse, caused the people of the County to begin to look upon him with dismay, and eventually disgust. Sentiment had fallen so poorly that when word arrived one day that

Andre had been slain...and moreover that his killer had been none other than an elf... the people of de Whitemere were more concerned with the matter of succession than with any thoughts of revenge.

The County was now in the hands of the Regent Countess and Andre's widow. Never before had de Whitemere been without a male heir for the Seat, and matters were only complicated by the return of Gillian, who now called herself Rahne Whitebriar. She brought with her what seemed to be the answer to the County's difficulties; her young son could be groomed for leadership. The revelation of the boy's own fae blood, though, came as something of a shock. However, the increased exposure to fae folk over the years through trade connections had lessened much of the fear and hatred on the part of the County's inhabitants. Although all admit that the child, Beren, is not ready to take title yet, most agree that there is nothing to prohibit it in the future. That, plus the sudden, and seemingly coincidental, resurgence of healthy weather patterns upon Gillian's return seemed to bode good fortunes to the more superstitious inhabitants. At the current time, de Whitemere continues to be overseen by the Countess, the Lady Triess (Andre's widow), and Lady Gillian, although Gillian's hand in County politics is intermittent, as she is seldom there. Currently, Gillian (or Rahne, as she prefers) is focusing her interests on a small port town acquired some years ago by her brother, called Cullyport. Why Cullyport should be of such interest to her is, as yet, a mystery, but people of the County hope that it will mean increased trade in goods from distant lands.