

DUST TO DUST



ASHES TO ASHES...



The Dust to Dust Campaign Rules are based on the Shattered Isles system created by Ian Lemke and Jennifer Hartshorn and the King's Gate system revised by Jonathan Cantrell, Jorge Diaz, Kristyn McGeehan, Will Kotas and Adam Miller.

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Chapter 1: World of Dust to Dust

History

What follows is an overview of major and formative events in the world of Dust to Dust. Players wishing a more in-depth view of the complicated and often obscure past are strongly recommended to possess appropriate Lores and/or pursue such information during the course of play.

Around four millennia ago, once-proud kingdoms and empires began a long slide into ruin, accelerated by the upheaval of the lands, sinking of islands, plague, and famine. This age of ruin and darkness lasted for three thousand years, in which much of the history of the world was forgotten. Thirteen hundred years ago, the light of civilization was renewed. A group of wanderers from Luzerne City found Marath Suvla, and the Redwood Throne was revealed to them in all its majesty. They returned to Luzerne City with word of this miracle and laid the foundation for the Church. This marked the first year of the Regnal Era.

In the third century of the Regnal Era, the Redwood Throne supported a movement to separate the Principalities from the crumbling Great Kingdom of Tarsikka, ending in a bloody war of independence. In the years since then, the Principalities have grown to become a dominant power of the known world. The Church has spread its influence as well, and most people of Gaunt and Athral Isle are familiar with its teachings.

Other nations have risen from the ashes as well. The northern land once known as Druma has become the nations of Oresund and Gaunt. The island kingdom of Endeiras is now Athral Isle. Ophira developed into the Caliphate of Dusk, the Emirate of Rahaal, and the Sultanate of Khodar-i-Gesh, collectively known as Akathia. The Great Kingdom of Tarsikka is much diminished from its days as the Empire of Tharicia, but it still stands.

The last thirty years have seen a rise in political conflicts and warfare. After ninety years of struggle, Athral Isle fell to Gauntish invaders. The natives have rebelled against their foreign overlords repeatedly, resulting in even more brutal repression. With the support of the Redwood Throne, the Principalities of Verdien went to war against Tarsikka, ending in the annexation of the Skattenmark. The Principalities have also suffered from two civil wars: the Grand Dukes' War and von Berga's Rebellion. The Sultanate of Khodar-i-Gesh fell to the sudden onslaught of horrific creatures called ghuls that came from across the Wasteland. Three years ago, the Emirate of Rahaal fell to inhuman invaders, called the Marrashi, from across the southern sea. Peasant revolts have long been a part of Tarsikka, but the past few years have been especially contentious.

Three years ago, the Caliphate of Dusk rediscovered the location of Marath Suvla and established a colony there with a provincial governor, or Khedive. The colony is deep inside Troll Country, and the Caliphate cannot afford it the support it needs. The Caliphate and their Tarsikkan allies have invited two other political coalitions to join them in the defense of legendary Marath Suvla. Verdiens, Gauntishmen, and Oresunders operate under the banner of

the Redwood Throne, while native Athrals and guild-aligned Verdiens serve the Guilds of the Hulder.

Civilization

The world of Dust to Dust is both like and unlike our own. It is a world of magical wonders, unspeakable horrors, and faith and heresy. The people of the world seek to understand the world around them, control the complex forces of the universe, and build upon the knowledge of their ancestors.

Dust to Dust is historically similar to our world in the High Middle Ages, perhaps between 900 A.D. and 1100 A.D. The existence of magic and other factors have created many distinct divergences. Below is an overview of the accomplishments of the civilizations and peoples of the world of Dust to Dust. We hope they will help you join our consensual reality and take your place in the story.

Cultures

There are many cultures from which Dust to Dust characters may hail. Humans and homunculi may come from Akathia, Athral Isle, Gaunt, Oresund, the Principalities of Verdien, Tarsikka, or the Tharici. Celestials come from Heaven, but they may belong to one of several Spheres and one of several Philosophies. The Returned have come from the First Age, and may come from any of its cultures: Druma, Endeiras, Mazhan, Ophira, Tharicia, or Ton Isiq. The culture packets for each of these contain secrets of those cultures. Contact the Plot committee once you've decided upon a culture based on the information below.



The Kingdom of Athral Isle

Government Style: Monarchy (Occupation)

Ruler: King Sigmar Voluspa

Population: 1.7 Million

Capital: Exendun

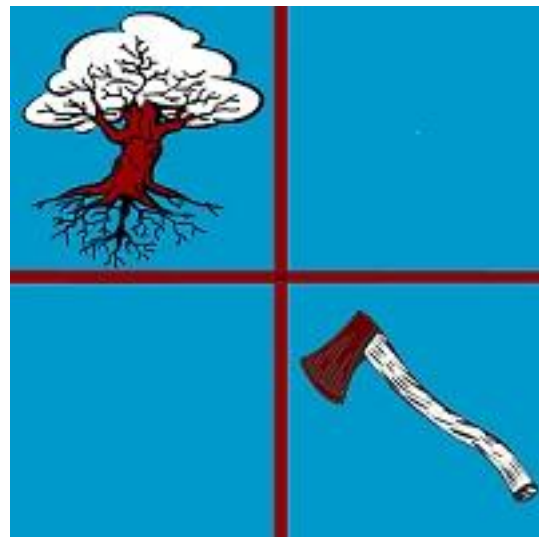
Alchemy: Illegal, but practiced in secret.

Ritualism: Common

Inscription: Common

Forge Magic: Common

National Symbol: Currently a bisected field of blue with red lines, a red world tree in the upper left, and a bleeding axe in lower right.



Land

The land of Athral Isle is temperate for the most part. It is a land of variety in terrain and quality. It has low salt marshes in the south, white beaches and the busy port city of Malden in the southwest, and the capital of Exendun in the southeast.

A line of mountains runs from near Malden in the southwest up along the western coast. Along the western coast of Athral Isle, it is not uncommon to find sheer cliffs from the sea to the mountains. There are a series of small, rocky islands found off the coast that have been the home

of many legends over the centuries, not the least of which is the Firstborn city found on the small island of Maithrindar. Now a place of moss-covered ruins, it was once thought to be a powerful citadel of the Firstborn. Only a few fisherman live there, and they do not stray far into the ruins.

Further inland, lowland farms reach from the mountains of the west toward the eastern coast. They stop only for the Geistwood. The Geistwood is a vast forest covering the midlands, the north and the east. While there are villages in the heart of the forest and one large city, Seresbury, the wood has long been thought to be infested with spirits and monsters. It is home to many bandits, and the most noted of these are the Firstborn Sons.

Uethyl was once a Firstborn city, but fell into ruin. Now it is a site of a thriving village. Given its location and legends about the wood, the Gauntish presence there is minimal; many uprisings start there.

Off the eastern shore, there are tiny rocky islands and hidden hazards to navigation. The one large eastern seaport is Seastone Deeps. It is one of the few places along the coast with a relatively clear and safe approach. Lighthouses along the coast guide travelers past hazards and toward Seastone Deeps. The city itself is a fortress; when Gaunt invaded it was the first place attacked and among the last to fall.

North and eastward, there are more mountains, including the highest mountain in Athral Isle, Kier's Rock. The people of the highland mountains are a hardy people dwelling in small settlements. The one exception is the city of Tanalassa, nestled in the mountains near the Thistlewine River. Tanalassa is a trading city, and many rivercraft carry goods up and down the river between Tanalassa and Seresbury.

In the north and the west of Athral Isle, the land is barren. Few trees grow, and the plants that grow out of the earth turn to ashes. No one knows for certain how long the land has been poisoned, and there are many stories of how the Wasteland came to be. Bandits dwell just inside the wastes, raiding across the border for food and drinkable water. People even more wicked make their homes in the Wasteland as well.

The actual political boundaries are made up of 9 counties. These counties are Malden, Seastone, Conwarashire, Seresbury, Tanalassa, Harn, Darby, Hempton, and Sherfield.

The History

Athral Isle is a land conquered. It is a land with a long history and many legends. Old tales speak of Endeiras, land of the Firstborn and the Humans who lived among them. It is a tale almost lost to history; none know what truly caused the fall of the mighty empire. Some say it was something in the Wasteland that even then troubled them. Some say it was the betrayal of humans or magics of an ancient darkness.

After the fall of Endeiras was a dark time. Many small kingdoms rose and fell. Queen Nillan the Bloody, King Harn the Betrayer, and King Morgo the Bastard were but a few leaders of legend. It was not till the year 701 RE that Good King Auric, the first king of the Couraine dynasty, united the nation under one ruler. The core of his army was a company of archers.

For four centuries, the Couraine kings and queens led Athral Isle in a mostly peaceful existence. In 852 RE, Gauntish forces attacked the island and were turned away by King Theirian's navy. In 880 there was a year of civil war, as Atwin the Younger fought with his sister Nirian for the throne. In her mercy, the victorious Queen Nirian exiled Atwin, but he returned five years later. This time he was imprisoned, but he was killed in an escape attempt. In 903 RE, the Gauntish came in a large raiding fleet once more. They landed and fought a protracted battle for most a year until they were finally defeated at the Battle of Malden Cliffs. It was said their heads were sent back to Gaunt by the boatload as a warning. Despite a few other conflicts here and there, Athral Isle seemed to be a land blessed by good fortune.

That changed in the year 1109 RE, when Gauntish forces simultaneously attacked the northeastern shore and the southern ports. While the attack in the south was repelled, half the Athral Navy was burned in the harbor. The northern assault pushed through the mountains, and unlike previous assaults, the Gauntish raiders stayed. The hard winter and the mountain passes gave them time and space to dig in. While the Athral forces struggled against the weather and terrain, the Gaunts resupplied and increased their numbers twofold. For decades, the forces of Gaunt slowly drove King Mark of the House of Couraine southward, as more and more of their countrymen arrived in longships. This conflict stopped the Athrals from concerning themselves with matters on the continent for many years. Finally King Ardith, the son of King Mark, was captured in the cliffs near Malden, ending the rule of the House of Couraine in 1190 RE. King Drostan was crowned king of all the Athral Isle.

In RE 1197, Prince Auberic sneaked into the country from the Free City of Hulder. Auberic was the son of the last king of the Couraine line's brother, making his claim legitimate. The Redwood Throne ensured his failure, however, by declaring their support for the rule of King Sigmar I, Drostan's successor. While the Prince was brave and charming, he lacked the military acumen of older men. He took his levied army into an open battle in the fields of Conwarashire. His defeat was inevitable, as his force of 500 knights, mercenaries, and untrained peasants faced nearly 2,000 hardened warriors of Gaunt. When he was captured, the King hanged him in a cage from the walls of Exendun until he died of starvation and rotted away.

The Alchemists led the ill-fated Tower of Winter Rebellion in 1205 RE. The fact that many Alchemists escaped the fall of the tower caused even harsher penalties to be levied against the practice. In 1207 RE, the Highsummer Defiance of the Athral townsfolk in county Seresbury ended in blood. Twenty leaders of the uprising in the village of Uethyl were hanged. Legend says they sang as the nooses were placed around their necks. The story says that their song did not end till the bodies were cold fruit in the night.

The People

The Athral people are divided. Some are descended from the native Athrals, while many Gauntishmen have known no home other than Athral Isle. The near century of constant fighting and the oppression of Sigmar I is a festering wound upon the land.

The Athral natives (sometimes calling themselves Cuilic) are the descendants of humans that lived in the empire of Endeirias. They are a proud people tied to the land and their traditions. They are farmers, fishermen, craftsmen and tradesmen. They are forbidden by law to carry a blade longer than a dagger into a city, and it is illegal for any of them to own a shield, even

nobles. Many native Athral nobles kept their positions in exchange for swearing fealty to Sigmar and paying extra taxes from the revenues of their lands for "reparations".

Many of the invaders have lived their entire lives on the Athral Isle. While many of them think of themselves as primarily Gauntish and continue Gauntish traditions, a growing number of the younger members of their society think of themselves less as the proud raiders and more as the entitled ruling class of Athral Isle. Nevertheless, Sigmar requires all males of age and Gauntish descent to "learn the ways of axe, shield and war." The large number of well-trained Gauntish warriors keeps the Athral peasants in line most of the time.

The Lost Heirs of House Couraine

The legends concerning the last days of King Ardith are numerous. One story that has been proven false claimed that his wife and most of his children were never found. Another says the children were spirited away to the island of Maithrindar, to be raised in secret in the ruins. Still another says that the children were sacrificed to cast a bloody and terrible curse on the Gauntishmen, though this rumor was likely started by the Gauntish themselves.

There are some signs that a lost heirs survived, despite the best attempts of Gaunt to end the line. The Gauntish slew the king and his wife, and at least one son. There are conflicting reports as to whether he had three children or four. His brother's children were rounded up and killed after Prince Auberic's Rebellion, but rumors persist that one might have escaped.

Whatever the case, both King Sigmar and the Redwood Throne insist that none of the heirs were left alive. If someone were to come forward and claim being an heir, they would no doubt be executed if caught. Despite this, the common folk still speak in whispers of the return of a True King.

Faith and Religion

The people of Athral Isle generally follow the Redwood Throne, which has many churches spread throughout the nation. Following their backing of the Gauntish during the invasion, the native people of Athral Isle felt betrayed by the Redwood Throne, burning or otherwise dismantling churches in the outlying areas. In the intervening years, loyalty to the Throne has been slowly recovering, as the people realize that they need the Redwood Throne, and that they are stuck with the Gauntish for years to come. There is still mutual distrust in the region, but overall support of the Redwood Throne is trending up. In some areas where faith and belief is very low, the Left Hand has been called in to root out the source of the displeasure and remove the malcontents.

What makes the Athral Isle great?

The Athral Isle is a land with a long and proud history. Despite being occupied by the Gauntish forces, the Athral people are not conquered, not really. They keep their history alive in tales. They keep their traditions alive in secret. They keep their hope alive in rebellion and tales of lost heirs. Secret Alchemists keep their practices alive. Bandit leaders, Displaced Hand masters, and simple peasants all conspire to keep alive the nation, the dreams of who they were, and of what they can be again. Even some of those born of the Gauntish occupiers find the Athral Isle's history compelling, and consider this land their true home.

What makes the Athral Isle less than desirable?

Athral Isle is a land in turmoil. The oppressive reign of King Sigmar is not forgiving. The native Athral subjects cannot speak their minds in a land where "justice" is decided by a Gauntish lord with his axe and shield. The natives are taxed cruelly; resistance leaders are imprisoned and killed. Writing the wrong thing can result in arrest and execution. Practicing the wrong magic is a capital crime. Many Athrals have turned to banditry and thievery just to survive. All the while, Sigmar outlaws a little more of what it means to be Athral every year.

Further, the first ethnically Gauntish youths born under their parents' occupation in the Athral Isle are just coming to their adulthood in 1211 RE. These children face the awkward position of being hated in what is technically their homeland, and yet somewhat alienated from their Gauntish ancestry. The obligations of their clans back in Gaunt must be balanced with the obligations of country lordship, and many of the traditions of their ancestral people seem a bit backwards and out of place in the more hospitable Isle to some of them. It is thus a strong temptation for ethnically Gauntish, Athral-born children to become more Athral in attitude than Gauntish. Their Gauntish parents do not tend to approve of this weakening of their bloodline, opposing it with varying degrees of severity.

Theme & Costuming

The theme in Athral Isle is one of the oppressed natives resisting foreign oppression, at least for the Athral natives. The young of Gauntish descent are generally trying to find their place in the world, being neither the same as the Gauntish who claimed this land, nor the natives. The sources you might draw on start with books or movies of Robin Hood (pretty much any of the ones not starring Kevin Costner), Ivanhoe, and maybe a touch of King Arthur (the one with Clive Owen). Add in some real-world tales of King Cnut or the Anglo-Saxon and Danish occupation of Britain and more fantastical tales (like the TV show Robin Hood) and you have the right mix. This is a land of folklore, archers, hidden alchemists and bandit heroes. There are hidden heirs and wicked kings.

Athral Isle is the most basic "fantasy genre" style. If you own any Ren Faire clothing, you can probably dress in this style. Athrals prefer hunter green, and pale or bright blue (for their flag) in their clothes. Touches of blood red or crimson are not uncommon, but it doesn't tend to be the predominant color. The peasantry also sports a lot of brown because it is cheap. Most Athral fabrics are of a coarse weave, the fabric textures prized as a mark of the weaver (much as different tartans signify different clans in Sctoland, each weaver on the Isle seems to have their own texture to their fabric). Most Athrals wear corduroy and rough wool; carved wood and horn are often seen as buttons and bead accents. Tooled leather accents most bags, belts, bracelets, shoes, and hair pieces. The most frequent images in Athral adornment is the world tree and oak leaves. Hoods are most often in the long-tailed liripipe style, and those with long hair of either gender often wear their hair up or back in leather-worked holders.

Cultural Advantage

Athral PCs spend 2 fewer points for Healing Ways, Bow, Crossbow, and Thrown Weapon. They may only receive this price break once.

The Caliphate of Dusk

Government Style: Constitutional Republic

Ruler: Caliph Demir Isveren (Most Serene Excellency)

Population: Roughly four million, counting refugees from the Emirate and Sultanate

Capital: Darende

Alchemy: Government Supported, and common

Ritualism: Government Supported, and uncommon, with a strong scribe and historian tradition

Inscription: Government Supported, and uncommon, with a strong scribe and historian tradition

Forge Magic: Government Supported, but rare, with most smithing and minerals being imported

National Symbol: double-headed golden eagle superimposed on a mountain



The Land

The lands of Akathia were once comprised of three great nations, the Caliphate of Dusk, the Emirate of Rahaal, and the Sultanate of Khodar-i-Gesh. Out of the three sister nations, only the Caliphate remains both sovereign and in relative good health. This is due in large part to housing two great centers of learning in the modern world: the military academy known as the Tower of Glass, which houses the Sand Spire warrior order, and the Great City of Scribes, Khaldun, which houses one of the world's largest and greatest libraries. The Sunbreak Mountains, in the East, are home to the mysterious city-fortress known as the Rat's Castle, illegal by law, but rumored to be home to a brotherhood of assassins most foul. Tralzun province is home to the city on the mountain, Timarhane, one of the premier weapon and armor crafting centers of the nation. Sirkaye is home to the City of Smoke, Bazmel. Bazmel is sometimes seen as a city of frivolities and decadence, but none can deny its importance as a center for trade with the lands east of the Caliphate.

Three protectorate states have been granted to Emirate refugees by the Caliphate, all bordering their former homes. Mahallesi borders the Crusader State in a slim rectangle to the north, Zoridurum follows the curvature of the lands to the northeast, and Olma, the largest of the three, is situated in the middle of the eastern border regions. These three areas are ruled by the Emirate-in-Exile, Emir Bomani Thalas. He ascended to the throne shortly after the death of his father, Emir Darius Thalas, during the invasion of the Emirate. He operates mainly out of Olma, but is often found in the Royal Palace in Darende, in conference with the Caliph and his advisors.

The Sultanate has not been as lucky as either the Caliphate or the Emirate. The country has been decimated, with survivors flocking to the city of Tuzagi. Most of the Sultan's court has not appeared after the people began to flee the nation, and most believe them dead. What little government remains of the Sultanate makes it home in Tuzagi as well, due to the history of the town as a point of welcome. The refugees follow the word of Muhtar Baska Ayri, the Muhtar of the town of Tuzagi. However, Muhtar Ayri often consults with the two remaining political figures of the Sultanate, Padan Karif Uruman, a middle ranking officer in the Sultan's guard before he fled to the Caliphate, and Ustandar Ursiya Edris, who was the Ustandar (the equivalent of Muhtar) of the now fallen lands of Edris before she too fled. They are allowed to govern and

rule their own people inside of Tuzagi, as long as they do not upset the balance set in place by the Muhtar. Due to prolonged exposure to less than ideal conditions, the citizens of the Sultanate grow restless and chafe for activity to begin in the retaking of their homeland. The normally small town of Tuzagi has become a tent city for the foreseeable future, with tension growing constantly.

The History

The Caliphate is one of the oldest lands in the world. The Caliphate can trace its history from the time when it was part of the great land known as Ophira. The three nations now known as the Caliphate, the Emirate and the Sultanate underwent a period of great war and strife, beginning in 1821 TE with the assassination of Caliph Fadil by the renowned assassin Hayalet. Hayalet was rumored to have been hired by nobles in the area now known as the Sultanate in order to seize control of the throne. What followed has become known in the time since as the Dust War, though at the time it was referred to as the Noble's War. Following many years of bloodshed, peace was finally established with the signing of the Tuzagi Contract in 1883 TE, following the defeat of Komutan Djoser and his forces in the area surrounding Tuzagi by Komutan Khalid, the leader of the military forces of what would become the Caliphate. This established the three lands of the Caliphate, the Emirate, and the Sultanate. This peace lasted for centuries, until the fall of Khodar-i-Gesh in 1182 RE to ghul forces, followed by the fall of the Emirate in 1208 RE, and the creation of the Crusader State of Marash el-Dahaka. The Caliphate has accepted the refugees from both nations, and is currently holding strong, though tensions are building within the nation.

The People

The Caliphate laws and traditions of determining a Caliph stem from Hukuk Kaydırma, a sacred text pre-dating even most accounts of history in the Caliphate. This extends back until such times as the thirty-one tribes of the steppes and sands first came together under one banner. The Hukuk Kaydırma states many things, including the way the land should be governed, and how the Caliph should be chosen and rule the land. The first Caliph was chosen by the thirty-one tribes, with the rule that the people may overturn his rule if they were not treated well. In turn, the Caliph selected his own successor and advisors, under the knowledge that the people may remove him through the advisors if they grew too discontent. Though this has always been the way, this forcible removal has only occurred once, during the Red Sand War in 2127 TE.

Four of the six Royal Advisors are chosen from the common people: the Bakici, loremaster of the Caliphate; the Kader, the person in charge of all Caliphate ritualists; the Gida, head agriculturalist; and the Martaval, known as the Voice of the People. Once a month the Caliph holds a meeting with the Martaval to address the concerns, suggestions, and complaints of the people of the Caliphate. The other two Advisors are the Alsimist, chosen from the ranks of the Royal Alchemists, and the Komutan, who represents the Sand Spire and the Tower of Glass.

The people of the Caliphate have some of the longest-standing traditions of all the nations in the modern world. Some of them stretch back to the the last age, or were started as a result of events in the last age. Duskers are a people of tradition, and their customs and rites reflect that. To go along with their customs, they have a smattering of widespread and ingrained superstitions as well. Some are for kindly acts, some are for strange occurrences, and some are for turning aside

the works of those who wish them ill. These traditions, customs and superstitions are imprinted on most Duskers from birth. One of the things that sets the people of the Caliphate apart from other countries is that they live daily with the presence of those known as the Desert Screamers. These Desert Screamers are known as wise men and women of the desert, and can purportedly perform feats of high magic, channeling the powers of the sand and the flame. Others are said to become more like the cats that they revere.

Most people within the Caliphate are peasants, working the land for the ruler of the land, or the noble of the nearest town. These rulers are usually known by the title Asil. Though the Caliphate listens to the advice of the people, to openly deny any of the edicts of the Caliph or his advisors is to invite punishment. Punishment in the Caliphate can be swift, and there is little to no justice system. Justice is uneven through the Caliphate, each Asil issuing their own rulings, with reports of treason escalated to the military advisor for crimes against the state. The military presence in the Caliphate is a strong one, particularly now with the refugee population, which can lead to a feeling of loss of free will. In order to keep the peace, any act of aggression is handled swiftly and harshly. Keeping the peace is difficult, particularly now that there are so many more mouths to feed, and the same amount of food (or less, from loss of trade) to feed them. For the first time in a long time, threats from the South and East affect the Caliphate, and a time of turmoil is at hand for the normally stable nation. The Caliphate is, above all, a land of order; when that order is threatened, the consequences can be dire indeed.

The Caliphate is home to a large number of craftsmen, particularly alchemists and scribes. The cities of Khaldun and Bazmel attract many who wish to further their knowledge, gain in power, or just wish to be left to their scholarly pursuits. Many, however, ply their learned trades in various parts of the Caliphate, dealing often with those from the Hulder. The scribes from Khaldun and the alchemists from Bazmel are sought out by nobles within the Caliphate, and often those from without as well, especially those in the Principalities wanting to gain the upper hand in some struggle or other. Some of these craftsmen are drawn to the guilds, as well.

The nobles and the Caliph generally get along, with any argument being settled in the Caliph's favor. The might of the Sand Spire is strong, and nobles rarely risk the ire of the Caliph or the spears of the Tower. However, with the current difficult times, and the possibility of aggression from two different fronts, the nobles test the limits of the Caliph's control. Words of dissent are whispered in the night streets and in the taverns and inns.

Warriors in the Caliphate, almost without exception, attend training at the Tower of Glass, one of the world's only military academies. Warriors come from all over the world to study at the feet of these masters, and learn a style said to exist since time beyond memory. The academy itself is formally known as the Tower of Glass, though most call it the Sand Spire, after the name the warriors use for themselves. Most of these students end up serving in the Caliph's military, lending their spears, glaives, shields, and halberds to the defense of the nation. These Sand Spire warriors are fiercely competitive, and boast of their skills and exploits in battle. This pride has led them to seek out others they deem worthy of competition. As a result, relationships with Gaunt have opened up, with friendly, but fierce, competition of arms taking place between the two nations. Of all of the lands to the West, Gaunt is the most amiable to the Caliphate. However, this burgeoning friendship has further strained the tense relationship between the Redwood Throne and the Caliphate.

The Molten Sheik

Tariq Silkinti was the only son of the Caliph Devimsi Silkinti, and heir to the Caliphate of Ophira. Tariq participated in the slaying of his father and the subsequent containment of the Copper Gauntlet, the artifact that drove his father mad. Prior to assuming the throne, Tariq studied under his cousin and closest friend, Ghaliya. Tariq, though not possessed of any aptitude, also closely followed the practices and rites of the Desert Screamers, hoping to become closer to the magics they so deftly wielded. Though these arts made him a fearsome warrior, it was not his martial prowess alone that defined his legacy amongst the Ophiran, and later Akathian, people. Tariq, following his role in the death of his father, worked tirelessly to undo the harm done by the late Caliph. In the process, Tariq encountered strange beings that changed his perspective on life and the afterlife. Tariq took this knowledge to be a sign that he might be able to save the Caliphate from the horrors that were facing them. Tariq undertook a quest to restore the great Ophiran hero, The Speaker of the Thousand Suns.

"The Speaker of the Thousand Suns wielded the glory of the sun, the armor of the plateaus, and the fury of the flames" - translated by the scribe Beshep, from the "Tales of Eternal Day" by the Ophiran historian Meledev.

Tariq, with the help of Ghaliya, Hasim and Shihab, was said to cross the lands to make an offering to Above in order to restore this legendary figure to life. The tales of his journeys are many and varied. Some include him meeting the mythical Oracle of the East, communing with the locusts of the desert as if they were a person, fighting the forces of Shadow in the northern mountains, or entering a forgotten city and vanquishing the evil that still remained in the place. While these facts are inconclusive, the texts that remain indicate that the new Caliph did return.

"And there before me stood the cousin of my blood and brother of my heart, Tariq. His skin was as Mt. Kuthat if it had been set ablaze. His armor shone as if it were polished by the noonday sun, and his sword bathed us in his glory" - translated by the scribe Beshep, from a letter to Eket of the Desert by Ghaliya.

Tariq was known as the Molten Sheik from that point forward, and was beloved by his people. Tariq pushed much of the horrors from Ophira, before retreating to the West in order to dispose of the Copper Gauntlet and join in a great battle against the Shadow. Stories say that Tariq was slain in the fighting in the area, and that his ashes and crown remain there to this day. People of the Caliphate believe that when he is needed, Tariq will rise from the ashes to lead Akathia out of the Shadow once more.

Faith and Religion

The majority of the Caliphate is not religious in any sense they would consider. If pressed on their beliefs, most would say they believe in the glory of the Caliphate for time without end, and that they wish to continue to be a part of its eternal glory. They name the Caliph both in their blessings and curses, along with the Molten Sheik, sometimes referred to as the Sheik, the Great Sheik, the Fiery One, the Prophet, or any derivation on that theme. There are no true rites or practices that the majority of the people in the Caliphate follow, save the Blessing of the Sheik. Most believe that the Molten Sheik waits for them in the afterlife, waiting for them to join his side, should they prove worthy. The unworthy are sent to atone for their lives by serving the people of Akathia until their spirits are ready. There are those that treat Ghaliya someone worthy

of prayers and attention as well. Some people utter such prayers as "Ghaliya have mercy upon me," "May Ghaliya forgive me," or the like. There are no churches or places of worship for the Molten Sheik or Ghaliya. No sacrifices or offerings are made in their honor. Instead, the people of the Caliphate try to live their lives so that Ghaliya and the Molten Sheik would be proud to have the newly dead by their side. If Duskers ask them for strength and guidance, who can blame them?

The Desert Screammers follow a form of traditional ancestor worship associated with their rites and powers. Little is known of the inner workings, and then only by the lorekeeper. It is unlikely they would share their beliefs and rituals with anyone outside of their organization. It is said that the Desert Screammers often go on "vision quests" when seeking guidance or answers. People have heard rumors of a place called "The Courtyard of Making" being mentioned by the Screammers in relation to their spiritual journeys. The few accounts of people witnessing the Desert Screammers returning from such a quest describe them as having "eyes that have seen what is not meant to be seen" or "having the angry pink of new scars slashing across their skin, only to watch it fade before us." Truly, none can know the rites and ceremonies of this reclusive and secretive group without becoming a part of them.

The one group that could be considered religious is the Sand Spire, practicing out of the Tower of Glass, sometimes just referred to as the Royal Academy. Members of the Sand Spire are indoctrinated with the poem "Bu Alev," which chronicles the life and trials of the Molten Sheik. Each member of the Sand Spire is made to recite sections of the poem as they practice their tactics and maneuvers, as a mental exercise in discipline and skill. It is common for these chosen sections of the poem to be painted or inscribed on the shields of Sand Spire warriors. The practical result of this is that members of the Sand Spire give thanks to the Molten Sheik and his glorious light of the heavens. They recite sections of the poem for many occasions, often using lines before eating meals, entering combat, the death of a friend, the death of a foe, and even at marriages or other ceremonies. The poem is a way of life that helps them to fight their battles and follow a code of honor. These lines often adorn their armor and weapons, and all of the Sand Spire undergo a journey to create their own personal Chest of Atonement before they may reach the rank of master within the school. The Sand Spire celebrates two holidays dedicated to the Molten Sheik: Revelation Day the Day of Ashes. These started off as holidays for those that serve in the Caliph's army or attended the Tower of Glass, but in time, they spread to the rest of the Caliphate. The Sand Spire also holds a great feast each year to celebrate the life of their founder, Shihab Kaya. This is a day of feasting, drinking, and brotherhood. This feast occurs at the end of the fall each year.

During the holidays dedicated to the Molten Sheik, people often wear clothes of brown, yellow and red. Many have shirts, tabards and patches displaying one of the symbols of the Molten Sheik. The two symbols most often associated with the Molten Sheik are a crown wreathed in flame, or an urn with a picture of a mountain on the side. The colors of these symbols are browns, reds, and yellows.

What makes the Caliphate great?

The Caliphate is by far the most stable of the nations. The line of caliphs has served their nation well, and listen to the people concerning their decisions. The nation has faced relatively few threats, either internal or external, and life for the average person in the Caliphate is not as hard

as it is in other nations, Tarsikka for example. The Caliphate is by far the most open when it comes to accepting the practices of ritualism and alchemy as well. Neither seem to carry the stigma they do in other parts of the world, and libraries have been established to help those who are so inclined to learn and research, to say nothing of the Royal Alchemists that serve the Caliph himself. The Caliphate has several metropolitan centers and is by far the least dependent on other nations, though they still can't produce everything they require, particularly after accepting so many refugees. The Caliphate has a great military tradition as well, hosting the only formal military academy currently known in the world. The Caliphate also openly embraces the mystery cult that calls the desert and steppes home. The Desert Screamer are revered as wise men and women who serve a higher calling at the behest of the Caliph.

What makes the Caliphate less than desirable?

The will of the Caliphate is the will of the land. Though the Caliphate listens to the advice of the people, to openly deny any of the edicts of the Caliph or his advisors is to ask for punishment. Punishment in the Caliphate can be swift, as there is little to no formal justice system. Justice is uneven through the Caliphate. Most local rulers issue their own rulings, and reports of treason are escalated to the military advisor as crimes against the state. The military presence in the Caliphate is a strong one, and the military has traditionally been ready to enforce order whenever and however necessary.

The presence of so many refugees from the Sultanate and the Emirate has only made the local rulers and military stricter in their authority. In order to keep the peace, any act of aggression is handled swiftly and harshly. Restriction of personal liberty is felt now as it has never been before. As such, keeping the peace is difficult, particularly now that there are so many more mouths to feed, and no corresponding increase in the amount of food available to feed them. For the first time in a long time, threats from the South and East are effecting the Caliphate, and a time of turmoil is at hand for the normally stable nation. The Caliphate is, above all, a land of order. When that order is threatened, the consequences can be dire indeed.

Theme & Costuming

The Caliphate is a land of civilization and order. The nation is very prideful and considers itself to be one of the foremost cultural beacons of the age. Parallels can be drawn between the Caliphate and the rise of the Ottoman Empire. The lands of the Sultanate are more traditionally Arabic and Persian, while the Emirate is more traditionally Egyptian. The Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor are good fictional references, as well the historical based book *Lords of the Horizon*.

The look of the Caliphate is Ottoman Turkish. The most common colors are shades of yellow and orange. Fine weaves in silks, muslin, cotton, and linen dominate materials; above all, clothes should be breathable. Layers are very important, and tend to be worn in loose, airy styles. Light to medium weight embroidery fabrics are especially common in coats and jackets. Ghawazee-style coats are very popular in women's clothes; usually the coat is worn over a light chemise top and a pair of loose, solid-color pants. Evil Eye Warding is predominant, so many Duskers wear small, half-sphere glass pendants that are outer-most blue, then a circle of white, then black at the center. Weaving and dying is highly sought after and prized, so cloth tends to be very fine and intricate in pattern and design. Cats and spiders are often used in jewelry and as pattern-motifs in clothing.

Cultural Advantages

Duskers pay two fewer points for Spear, Glaive, or Halberd. This build cost reduction only applies to one skill purchase. This cost reduction also applies to the Haftmaster style.

The Kingdom of Gaunt

Government Style: Hereditary Monarchy

Ruler: Dane Sverre Frosteye of House Voluspa

Population: Two million

Capital: Vastervik

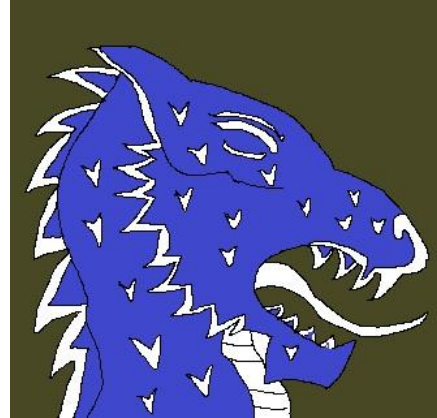
Alchemy: Rare

Ritualism: Uncommon

Inscription: Rare

Forge Magic: Uncommon

National Symbol: The fierce Ice Dragon, Lavine (lah VEE nay), also seen on the shields of the Dane's Bulwark



The Land

The Kingdom of Gaunt is a sparsely populated land of raiders, sailors, and farmers. Its warriors conquered Athral Isle and crowned there one of their own, Drostan of House Voluspa. They continually strive for glory in battle, and usually respect power more than legal authority. While any man or woman can be a fierce warrior or a successful captain, it is the ultimate goal of a successful Gauntishman to retire and live on the splendor of his successes. The Dane's Bulwark and the Shielddeaters of Gaunt—two lodges of warriors—have earned exceptional fame even beyond Gaunt's borders.

The nation of Gaunt would be inhospitable and unsettled to a Verdien traveler, while an Oresunder would think the countryside warm and gentle. Reaching all the way to the midlands, fjords break up Gaunt's coastline and create many natural harbors. Vastervik, the capital and the largest city of Gaunt, has turned one of those harbors into the busiest port north of the Hulder. Built on the ruins of forgotten Druma, the people of Vastervik repaired all that they could of the existing structures, and it approaches the comfort of its southern neighbors.

The terrain is rugged, with stony and windy coasts and deep, untamed forests. The high, frozen peaks of the Skyskara Mountains form the country's eastern border. There are few known passes through the Skyskara, and all of them lead to Troll Country. Working farms dot the lowland countryside, though countless burned-out houses and barns from various raids and feuds can be found as well. Cities and towns are few, but there are many villages, each protected by the hall of the local lord.

The second-largest settlement of Gaunt, Nidaros, stands by Lake Tinorra in the southeast. Though dwarfed by Vastervik, Nidaros is still a bustling city of loggers, woodworkers, and trappers. It is the home city of House Soldis and the center of teaching for the Shielddeaters warrior lodge. In winter, the lake freezes and the Shielddeaters train on the ice throughout the short days and long nights.

The History

Missionaries from the Redwood Throne first entered Gaunt in 60 RE. Little is known now of what they found during those years, but the few survivors told blood-curdling tales of trolls and frozen dead that walked the lands. When another legation returned in force 175 years later, they found a settled country, but those missionaries reported that all of the oldest villages were near the sea, but had no record of their founding.

Prior to House Voluspa's rise to power in 835 RE, Gaunt was known as a lawless land of feuding tribal chieftains. Gauntish raiders and bandits made the roads from the Principalities to Oresund too dangerous to travel, contributing to Oresund's isolation. The sea-roads too were unsafe, as the Gauntish sea-raiders were merciless. Recognizing that these constant feuds disrupt the maintenance of roads and the distribution of vital resources, the monarchs of House Voluspa declared them to be immune to clan feuds and overthrow. Starting with Dane Ingalvur the Stout in 839, the crown of Gaunt has used political or military pressure to compel every clan to swear itself to a "league of neighbors" that supports and defends Gaunt's infrastructure. A later monarch, Dane Medana Southborn, named it the Amphictyony, a term borrowed from the earliest Tarsikkan histories, lending an air of scholarship and civilization to the practice. House Voluspa has labored to restore and maintain the Amphictyony's holdings, such as roads and posts, but sustaining their authority means sending most of their manpower to raid their neighbors.

House Voluspa relies on external enemies to maintain internal cohesion, and protects the holdings of the Amphictyony with the threat of extreme force. As Gaunt reveres the warrior life and rich plunder, its people turn to infighting if they lack outside targets. Only the warriors of the Dane's Bulwark forego raiding and the forging of warrior-rings, as they are charged instead with guarding the Dane and the homeland.

The first of those external enemies was Athral Isle, against which Gaunt sent a raiding fleet in 852. Turned aside by King Theirian's ships, they returned home empty-handed and began to plot their next attack. A few decades later, Gauntish mercenaries fought in the Athral civil wars, secretly reconnoitering the land they still meant to plunder. In 903 Gaunt returned in force, establishing a foothold at Little Loughton and looting across the countryside. They sent many treasure-laden ships home, until the remaining raiders were finally defeated at the Battle of Malden Cliffs. One final ship returned to Gaunt, bearing the heads of the slain Gauntish warriors.

Shamed by this show of scorn, generations of Gauntish warriors turned elsewhere for plunder. Clan-feuds that continue even into the modern day were born in the infighting that occurred during the two centuries following the Battle of Malden Cliffs. Gauntish warriors looked also to Oresund, but found little worth taking. To the south, raiders struck the Margravate of Eisenmark and continued even into Trayal and eastern Brezha; successes there revitalized all of Gaunt. Heartened by their victories, Dane Ulfkell of the Bearskin commanded a new and greater fleet to gather: the pride of Athral Isle would be sundered, its tall towers toppled, and the Couraine Kings shamed.

To this battle he sent his niece Katla Spearwife and his son Ingvar. In 1109, they divided their forces, attacking in the north and in the south. Katla's fleet in the south was repelled, but not before they had burned half of the Athral fleet. The survivors sailed northward to Kingswatch

Harbor, where Ingvar had won a foothold, and joined his forces there. The Athral defenders failed time and again to drive the Gauntish from the mountains around Kingswatch. When word of this victory reached Gaunt, Athral Isle's doom was sealed; dozens of longships packed with warriors joined Ingvar and Katla. The conquest of the Isle spanned eighty-one long and bloody years, until King Ardith was slain at Malden and his line ended. Finally, Drostan of House Voluspa was crowned king of Athral Isle.

In the twenty years since that victory, Gaunt's gaze has once again fallen upon Eisenmark. Many warriors find work as mercenaries across the Principalities and Akathia; the Redwood Throne in particular pays well and values those who do not have familial connections to Verdien.

The People

In Gauntish society, the warriors are typically in charge, but with a dependence on and superstitious fear of ritualists and other types of magic. Warriors who have retired to the life of clan lord are also revered, if only because the strongest, wisest, or most cunning warriors live to see retirement. The strength of a clan is through the familial relationships of the women; men are typically clan lords, but it is through the strength of the lord's wife, sisters, daughters, and female cousins that he finds extended success. Men born to successful clans are raised with the idea that they will leave the clan in order to prove their worth and possibly found clans of their own. Women learn that their familial ties shape the clan's future. Many a ship's captain is an enterprising woman sailing a ship sponsored by her clan's lord. The woman owns the vessel free and clear, and sails for the glory of her clan; many young men owe their first successes to joining a ship for the Sword-Price of a year and a day of service.

Forge Magic is the most common magical practice in Gaunt, and even that is relatively uncommon, though mundane smithing is widespread. Healers receive gratitude but no glory for their acts of healing. In service of the injured and the slain, a healer is expected to take up arms against the aggressor. The Gauntish respect those who stand up for themselves, especially in the face of overwhelming odds. Skalds, the scholars of Gaunt, are treated with respect, in large part because they can build or destroy one's reputation. It is absolutely forbidden to punish anyone for things said in the office of a skald; thus the only revenge on a skald is dismissal from service or the response of another skald. Serving as a skald is not mutually exclusive with any other societal position, up to and including the Dane.

The stereotypical Gauntish personality ranges from "braggart" to "silent guardian." Internationally, native-born Athrals and northern Verdiens hate them for their historical conflicts. Oresunders generally like travelers from Gaunt, and the other nations have no significant contact with them.

Gaunt boasts two orders of warriors, the Dane's Bulwark and the Shieldeaters of Gaunt. The Dane's Bulwark are trained to defend the Dane, and serve as his loyal guard and warriors wherever they might travel. The Shieldeaters are berserkers, fearlessly despising shield and heavy armor, and destroying the shields of their enemies. Many of the fiercest raiders of Gaunt belong to the Shieldeaters.

The Gauntish collect battle-trophies whenever possible. Their warriors and lords also strive to amass huge hoards of wealth, which they use to attract followers and secure their loyalty. A man who gathers enough wealth might buy the comforts of a better life for his sons and daughters,

even if he himself finds death in battle. The exchange of treasure-gifts is central to the relationship between a lord and his warriors. The lord is judged by his gifts to his followers and can expect unshakeable loyalty from them as long as he pays them handsomely. The lord that falls on hard times usually finds his warriors flocking to another lord's mead-hall. It is not unheard-of for a lord expecting financial ruin to transfer his warriors to the service of another lord within his House, securing as much loyalty as he can through the ties of his wife and daughters.

While skill at arms is expected of all men, most pursue other trades as well, rather than serving as a guard or soldier full-time. They might be fishermen, farmers, miners, furriers, and crafters of many other trades. Women likewise take up many of these same professions, with the most successful serving as a clan's ship captains or raid leaders.

The first treasure a warrior receives is two weapons, of whatever style he prefers, and a shield if he favors it. His service in return is called the Sword-Price, a year and a day of loyalty, in which he receives a quarter-share of any treasure-gifts that would be his due. Should the lord's coffers run empty, the young warrior must remain loyal while the senior vassals look elsewhere. A man or woman might receive weapons as young as 16, though it is not uncommon to wait a few years more.

Few outsiders recognize the importance of women in Gauntish culture. Though women often become respected warriors and captains, it is not the most common path. Most stay in the home or the mead-hall, where they not only raise the young, but also create long-term plans and perform political maneuvering for the warriors. Though warriors are brash and straightforward, the Gauntish people also respect cunning and subtlety in women and their prominent lords. Women do much to guide the connections that hold society together, even as warriors tear it apart with feuding. They encourage marriages to create strong bloodlines, and they ensure inheritances go to the worthy and do not leave widows empty-handed. Even so, women are not exempt from the violence of House feuds, and are some of Gaunt's most vicious fighters on the battlefield and in politics.

Aside from their warrior culture, the Gauntish people are noted for their vibrant revelry and celebration of life. A Gauntishman would prefer to feast today and go hungry the day after rather than eat moderately both days. Gauntish people with the opportunity frequently travel the world, and the people they meet in those travels typically find individual Gauntishmen to be entertaining and friendly guests.

House Feuds

Gaunt has never had a justice system capable of stopping warriors from pursuing feuds, which stem from real offenses such as murders or thefts, as well as imagined ones. Many feuds started over nothing more than a perceived insult. The ultimate act of any feud is a hall-burning, which typically has as its goal the extermination of an entire familial line. Any survivors of a hall-burning traditionally dedicate themselves to a lifetime of revenge; the songs of the skalds glorify such warriors.

One may be born into a House, or join by entering the service of a lord of that House. To join a House is to join in its feuds, just as joining a lord is to involve oneself in that lord's personal feuds. Four Houses dominate Gauntish politics: Voluspa, Risten, Hybbert, and Soldis.

Founded in 835 RE, the royal House Voluspa was the first of the Houses, and the other three Houses formed in the forty years that followed. House Risten has typically allied itself with House Voluspa. Those men and women of influence who would not swear themselves with Voluspa nevertheless mirrored its organization and aims in forming Houses Hybbert and Soldis. All of the Houses carefully avoid any appearance of opposition to the Dane, and only rarely do they interfere with any who travel under the sign of the Ice Dragon. In return, the Dane distances himself somewhat from the internal working and feuds of House Voluspa. Contention is especially fierce between House Risten and House Soldis, stemming from the theft of a great herd of cattle in 961 RE. Cycles of retribution followed, but the grudge between the two Houses continues two and a half centuries later.

Approximately 45% of Gaunt's population is loyal to a House. Those subjects not sworn to a House risk being swept up or destroyed by the violence of the feuds. In these cases, their surviving family typically joins whatever House will aid them in getting revenge. However, commoners not allied with a House seldom have much worth taking. Warriors therefore usually don't bother those who do not involve themselves. Some parts of society are protected from the violence by severe strictures of law. In addition to those directly serving the Dane, the Amphictyony protects those who maintain Gaunt's minimal infrastructure, and even accidental injury to any of these people results in the guilty party's House or local lord bringing him to justice before the Dane can involve himself.

A code of hospitality also overrides the obligations of House feuds and personal grudges. Once a guest has accepted food or drink from a host, even if the guest or host did not recognize that they had reasons for conflict (such as a guest entering disguised), both are bound to protect the other, and the host is obligated to ensure the guest's safe-conduct for a period of three days. Even minor infractions against hospitality are considered infamous crimes, and such a violator soon finds that his allies have deserted him. A dispensation of royal justice often answers the crime of violated hospitality.

Faith and Religion

The House of Voluspa has granted the Redwood Throne considerable leeway within Gaunt, and the Dane claims to follow their guidance. However, he seems to "misunderstand" their teachings whenever it proves convenient. From this state of theoretical alliance with the Church, Sverre suffers far fewer retaliatory raids from Eisenmark, but the Shieldeaters continue to cross the border into Eisenmark with relative impunity. The common people are impressed with the Redwood Throne, thanks to occasional displays of miraculous gifts. They are generally interested in what the priests have to say, but the messages of absolute obedience to the Throne and acceptance of one's position in life are definitely unpopular in this culture of self-betterment through the warrior arts.

Regardless of what the Redwood Throne teaches, the traditions of ancestor worship that their cousins in Oresund still practice somewhat linger in Gauntish culture. Many Gauntishmen combine the two faiths, simultaneously thanking the glorious Throne and the spirit of their grandfather for a favorable outcome. For their part, the Redwood Throne continues its effort to absorb the more notable figures in Gaunt lore into the religion itself, making them in to Agios and Agias of the faith in order to garner more support.

What makes Gaunt great?

The Gauntish are a bold, adventurous, and affable people, interested in seeing the world and claiming as much of its wealth as they can. There is no limit to how far one might rise in Gauntish society, given courage, strength, and allies. They endure in an unforgiving land and sail storm-wracked northern seas. They are honorable, particularly in upholding laws of hospitality, though their sense of honor is often strange to other cultures. Gauntish culture embraces a high degree of internal, even violent conflict, while also laying out clear boundaries beyond which that violence is not tolerated. Gaunt's warriors are some of the most feared and respected in the world, and are highly sought after as mercenaries - particularly those belonging to Gaunt's two famed warrior orders. Gaunt is a country for people who like mead, axes, epic poetry, seawater, and blood, in no particular order. Gaunt has recently won its long war against Athral Isle, and the Isle's wealth has enriched people at every level of Gauntish society.

What makes Gaunt less than desirable?

The Gauntish have made many enemies over the past few centuries, particularly the Athral populace that they have conquered. Without an external enemy, though, the feuds between the four Houses inevitably tear the country apart, as has happened before. Scholarship, including the lore of magic and craft, receive less respect within Gaunt than elsewhere, though a competent wizard is still highly valued. A Gauntishman who lacks the strength or the allies to protect what he has won't have it for long. Belonging to a House carries certain protections and privileges, but also carries heavy responsibilities, particularly the obligation to avenge insults or attacks against other members of the House.

Theme & Costuming

Gaunt is a nation of Vikings, dedicated to the comitatus code, with a few twists. Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are significant historical guidelines. The Dane's Bulwark focuses on themes of loyalty and a warrior's obligation to his lord, while the Shieldeaters of Gaunt are berserkers.

Gauntish people wear a lot of Royal Blue. Not only is it the color of Lavine, the Ice Dragon of Gaunt, but Royal Blue dye is produced from a shellfish found only in Gauntish fjords, so the color holds both pride for them, and is readily available. Furs are worn by nearly everyone in Gaunt; it is a cold country, and there is a steady trapping trade in the mountains. Stamps are used to create intricate knot-work patterns on the edges of clothes. Coarse, hardy cloth is common, especially wool.

Cultural Advantages

The Gauntish pay two fewer points for Rapid Healing or Pain Resistance.

The Kingdom of Oresund

Government Style: Monarchy

Ruler: King Austar Finbrandur (OWS tar FEEN brawn der)

Population: Roughly two million

Capital: Dunaldur (DO nawl der)

Alchemy: Rare

Ritualism: Wide spread

Inscription: Wide spread

Forge Magic: Common

National Symbol: A phoenix over an Irminsul



The Land

Oresund is divided into thirds, each section nominally controlled by a separate clan, though inter-clan squabbles are not uncommon. Outwardly, the clans are relatively friendly with each other, as cooperation is an absolute requirement for continued survival. This doesn't mean that everyone gets along all of the time. A number of severe blood feuds have required crown intervention to stop them from engulfing entire regions in armed and magical conflict. The most notable feuds are between the line of Bergmar the Herald (BURG mar) and the line of Arnsteinn the Grim (ARNS teen), both of Clan Finbrandur; the line of Hessu (HAY su) of Clan Nokkvi (NOAK vi) and the line of Jatgeir (YAWT geer) of Clan Rosskjel (ROWSS chell); and the bloodiest conflict of all, the lines of Patrekeur (PA tray keh oor), Coastal Warden of the Northern Farthness, of Clan Finbrandur and the line of Rafnhildur (RAF neel der), Witch of the Eastern Desolation, of Clan Rosskjel. This last feud ended in the king posting military forces in the town of Danbraeg (DAHN braig), one of the largest towns in the Eastern portion of Findebran, and banning the possession of weapons during times of non-eminent threat. The feud itself was so bloody that the population was set back half a generation while the young male children recovered enough to start families of their own.

Each territory has three cities that are of any respectable size, with numerous enclaves and villages spread throughout, particularly in Findebran where most of the region's fish and rice are produced. Findebran is home to Eksansa (Ehk SAN sa), a city on the coast with a freezing harbor; Audleberg (AWD uhl berg) in the West, northeast of the border with Nokkviln (NOAK veeln), and a center for industry and modern culture; and Danbraeg, the largest city in Findebran and the most militarily active because of its close proximity to Troll Country and the ongoing feuds. Kjellunde (CHELL oon duh) holds the powderkeg city of Fridlevur (FREED uhl ver) in the North, closest to Findebran and the most frequent location of troll incursions; the seat of the Unbroken Circlet and Oresund's most populous and developed city, Dunaldur; and Roalvin (RO awl vi), the center of most wood production in Oresund in the Southeast. Nokkviln holds the border city of Skofti (SKOHF ti), which often faces challenges from Gauntish raiders seeking the raw ore of the area and the finished goods that the smiths and forge mages produce. It also has

the coastal town of Ingimundur, producers of clay, glass and agricultural goods, and the Northern inland town of Jonnhild (YOWN heeld) within its borders.

The History

Oresund has been an independent nation since the end of The Wicker Wars against the former nation of Druma in 213 TE. The Wicker Wars stretched from 199 TE until 213 TE, and the war was meticulously recorded by the scribes of Oresund. While the remaining accounts of the war are very detailed, few of the actual accounts remain, time having taken its toll. The diaries, journals and official histories that remain give a confused description of events, beginning with the wizard Isto (EE sto) trying to replicate the creation of the Tharician homunculi without requiring a body made of flesh. The histories indicate that woven men fought against the troops of Gaunt, while others say that the woven armor was crafted and given to the Oresund troops, in an astounding feat of craftsmanship.

After the Wicker Wars came to an end, the tribes of Oresund united under the banner of the beings known as the Pentaverate. The Pentaverate are five mythical beings that enter into the history of Oresund during the middle of the Wicker Wars, and they turned the tide of the war with their great magics and exquisitely crafted arms. Their valor was such that the people of Oresund clamored for them to assume control of the nation and lead them to victory. In time, the five revealed themselves as the Gods of the Northern Hearth, claiming to hail from the lands in time immemorial, and were amongst those gods that shaped the land from the great Void. Many scholars, scribes, and historians disputed their claims, but none could dispute their power or the precipitous timing of their arrival.

After the Pentaverate had left Oresund, the three clans and the rule of Oresund was established. The rule was uneasy at first, with the clans conflicting, though that faded over time. Squabbles and feuds still occur, but the nation is much more cohesive and focused than it once was. The Pentaverate imparted two major traditions to the people of Oresund as well: ritualism and forge magic. To this day, the lands of Oresund excel in these areas above all others, save perhaps the Tharici and the scholars in Khaldun. Great debates rage about which holds the greatest knowledge in of any of these arts.

The People

The throne of Oresund is not a hereditary position, or a position won through strength of arms, as it is in neighboring lands. The King or Queen of Oresund is chosen from the Unbroken Circllet, the name given to the ruling council of Oresund. The nine members of the Unbroken Circllet include three ritualists, three warriors, and three historians or scholars. Each of the three clans of Oresund sends one of each type to be members of the Unbroken Circllet, and should a member pass away, that clan sends another person who fills that role to replace them in the Circllet. King and Queens are chosen from the archetype of the Circllet that would be next in line to rule.

Currently a ritualist, King Austar Finbrandur, sits upon the Oresund throne. The next in line to replace him, should he die of old age or fall in battle, would be a mighty warrior, and following his or her death would be a historian or scholar. There is rarely any bickering amongst the Circllet about who should be appointed to the throne within a given sect. Though they are all from the same three clans, they are of different ages and experience when they are appointed to the Unbroken Circllet. In time, their ties to each other and to Oresund strengthen as their ties to

individual clans weaken. When conflict has arisen within the Circlet, the member has either been cast out of the council immediately, returning shamed and dishonored to his or her clan, or has been slain outright, and that clan has been removed from regal contention during that appointed cycle. These strictures prevent such conflict from occurring with any sort of frequency. King Finbrandur is from Clan Finbrandur, as each king or queen assumes the surname of their clan upon taking the throne. He is of middle years, with dark hair streaked with grey. He is a soft-spoken man, and his opponents have mistaken this for a weak will. King Finbrandur has dispatched those who assume such with ease, and his well-thought-out decisions have earned him both respect and love within Oresund. He follows on the heels of the deceased Queen Gabriella Nokkvi, of Clan Nokkvi, a scholar who was so steeped in historical tradition and analysis that few, if any, changes were made to the lands; people chafed upon the harsher, more outdated strictures of a past age. Queen Nokkvi was slain in battle with trolls on the eastern border of Oresund at the Battle of the Eastern Reaches.

Clan Nokkvi is currently in charge of the warrior sect of the council, led by Alvgeir Starm (AWLV geer), a self-styled blessed warrior that believes to be struck by his club is to be struck by the fury of the heavens. Though he is excessively vain, he is an extraordinary warrior and holds quite the tactical mind behind a pompous exterior. He shares the warrior sect with Dorrit Eirun (DOH reet AYH rohn), the Frostmaiden, leader of the Tundra Guard, from Clan Finbrandur, known for her icy demeanor and deadly spear and shield skills; and Nilmer Preben (NEEL mer PRAY ben), a young warrior from Clan Rosskjel who wields a great two handed sword and is oppressively cheerful.

Along with King Finbrandur, the ritualist seats are filled by Stanislava Udve (OOD vuh) from Clan Nokkvi, who specializes in binding and identification rituals, and is known for her exceptional hearing and sight; and Teitur Egill (TAY ter EE gill) from Clan Rosskjel, who specializes in magic of frost and shadow, known for his short temper and mercurial decisions. Stanislava is of middling progression in comparison to other ritualists that follow a similar path, but is a highly skilled scribe as well. Teitur is a true master of his arts and many seek to learn from him, though his secretive nature and temper often deter students from prolonged learning endeavors.

The sect of the historians and scholars are more alike than the other two sects of the Unbroken Circlet. All three must possess knowledge of Oresundian history, Gauntish history, and the history of trolls and shadow creatures. Beyond that, each is expected to have an expertise in military, ritual, or political history, and one rare area of knowledge. Currently, the scholastic sect is composed of Emma Bjarmasdottir (BYAR mas doh ter) from Clan Rosskjel, the eldest of the sect and de facto leader. Her specialties are political history and ancient civilizations. Aksal Mironsen (AHK sahl MEE rohn sen) from Clan Nokkvi, a man of middle years whose physical prowess belies his kind and studious nature, specializes in military history and the Great War of Shadow, the period of the Most Foul. Hensar the Sharp from Clan Finbrandur, a young and serious man with little to no sense of humor and a great eye for detail, specializes in ritual history and contracts throughout the ages.

Clan Nokkvi controls the southwestern crescent, stretching from the middle of the northern Gauntish border and sweeping west along the coastline, aptly calling their area Nokkviln. Clan Finbrandur controls the majority of the northern coastline, and portions stretching a little to the south and east of the northern coastline, calling their territory Findebran. Clan Rosskjel controls

the most dangerous and contested areas of Oresund, naming their territory Kjellunde, with a specific area defined as the Eastern Desolation along the borders to troll country in the north.

The people of Oresund are most commonly farmers, craftsmen, warriors, scholars, and historians. Very few fall outside of these roles, other than a few merchants and business owners. Taxes on the people are seen as fair, supporting the land, but not requiring the entire wealth of the citizenry. As such, the works of the kingdom are not as grand as they could be, but the people are fiercely loyal to their kingdom when opposed by outsiders. Petty squabbles and feuds between the clans stretch far back, but the kingdom is quick to intervene should the rivalries grow too hot.

Most hope to please their clan, and those who perform well have a chance to become part of the Unbroken Circlet, as it draws from the commoners. This provides a very real motive for many of the people of Oresund to do their best to serve their nation. Warriors often aspire to join the Tundra Guard, the elite fighting force of Oresund that patrols the land, facing the worst of foes and creatures of legend. Ritualists, unsurprisingly, form cabals and work with those of like minds. Some work openly to benefit the land and its people.

Life on the borders is a harsh one, and only the bravest live there, seeing it as a constant test from the Pentaverate.

The Pentaverate

The Pentaverate ruled, if the accounts can be believed, until what is known as the Day of Transformation. In 965 TE, the Pentaverate stated that they had to leave the lands of Oresund, and that it was time for the people of Oresund to take the reins of their fate into their own hands and stand alone. The Pentaverate decreed:

*"three tribes shall Oresund be,
forever a land of three,
chosen from all,
the council falls,
under the king's decree:*

*one of three the warrior's might,
one of three have history's sight,
the last of three alone,
picked from the ritualist's bones,
make the glow of Oresund's light."*

Since that time, the three tribes of Oresund have shared rulership over the land, each offering a ritualist, a historian, and a warrior to serve on the ruling council, with a king or queen selected from amongst their ranks, and never the same role twice in a row. After that day, the Pentaverate disappeared, claiming that they would forever watch over the land of Oresund and send them trials and tests. Should the nation survive their tribulations, the five would return, to forever guard and teach the land of Oresund.

In the time since, they have not returned, but it remains an important part of Oresund's history. The five are venerated as gods within the lands of Oresund, forever influencing the people and the land.

The Pentaverate was comprised of:

- **Ukonnen** (OO koh nen), who controlled the battle and the storm. Ukonnen was seen as having influence over love, fury, luck and the home, as well.
- **Murha** (MOO rah), the mighty general. Murha was seen as the god of war, destruction, the bonds of brotherhood, healing, dreams, and ice.
- **Kirjano** (KEER yahno), the twisting muse. Kirjano was known as being the impetus behind song, inspiration, passion, misfortune, secrets, shadow and truths.
- **Taito** (TAI toh), the benevolent mistress. Taito was worshiped by crafters and workers of forge magic, who venerated her for her power over the forge, the flame, creation, wealth, beauty, and retribution.
- **Vastaus** (WAH stows), Law-Father. Vastaus was sometimes seen as the chief god of the five, due to his demeanor and the actions of the others, though it was never stated as such. Vastaus was known as the god of oblivion, light, strength, nature, wisdom, knowledge, tyranny, mercy, and judgment.

Many of these concepts seem strange and contrary, but to the people of Oresund, they were facets of the multitudes of the Pentaverate's powers and domains. Indeed, rites and ceremonies were developed in different ways to please certain aspects of these gods. Many of the people of Oresund still practice these rites and pray to the Pentaverate for strength and guidance. They believe that one day, the Pentaverate will return and lead them to a higher glory than any could ever know.

Faith and Religion

Three religions in Oresund hold some sway. The faith of the Pentaverate is the most common, by far. The majority of the nation follows this faith. However, some on the far borders of the nation follow the old faith of Gaunt, or have started to follow that of the Redwood Throne, who have made strong footholds in the southern reaches of the nation.

What makes Oresund great?

Oresund is a land of myth and monsters. While other nations have heard horror stories of trolls, spirit witches and the frozen dead, Oresunders have lived it. Oresund is a land tolerant of the ways of magic, but not so much so that it is common place. One who practices the magical or alchemical arts is sure to find intrigue following them wherever they go. Ritualists are expected to adhere to certain laws and codes, whereas alchemists must remain secretive and circumspect. Oresund possesses a wholly unique religion and history. No other nation claims to have had gods not only walk among them, but rule them and raise them to their current glory. Oresund is rugged, clannish, and rural as well as civilized, urbane and metropolitan. Oresund's history is unlike any other history of the modern world, and the outcome of that is reflected on its citizens. Oresund is a land of bargaining and agreements, allowing for a type of home politics unseen elsewhere with more rigid power structures. Being from Oresund is akin to stepping out of a book of myths and legends for the other nations. Lowlanders simply might not believe the true tales being told by Oresunders.

What makes Oresund less than desirable?

Oresund is a cold, desolate place with limited contact with the outside world. Outside of a tense history with Gaunt and chilly relations with the Principalities, few other people have had contact

with the distant Oresunders. The Caliphate's scribes and wise-men have clamored for official relations to be opened between the two nations, but nothing has come from this, as of yet. Only the Tharici are well known to Oresunders, outside of the Gauntish. Oresunders are widely uneducated with regards to the way Tharici are treated in other lands, having only seen the receptions of them in their own, which are mostly positive, barring a few altercations here and there. Traditions are so important to Oresunders that it's difficult to follow a different path. This creates a sometimes stifling situation for young people within the lands. Trolls and the frozen dead are becoming more and more of an issue, once again, as well as the strange arrival of the Frozen Castle. Not to mention the fact that the Tundra Guard is once again active, something that has always spelled a time of trouble for the nation. Oresunders are often hard to understand and get along with, and are considered strange and almost unreal by the rest of the world. Their reputations and legends precede them, making it almost impossible to get past the stereotypes and expectations of others. Their strange religion also is without place in much of the rest of the world, and their beliefs often conflict with the those of the Redwood Throne. Religious conflict in the rest of the world is a very real part of the life of an Oresunder adventurer.

Theme & Costuming

Oresund is a land of mysticism, the occult, myths, and survival. Oresund deals with creatures and situations that the rest of the world considers myths and stories. Oresund possess much magical knowledge, and is practical in its use and application, but is very superstitious of things that they don't know or understand. Oresunders are quick to work rituals and perform acts of warding in almost any conceivable situation. Oresunders tend to dress in loose robes, if they are ritualists, or loose, utilitarian clothes fit for survival. While they wear furs and layers for warmth in their homeland, they are quick to adapt, since adaptation is survival, and would almost certainly shed the furs in warmer climates, perhaps keeping them in their home to remind them of their northern homeland. Oresund draws from such sources as the epic poem The Kalevala, the Song of the Volsungs, as well as other sources of Finnish, Norse and Icelandic myth.

In style, most Oresunders look a lot like Cossacks. In general, everyone wears utilitarian clothes fit for survival. Clothing colors tend to be neutral, earthy colors, including all shades of browns and creams, as well as mossy greens, and clay reds and yellows; whites and bright colors are almost never seen. The most common type of ornamentation on clothing are small needle-worked patterns along a single edge (or sometimes two edges) of a garment, usually in a geometric pattern no more than about two inches wide. These trims are almost always burgundy or periwinkle blue, from the dyes of the coastal flowers. While clothing is generally single-color, stripes do appear frequently in accent cloth, as it symbolizes the many layers of family and friends to which you are connected. Fish feature prominently in Oresund's art and jewelry, because the country is coastal, and heavily dependent of its fishing industry. The phoenix is common too, especially if paired with five stars, as in the national flag. The phoenix is also worn as a charm by the especially devout, as it is the symbol in their belief that their gods will rise again. Oresunder ritualists tend to wear long, solid-color robes.

Cultural Advantages

Oresunders pay two fewer points for Ritualism Initiation.

The Principalities of Verdien

Government Style: Imperial Monarchy

Ruler: Emperor Ludovic II

Population: 5 Million

Capital: Luzerne City

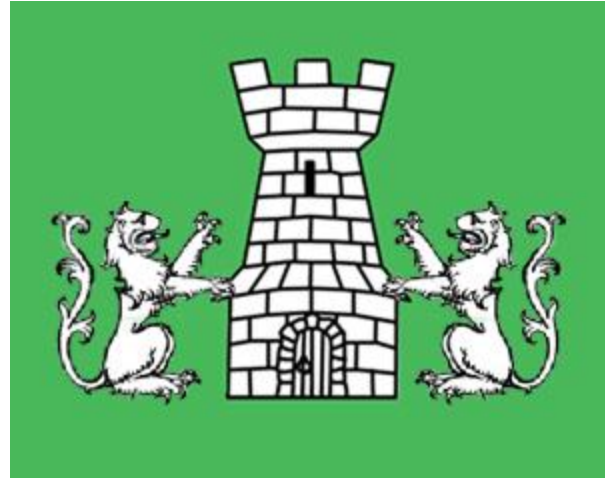
Alchemy: Guild Controlled, common

Ritualism: Illegal outside of Church auspices, uncommon

Inscription: Guild Controlled, uncommon

Forge Magic: Guild Controlled, uncommon

National Symbol: Lions on a green field before a tower



The Land

The Principalities of Verdien are divided into eight political units. In order of precedence, these are Luzerne City, the Prince-Bishopric of Brezha, the Duchy of Trayal, the Duchy of Eastern Trempa, the Free City of the Hulder, the Duchy of Western Trempa, the Margravate of Eisenmark, and the Margravate of the Skattenmark.

Duchy of Eastern Trempa

Eastern Trempa is the breadbasket of the Principalities. It is ruled by a Duke-Regent until the Emperor confirms a new ducal succession or changes the form of its governance. The Patriarch of the Redwood Throne is pushing him to make it a Prince-Bishopric.

Duchy of Western Trempa

Western Trempa has a thriving community of ritualists and alchemists, as well as theoreticians of magical subjects, thanks in large part to its distance from Luzerne City. Ritualists here are more open than elsewhere, but still maintain a certain amount of low-profile so as to avoid the wrong kind of attention.

Duchy of Trayal

Trayal has lands well-suited to shepherding, and good access to mineral veins in the mountains. It is ruled by a High Steward until the Emperor confirms a new ducal succession or changes the form of its governance. The Patriarch of the Redwood Throne is pushing him to make it a Prince-Bishopric.

The Free City of the Hulder

The Hulder is a major center of guild activity and shipping. It covers little land past the walls of the port city, but it has a great deal of influence beyond its size.

The Prince-Bishopric of Brezha

The northeastern region of the Principalities is ruled by a Prince-Bishop. This lord wields his authority under the direct benefice of the Redwood Throne, and is one of the Church's highest-ranking members.

Luzerne City

This domain is an enclave within the Prince-Bishopric of Brezha. It is the seat of Imperial rule,

and the largest city by population in the Principalities (and Gaunt, Oresund, and Athral Isle, for that matter; only the capital city of the Caliphate can compare).

The Margravate of Eisenmark

Eisenmark suffers from the depredations of Gauntish incursions. Verdien warrior orders have mostly shifted their base of operations here.

The Margravate of the Skattenmark

The Skattenmark - "Shadow March" - was annexed from Tarsikka two centuries ago. It remains an eerie place, more like Tarsikka than the rest of the Principalities. It chiefly produces timber.

The History

The history of the Principalities stretches back to the third century of the Regnal Era, when the individual Principalities were client kingdoms paying tribute to Tarsikka. Where the Tarsikkans have forgotten much of their past glory, it is still possible to stir the Verdiens into a frenzy against their hated oppressors of a millennium ago. Reinmund von Trayal led a rebellion in 218 RE that quickly drove the Tarsikkans out of Trempa (which was, at the time, undivided).

He repulsed two major offensives, at the Battle of Drenberg and in the Red Forest Campaign, over the next five years. Inspired by his example, Danut Rosser, the provincial governor of Eisenmark, joined him in 220. Later that year, Jules Parve, more widely known as Exeter I, the Patriarch of the rapidly growing Redwood Throne, led a revolt in the streets of Luzerne City. In 230 RE, Reinmund von Trayal walked freely into Luzerne City and accepted the crown of Verdien from the Patriarch, who had been his close companion in the last six years of fighting. Tarsikka continued to claim the Verdien kingdoms for the next century, but they never again received tribute. In addition, the Redwood Throne was now firmly established both as the state church of Verdien, and as a formidable power in its own right.

The past ten centuries have seen frequent infighting between what had once been neighboring kingdoms. Many of these petty wars only came to an end when the Emperor or the Patriarch rode out of Luzerne City at the head of an army and enforced peace at the end of a blade. Though one can justly accuse the Church of some abuses of political power, they restored peace many times over, and the infighting has diminished overall through by their aid. This has unquestionably been good for the Empire's prosperity.

In 996 RE, Emperor Honoré IV and Matriarch Victorine II conjured common purpose amongst the Principalities: the Empire's expansion. With the idea of claiming territory from their former masters, they turned their eyes toward the Skattenmark. Tarsikka was still recovering from its own problems, and could not mount a full defense against their invasion. This successful conquest shored up support for both the Crown and the Throne at a time when both were waning, due to a resurgence in petty squabbles between the states. Forty years ago (1170 RE), they faced a similar problem and attempted the same solution. With a trumped-up *casus belli*, they declared war on Tarsikka and besieged the border citadel of Arad-Targa. In the end, Arad-Targa was sacked and many priceless items of magic and art were stolen. The siege was costly, with some 2,500 attackers, more than half of the Verdien force, losing their lives. Most of them were buried in Tarsikka. It is widely rumored that the Tarsikkans unearthed them and used them to build an army of homunculi.

The past ten years have seen the nation once again plunged into violence, as the Grand Dukes' War tore Eastern Trempa and Trayal apart for two long years. Less than a full year later, von Berga's Rebellion brought the fury of the Left Hand down on Western Trempa. As Gaunt no longer sends its raiders to Athral Isle, Eisenmark has become a favored target, and neither the Emperor nor the Margrave have moved decisively to stop the attacks.

The People

Verdiens see themselves as the most advanced and civilized people in the world. Taken as a whole, they are wealthy and powerful. They have a strong, unifying religion, and their guilds dominate internal and international trade. Verdiens are proud of their achievements in every known craft, from agriculture to glassblowing.

Verdien society is in the throes of ongoing and intense class struggle. The Redwood Throne, the nobles (and by extension the Emperor), the guilds, and street gangs strive for dominance. A noble might ally with other nobles to push back against pressure from the Redwood Throne. Shortly thereafter, he finds himself working with a guild and funding a street gang to discredit another noble (All four groups are open for PCs to play, though Redwood Throne and Verdien nobility require Plot permission). Any of the latter three might secretly belong to a cabal or a mystery cult.

The Guilds

The guilds of the Principalities, centered in the Free City of the Hulder, hold vast political and financial power that extends even onto Athral Isle. They further have a small number of representatives in Tarsikka, the Caliphate of Dusk, and Gaunt.

The major guilds are the Imperial Society of Alchemists, the Brotherhood of Ledgers, the Honorable Society of Brewers and Vintners, the Honorable Guild of Physickers, the Imperial Scribes, and the Imperial Society of Smiths. It is both unlawful and inadvisable to practice these trades on anything but the smallest scales outside the auspices of the guild. Within the guild, one can expect to find the friendship of like-minded individuals, easy access to work, excellent pay, protection of various sorts, and teaching. Members advance within the guild through years of study, hard work, and political acumen.

Many nobles find the guilds and their members distasteful, or beneath their dignity. However, these nobles lack the unified support to have leverage against the guilds, and frequently, rely too heavily on their services. When it is important enough to them, the guilds can stand up to the Emperor or the Patriarch.

Faith and Religion

The Redwood Throne holds near-total sway over the souls of the people. The Patriarch has political power at least equal to that of the Emperor. The people know the name and face of the Patriarch, but almost no one can name those who sit on his inner council. Cities and towns have priests, though most villages do not; the Church gives relatively little consideration to ministering to the people of the countryside. Many villages have a monastery within a few days' travel, at least.

The Redwood Throne makes it clear that mystery cults are lies that wicked people feed to the credulous. They direct the Left Hand of the Throne to stop the spread of mystery cults and the practice of any form of unauthorized magic, be it ritualism, forge magic, inscription, or alchemy. The Church has a small number of authorized wizards in its ranks. Nonetheless, it cannot interfere with the guilds' practice of forge magic, inscription, or alchemy without paying a serious political cost.

The Redwood Throne teaches that one is born into a position and should serve in that position as faithfully as possible. Hard work, piety, and moral standards guarantee that you will be reborn into a more comfortable position in the next life. Joining the direct service of the Church is the only form of social advancement available to all ranks of society, though the lower class should not expect too much.

What makes the Principalities of Verdien great?

The Principalities are the dominant religious and economic power in the known world. Their military might is rivaled only by the Caliphate of Dusk, and their guilds possess the most advanced knowledge of every kind of craft. Their strong infrastructure and tightly-knit society support trade and allow communication and research to take place more quickly than in other nations. They are (mostly) united in the worship of the Redwood Throne, and that unity gives them amazing strength. The Church also has the support of the feared Left Hand of the Throne and the Ivory Sun. They have faced few serious internal or external threats to their stability in their near-millennium of history, and their people have prospered as a result.

What makes the Principalities of Verdien less than desirable?

All of that unity stifles dissident religious views, such as many of the mystery cults, and some areas of learning, such as ritualism. Many Emperors and Patriarchs have dealt with other countries callously or high-handedly, particularly their Tarsikkan neighbors, and the Principalities as a whole are more feared than respected. Long insulated from the threat of trolls, ghuls, werewolves, and the like, some Verdiens have derided these creatures as divine punishments inflicted on the blasphemous idolaters of Oresund, Akathia, and Tarsikka, rather than learning to fight such creatures themselves. Their tightly-knit society is at the same time locked in internal conflict: the nobles, the guilds, and the Church undermine one another to seize the reins of their country's destiny.

Theme & Costuming

This is the Holy Roman Empire, with the Redwood Throne standing in somewhat for Rome and the Church. It is heavily German, and the feel should be predominantly Germanic Gothic (not in the Anne Rice sense).

As far as clothing, ornate patterns that include fierce creatures such as lions or eagles commonly adorn formal jackets or capes. Beautiful and intricate weaves, such as damask, are often found even in every day Verdien clothing. Long, a-line skirts are common for women, and pants that hug the calves are common for both genders. Jewelry tends to be fairly sparse in Verdien fashion, though fine beads are often woven into clothing trims. Ornamental hair clips set with patterns made of rare woods and shells are a common sight in women's formal wear. Men's formal wear tends to be highlighted by similar pieces, worn as lapel pins. The most common

colors in Verdien formal wear are jewel tones, though usually outfits will be nearly all one color, making the wearer look like some exotic gem.

While the Redwood Throne does not precisely enforce Sumptuary Laws in the Principalities, the more modest fashions of the Prince-Bishopric of Brezha have gained a certain foothold. Spurning wasteful expense, they prefer to use a single color of dye, rather than many. A single costly gem, displayed tastefully, is within the rules of Pious Fashion; lots of them, or excesses of gold and silver, not so much.

Cultural Advantages

PCs hailing from the Principalities of Verdien receive a unique Advantage. Humans from the Principalities gain one additional IBGA that may be used only for the purposes of information gathering. This can be the use of a Lore skill, social actions, including political actions, or research of any kind. Additional uses of this ability are up the players, and if the IBGAs do not meet the requirements, Plot will request that another IBGA be submitted.

Tarsikka

Government Style: Oligarchy

Ruler: The Council of Silver (Countess Adriana Tija, Baron Miklos Hideg, Lord Sorin Nimic, Baroness Nicoletta Torca, Count Octavian Tumul)

Population: Roughly two million

Capital: Atyruen

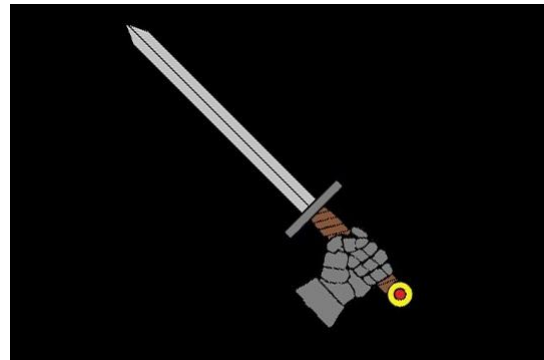
Alchemy: Uncommon

Ritualism: Uncommon

Inscription: Uncommon

Forge Magic: Rare

National Symbol: A plated gauntlet holding a longsword, both in silver, on a field of black



The Land

Tarsikka is land of dark forests, murky swamps and mountains steeped in superstition and lore. Everyone must be vigilant against the Shadow, or else fall victim to the creatures in the night. Tarsikka is a nation divided into five large domains, each ruled by a single family. These five families, collectively, form the ruling body of Tarsikka, the Council of Silver. The Council of Silver works, above all else, to protect Tarsikka from the horrors of Shadow. The largest city, and capital, is Atyruen, located in Stele (STAY-lay) County, governed currently by Countess Adriana Tija (TEE zhah), following the death of the last of the Stele line in 1197. Atyruen is known for their production of silver swords, as well as being a center for ritual research. Many commoners know it as the Walled City, or the Shining City, as it is the center of culture for the nation.

The lands simply known as Intunerik (un TOO nair ik) house the ruined city of Arad-Targa, a breeding ground for criminals, cabals, and those that do not want to be found. This is ostensibly ruled by Lord Sorin Nimic (ni MEEK), governing out of the small hamlet-fort of Otthon (OTT hun), with his group of elite swordsmen and ritualists, called the Sorin's Lock. This group deals harshly with those they find dabbling in that which should not be dabbled with. Arad-Targa is a

draw for adventurers that hope to get rich as well, either by finding a magical artifact, or by selling the secrets that they uncover.

Tarsikka houses three other cities of note. Trofeu, (TRO fay oo) a sprawling hunting lodge-turned-boomtown, is appealing to Baroness Nicoletta Torca (TOR sah) to become an independent fiefdom. Sufletul Lamenta, also known as the City of Souls, sits guarding the mountain ranges, and serves as home to a group known as the Light Under the Mountain, a sect of holy men and women who protect the secrets of the Tarsikkan dead. The City of Souls houses a grim truth, many believe. Among those believers is Count Octavian Tumul, who dwells in his castle in the city proper. Sare (SAH ray) is a town of superstition and mistrust, though much of the alchemy and armor produced in Tarsikka stems from Hideg Barony, and Sare in particular.

The History

According to scholars, the Great Kingdom of Tarsikka is all that remains of the once-great Tharician Empire. According to commoners, most scholars are full of candle wax, and brain-addled from smelling too much iron ink. Certainly the land doesn't reflect such grandeur; in fact, the formal name of the nation, the Great Kingdom of Tarsikka, is mostly incorrect. The last king of Tarsikka died in 848 RE, during the Crawling War, which stretched from 847 RE until 851 RE. It was, relatively speaking, a small-scale assault on Tarsikka, but it was a costly one. Records are sparse, as much was lost in the chaos, but the remaining ones indicate that the war began with the utter decimation of the hamlet of Pierdut (pee AIR doot) and the sacking of the surrounding countryside. Who or what exactly was attacking is very confused in the remaining records, but most seem to agree that it was a mix of strange people with black markings on their skin, with strange ears, and men entirely made of shadow. These creatures swept through large portions of Tarsikka before finally being pushed back at the fortress of Viraj, the fortress that would eventually give way to the city of Atyuren.

This war had two major impacts on the Great Kingdom of Tarsikka. The first was that the royal line was wiped out entirely during a night assault on Castle Destin (deh STEEN). The second was that one of the groups that had the most success in the war was a group of silversmiths working out of a small town called Mereu (may ROO). Their weapons caused agony in the men that it struck and dispersed the shadows more quickly than a normal blade. Following the demise of the royal line, the remaining nobles grabbed as much as they could, as quickly as they could. After seeing the efficiency of the silversmiths in battle, each of the nobles took care to have a silversmith of his own, and learned to fight with the silver blade. What followed is known as the War of Brothers, wherein the nobles of the four lands fought for the crown. This war raged from 853 RE until 882 RE, when the war ended with the creation of the Silver Circlet. The four nobles agreed to concessions with the others, exchanging land to make the domains more or less equal in size, and so began the Tarsikkan Oligarchy. It was agreed that a castle be built and maintained in the fortress of Viraj, as a symbol of the Great Kingdom of Tarsikka. The throne was vacant, though each noble sent a portion of their troops to serve in the castle, and official edicts and laws were pronounced from the castle. The throne was to remain vacant until such time as a king or queen was needed, and one would be selected according to the Laws of Kingship and Rule, as composed by the Scribe Herrad, at the behest of the Silver Circlet. The Silver Circlet agreed to serve and protect the land so that they would never again be caught unaware. This began the formal training of the Silver Swordsman of Tarsikka. Each noble was required to train and

receive their own silver sword, in order to patrol and serve the lands, and the tradition has stood ever since.

The Silver Circlet lasted until 1139 RE , when the ailing Duke Darnic (Dar NEEK) split his land into two counties, one for each of his children, Ilyena and Petrov. As such, the four lands became five, and to represent the new face of the land, the Silver Circlet abandoned their name, and have since been known as the Council of Silver.

In more recent years, the land has been ill at ease. The nobles patrol the lands more frequently, with casualties increasing. The killer known as the Copper Serpent has murdered those associated with nobility, and has not been caught, as of yet, despite the killings beginning in 1205 RE. A group of peasants has risen around this individual, styling themselves as the Bronze Fangs. Chafing under the harsh taxes and stiff penalties of the nobility, they led a successful uprising in Erze Hamlet in 1206 RE. However, their stock was sullied somewhat with the Revhely Uprising in 1208 RE. The Bronze Fang was dealt a heavy loss, and many of the remaining members have fled to Athral Isle, to garner support from other nations and escape certain death.

A group known as the Scorpions of Abendroth has been operating in Tarsikka for many years, uncovering corrupt nobility and raiding their holdings. In the last two years, however, they have disappeared from the lands. Rumor holds that they are heading north, allying with rogue homunculi who have escaped their ritualists, and are planning a grand gesture in the near future.

The People

The Council of Silver keeps a tight rein on the lesser nobles in Tarsikka, and, in turn, these lesser nobles keep a tight rein on the Tarsikkan peasants. Taxes are very high in Tarsikka, and must be paid in silver. This presents a challenge to the people of Tarsikka. Money hasn't been issued outright since the death of the last king, Ferenc of Komorfuld. The small amount of coin that circulates in Tarsikka is very old indeed, and becoming increasingly rare with every year that passes. As a portion of these coins are smelted down every year, this does little to help the situation. As a result, Tarsikka has extensive mining operations throughout the country, digging everywhere from foothills to mountains to dried up lake beds. This yields the largest amount of silver ore in the known world, each year. The peasantry sees very little of this, as taxes claim most of their earnings. Still, Tarsikka is known for their ore and their silversmithing. Those peasants that are not miners are usually farmers or craftsmen for the local noble. A small percentage are shop owners, and a still smaller number travel and pursue treasure, hoping to better themselves and their families. Had the peasants been unable to adapt to these taxation demands, the history of Tarsikka and its modern face might be very different. Certainly the Silver Circlet did not think to reissue currency before imposing these taxes. By the time they could have done so, the peasants were already meeting the new demands.

The lords of Tarsikka do not just take, however. It is the duty of every Tarsikkan noble to become a Silver Swordsman, or have those in their house that do so. They must patrol the lands of Tarsikka, fighting back the forces of Shadow and keeping the lands safe. The lords are very serious, and are quick to exact justice on the spot. Tarsikka has almost no justice system to speak of, with the local lords and constabulary meting out justice as is required. The protection of the

land and the people is the foremost concern of the Tarsikkan nobles, and most of the peasants know it. It's a harsh existence, but one that they know keeps them alive, when otherwise the land would have fallen long ago. The lords are known to offer positions in their house to peasants that have served or pleased them in some fashion, offering hope for all of the peasants of the land. There are many who chafe under this harsh law, and splinter off to fight this oppression. Those that are not "freedom fighters" are quick to sever any ties with those that are, especially if they are blood relatives. The penalty for treason is death, and woe those caught in the back-swing of the executioner's axe. Most peasants fight against these deviants, not wanting to lose the safety of the protection of the nobility. Still, there are those who side with them, and discontent is always present in Tarsikka.

Each of the five greater nobles have a variety of lords, baronets and marquis under them. The average Tarsikkan is more likely to speak of their local ruler with fear and respect, and speak of their greater ruler with awe. Peasants count themselves blessed and lucky when one of the greater nobles visits their towns or hamlets, and they often throw great feasts and celebrations in their honor when this occurs. The lesser nobles all answer to these greater nobles, and while they must do so, or face the consequences, the Tarsikkan nobility is not without its machinations. The politics of Tarsikka are a tense thing at best, and always revolve around the ownership and well-being of the land. A sentiment is growing in the town of Trofeu, in the Barony of Torca, to be granted autonomy and become its own land, either with a ruling lord serving under the baroness, or their own lands with a place in the Council of Silver.

Warriors in Tarsikka learn the way of the Silver Sword, should they be wealthy enough to do so. Otherwise, they are trained well by the local lords, but not in any special manner. Those of a scholarly bent pursue either the ritualistic or alchemical arts, though their ways are distrusted and may draw the ire of the nobility, depending on what occurs. Cabals in Tarsikka are widespread, with some serving the people and the lands, and other only serving themselves. Many towns have their own circles of wise men and women that fill this role, though they may or may not consider themselves to be members of a cabal.

Tarsikka deals very little with the rest of the world. There is some trade with the Caliphate, whom the Tarsikkans consider strange and bold outsiders, but harmless enough. The rest of the trading occurs with the Principalities, who has been both a foe and an ally. The last time they were opposed was in 997 RE, with the annexation of the Skattenmark from Tarsikka by the Principalities. Since then, relations have been strained, but have thawed somewhat over the last fifty years, as the Redwood Throne has made overtures to the nobility and peasants of Tarsikka. The church has had little success, but a few centers of practice have been opened in the western border regions.

The Tharici in Tarsikka

Sibling, parent, magi, thief, guide, evil, untrustworthy, savior. The Tharici are called all of these things by the people of Tarsikka every day.

The wanderers known as the Tharici are amongst those that believe Tarsikka used to be the Empire of Tharicia. It is from this great, bygone empire that they take their name. They claim that they are the true heirs to Tarsikkan soil and nobility, having long been cast out. Tharici wander the lands of Tarsikka, peddling their wares, acting as guides and bodyguards to those that

need it, and serving as wise men and women for those that request their considerable magical services. For it is true, the ritualists in Tarsikka are incredibly skilled, but even they do not possess some of the secrets that the Tharici hold. To many ritualists and cabals, this is an affront to their sensibilities. These wandering vagabonds waste secrets of power on frivolities and superstitious locals to make some quick coin. It is unsurprising that many Tharici caravans are found attacked and looted in the far reaches of the nation, with only their documents and magical implements missing.

However, wander they must. Tarsikkan nobles are not known for their generosity towards the Tharici, and many commoners believe the Tharici are to blame for the ills of the country. The insular nation is quick to blame any new woes on outsiders, for their mistrust of outsiders has only escalated with time and isolation since the Creeping War. If a person mysteriously vanishes, or livestock become dry, or crops wither, it is the Tharici that catch the blame. They must be quick of tongue and even quicker with their feet to survive in Tarsikka.

Certainly, there are times when a Tharici man or woman is indeed to blame. Things have been stolen, only to be found later in a caravan when it stops at another town. Commoners have woken up just in time, after being poisoned or influenced by magic, to see their homes being robbed or a blade about to be buried in their chests. None can deny the strange magics that certain Apa, the elders and leaders of the caravans, sometimes wield. It is this strange magic, sometimes drawing on blood, flesh and even the stuff of spirits that many in Tarsikka covet. Some come to bargain with the Tharici, and some might even be taught the secrets. Some never return at all. Rumors in Tarsikka have Tharici performing unhallowed and vicious rites alone and in the woods, binding themselves with dark pacts and bargains, and becoming horrific instruments of vengeance and murder. When asked of this, the Tharici make warding gestures and turn away from the inquisitive customer. Asking Silver Swordsmen about this results in a stern glare indicating that this line of questions leads only to the dungeons.



In spite of this, the Tharici are more welcome here than anywhere else. Their reputations do not always paint them well, and other nations are wary of outsiders in some cases. Many Tharici accept this wandering in Tarsikka as part of their lives, and try to survive without making too much fuss. Others struggle against the perceived injustice, and work to be more accepted in Tarsikka and reclaim the glory they claim was once theirs. Still others do not accept this lot at all, and punish the people of Tarsikka for being so foolish. A smaller minority, yet still a present one, leaves Tarsikka all together, seeking to learn about the world and either find a new home, or find something that might allow their people to rest and stop their wandering.

What makes Tarsikka great?

Tarsikka is the oldest surviving nation in the known world. It might not be the Empire of Tharicia any more, but scholars and historians claim that Tarsikka was. Tarsikka is a land of ancient truths, hidden mysteries, and secret horrors. It is a feudal nation where the nobility shows their dedication to the peasantry by patrolling the land with their silver swords to drive back

the shades and werewolves that plague the land. The Silver Swordsmen fight to keep the land safe, venturing into the wild borders of the nation to hunt down their foes. These shades and werewolves aren't the only horrors that plague the land, they are simply the most common. If monster hunting was a competitive activity, the Tarsikkans, the Duskers, and the Oresunders would be fighting for top honors every year. Secret enclaves of magic and mystery dot the land. Tarsikka is the home of the homunculus, and the number of ritualists and alchemists in the land reflect this. Tarsikka is also a land of rich folk tales and superstitions. Tarsikka has not felt the grasp of the Redwood Throne yet, and the mystery cultists known as the Servants of the Eternal Dawn have earned the respect and trust of many of the peasants, causing the nobility to trust them as well. No one in Tarsikka has it easy, with it being a constant struggle for survival, but this ever present threat has turned the land into one of vibrant life. Peasants steal pleasure and happiness where they can, hoping to improve their lands. They dream of becoming wealthy merchants, joining the knighthood, or even of being granted land. Nobles dream of a land of peace and safety, allowing them to turn their eyes fully inward and regrow and repair their nation.

What makes Tarsikka less than desirable?

Tarsikka is a land with harsh rules and a pervasive mistrust of any who are not Tarsikkans, particularly the Tharici. The nobility taxes the peasants harshly, needing the silver gathered to sustain the Silver Swordsmen, which in turn protect the nation. Peasants must serve their lieges without question, no matter what is handed down from above. The law is harsh and swift, with the nobility being the final judge in all matters. When the nobles are unable to provide constant safety for the peasants, this causes unrest and rebellion is a perpetual threat in the nation. The threats of the shades, werewolves, and stranger creatures are not small ones, and peasants are killed daily in their struggles with these creatures. As such, the mistrust of outsiders is a very real part of Tarsikkan life. The Tharici are blamed with the ruining of Tarsikka in the past, and are still not accepted in the lands, something that causes conflict between the Tharici and Tarsikkans. The Redwood Throne and the Principalities are long standing adversaries of Tarsikka, much of it centering around the Skattenmark and the aggressive expansion of the Throne. The Caliphate to the East is all right, but if they fail to secure their own lands, Tarsikka will have even more problems. Subjects of Tarsikka must be constantly vigilant, lest they be accused of misdeed by their fellow peasants, or are believed to be practicing the wrong magics or arts. To be wary is to be Tarsikkan.

Faith and Religion

Tarsikka is not a land of faith or religion. The Redwood Throne has a small foothold in the western part of the nation, and none in the rest. Most peasants and nobles believe in old wives' tales and superstition more than any one codified belief structure. They believe in ghosts, kobolds, imps, Vulthing the Crafter of Flesh and Bone, and the Army of the Spoken Word. They believe in creatures of Shadow and the pervasive evil that awaits to wipe the land of Tarsikka from the world.

The exception is the group known as the Light Under the Mountain. They are caretakers of the dead and guardians of the secrets of the grave. They heal the living and can channel the protection or fury of the dead to aid them in their cause. Those that wish to learn from them are taught the ways of their order, but they do not seek to spread the knowledge otherwise. Not much

about their beliefs are known, save that it revolves around the spirits of the departed and the guarding of their legacy. The rites they perform seem to call to a higher power, but none outside of the order know for certain.

Theme & Costuming

Tarsikka is a land of monsters, shadows, and superstition. The nation is very xenophobic and insular. It takes a long time for a Tarsikkan to trust, but when they do, it's until something major happens to breach that trust. Parallels can be drawn between the legends of the Black Forest and Transylvania. Eastern European superstition plays a large role in the theme of Tarsikka. German and Romanian folk tales are good places to look for thematic references.

Tarsikkan clothing is dark (black or grey), with brief highlights of bright color. Jewelry and buttons are silver. Charcoal and smoke greys feature highly in Tarsikkian fashion. The deep charcoal colored dye and the pale smoke grey comes from the wool produced in Tarsikka, prized for its versatility. It can be woven to feel no heavier than cotton, or thick enough to withstand the harshest chill. Skilled spinners can even produce almost pearlescent shimmers in the wool, and this is often incorporated into formal clothing. Although brighter colors are certainly worn, they are used sparingly in trims and highlights.

Tarsikkan nobles wear primarily jet black. Their fashions heavily feature velvet, lace, leather, and even some silk. Often noble outfits are accented by bright, vibrant colors, and highlighted by silver embroidery. Nobles use a lot of buttons to show off their wealth in silver.

Tarsikkan peasants tend to wear rough, sturdy clothing, favoring local wool for its availability and long-lasting wear. Skirts with aprons are common for females. Both genders tend to wear basic peasant-style shirts, with poofed sleeves. Clothing is adorned with colored embroidery on the sides of sleeves and/or legs.

Vests are common among both males and females, usually with inner pockets to contain valuables, as well as one or two outer pockets. A pattern akin to the Greek Key is often seen in clothes and decor, as it is a sign of generations connected to each other, past, present, and future. Mint is often grown around houses to protect from the evils of the forest. Because of this superstition, mint is a common ornament, either in image, or actual sprigs (often worn in hats).

Cultural Advantages

Tarsikkans pay two fewer points for Bastard Sword, Greatsword, and Longsword.

The Tharici

Government Style: Kinship

Ruler: None

Population: 900,000 (estimated)

Capital: None

Alchemy: Common

Ritualism: Common

Inscription: Common

Forge Magic: Common

National Symbol: None, various clan symbols.

The Land

The Tharici are a people without a home. They claim that the land now known as Tarsikka was theirs once, and that they now live in exile. Tarsikkans tolerate them, but no more than that, and occasionally drive them off with force. Yet this is a warmer reception than they find in any other land. In some lands, laws prohibit the Tharici from entering a city's walls, or from staying in one place for more than three nights. The only place any of the Tharici have as a permanent home is the Rat's Castle, where a few have pledged themselves.

For all that people distrust Tharici, they are not infrequently considered acceptable trade partners, and it is sometimes preferable to trade with them than directly with another nation. No one has a proud national heritage of *hating* the Tharici the way the Athrals have for the Gauntish, for example. In the Principalities, regional laws prohibit the Tharici from entering a city's walls, or from staying in one place for more than three nights. The scribes, alchemists, and smiths of the Tharici caravans often rouse the ire of the guilds, as they know many of the same secrets and compete for the same customers. At the same time, once the guilds have refused to do business with someone, that person might look to the Tharici for what they seek.

The Gauntish have customs protecting skalds from punishment for their words, and the Tharici have successfully invoked these protections in the past. The customs of hospitality are less reliable; some Gauntishmen claim that, for virtue of being mobile, tents and caravans are not dwelling-places, and food taken there does not bind host and guest. The head of House Risten has declared this viewpoint officially acceptable within their lands; their traditional enemies, House Hybbert, instantly declared the opposite.

The people of Oresund have little contact with the warm southern lands, so they welcome the Tharici more than they otherwise might. Tharici ritualists travel with the caravans, however, and many cabals of Oresund distrust them or plot against them for their secrets. It is said that Oresunders are happy to see a caravan arrive, and happy to see it leave.

Tharici traveling on Athral Isle must do so with great caution. Athrals once welcomed them, but the Tharici practice the art of the Displaced Hand just as rebellious Athrals do, and King Sigmar fears they will find aid or common cause. The increased presence of the Redwood Throne and the Left Hand also threatens traveling caravans. At the Throne's encouragement, Sigmar has issued many of the same laws against the Tharici that the Principalities have.

Even the people of the Caliphate have many reasons to distrust the Tharici. They fear that the caravans pass information on to their kinsmen in the Rat's Castle. The Caliph's law does not bind the Tharici, and they are often accused of swindling honest tradesmen. As the homeless Tharici must surely envy Akathian homes, many make the sign warding off the Evil Eye when they see these travelers. Despite all of this, the worst the Tharici usually face in the Caliphate is transportation to the country's borders. If it is proven that they serve the Rat's Castle, however, the penalty is death by hanging.

The History

The Tharici are scattered, and even they cannot accurately or consistently recount the history of all of their people. Sifting the truth from the legends, rumors, and outright lies is another major challenge. The greatest event of their history they called the Trajection, while the Tarsikkans call it the Great Deceit. In the distant, mythic past, a terrible evil made war against Tarsikka, laying waste to all before it. Its name was too terrible to utter, so they called it the Tendril of Ruination. The earth would boil up and spew forth serpents made of superheated stone; even worse, the hearts of the people became foul and poisonous. Murder was a frequent occurrence, as jealousy and greed ran rampant. The wasting sickness spread through the land, and those killed by the sickness did not lay down, but became twisted, leathery husks serving as unliving vehicles for beetles, snakes, and rodents that exploded upon those unlucky enough to stand against them in battle.

The Tharici stepped in where the most powerful Tarsikkan wizards could do nothing. Through arduous and dangerous effort, they gathered up the necessary components for a series of rituals. A cabal of five took the brunt of this effort upon themselves, and upon the completion of the final ritual, they and the Tendril of Ruination vanished from the world. The blight magnified tenfold. Beyond this point, historical accounts differ. Tarsikkans accuse the Tharici wizards of learning the Tendril's secrets and delivering Tarsikka into its grasp. The Tharici counter with the claim that their wizards were forced to draw on the living earth of Tarsikka to bind the evil one outside of the world. This much is certain: the Tendril of Ruination was not seen again, and neither were the five wizards. Tarsikka is still a land under a fearsome doom, if not as dreadful as the blight described in the legends. Finally, this breach between the lords of Tarsikka and the Tharici has never healed.

Two recent incidents show the shape of the future for the Tharici. A Tarsikkan nobleman named Harkany Demso had sheltered a large family of Tharici on his lands for over twenty years, in payment for a service they once rendered him. Having an estate full of Tharici cost him dearly in polite society, but he bore this cost with a smile, even as he refused to speak of the good they had done him. One day in 1204, all of that changed. Lord Demso had a seventeen year old son, Martinus, and more than anything in the world, Martinus wanted to learn alchemy. Harkany forbade it, claiming that it would cost the family the last shreds of their dignity, and he made his wishes widely known.

Martinus went to the Tharici that lived on his father's land, knowing that they could teach him. Though they initially refused, Martinus eventually won this knowledge for a remarkably high price: reportedly-- three measures of his own blood, a lock of his dead mother's hair, and ten strands of the rare and precious nightskein, the last stolen from his father, and alone worth a knight's ransom. What the Tharici did with these things remains secret, but the rest of the outcome is famous. Harkany noticed that the nightskein was missing, demanded it back from his son, and accused Martinus of studying alchemy. Martinus confessed, and Harkany drove out both his son and the entire family of the Tharici. Within six months, Harkany was dead of a strange illness, and that family of Tharici had to leave the country entirely, even as they protested their innocence.

The other incident takes place outside of Tarsikka. For the last eighteen years, from Gaunt all the way down to Akathia, people have encountered a caravan of particularly strange Tharici, calling

themselves the Red Candle Caravan. They travel on from one town to the next even before they have worn out their welcome, and ask more questions than are asked of them – neither of which are normal for the Tharici. They ask about ruins in the wilderness, roads that lead to nowhere, and dreams of broken bridges. When asked what they are seeking, they invariably respond in riddles like the following,

*Five are my gates,
Five my broad paths,
Five my tall towers;
To seek is to suffer,
To suffer is human,
To be human is to die.*

The People

The Tharici are many things to the people they come across: wise ones, thieves, mages, guides, traders, or keepers of secret lore. As their clan leaders guide their travels, the Apa – elders – guard and guide their esoteric practices, and possibly hold the real power. Those who know just a little about the Tharici suppose that their travels take them wherever the elders hope to find things of power.

Though every caravan and family has its pride, a few caravans are particularly storied among the Tharici. The Iron Moon Company, which mostly travels on Athral Isle, is famed for its knife-throwing and archery demonstrations. The Brass Wheel Company travels frequently between Tarsikka and the Caliphate. The Tari's Brothers Company is four separate and closely allied caravans, spread throughout the Principalities. The Glass River Company travels the cold northern lands of Gaunt and Oresund. The Red Candle Company is perhaps the most wide-ranging, and also the most enigmatic. The Mother's Mercy Company traveled throughout the Sultanate of Khodar-i-Gesh, and was said to even travel the wasteland to the east, but there has been no sign of this caravan since the Sultanate's fall to ghuls in 1182.

The Tharici are versed in every kind of magic, and this reason above all others is why people come to them – that, and their discretion in making such deals. The Tharici can also act as guides in wild and dangerous places. They make useful connections to the darker side of society, from which they chiefly gain information and the right of safe passage.

The truth is that after all is said and done, the Tharici want to save the world as much if not more than anyone else, and they just might know how to do it. If they should change their minds about that, so much the worse for the world.

Some Tharici struggle to change things socially for their people and cut through the centuries of distrust. Others have been cursed so often, so long branded as villains, that they embrace that role, and plan for revenge. For the claims are true enough-- Tarsikka *is* theirs by right, and they of all people should not be driven from its borders, or forced to live in fear of a noble's wrath or a mob of angry peasants.

Smithing

It's hard to know now which culture first developed Forge Magic, the art of temporarily binding magic into a blade or a suit of armor. One can, however, reliably say that if you want a weapon or armor made, and made well, with magic that will last, you gather as much coin as you can, you go to the Tharici, and you hope it is enough. The greatest of the master smiths keep their names a secret, but two names are whispered as being among their ranks: armorsmith Ionela Galca and weaponsmith Tomescu Vlas.

Early in the morning or late at night, a visitor to a Tharici camp will hear the sound of hammer and tongs, and of the smiths' voices raised in song. These songs keep the time of their hammer-strikes, and pass the long hours of work. If one knew how to listen to them, one might even learn a little history or lore of the arcane.

This practice of Forge Magic particularly angers the Imperial Society of Smiths. The Tharici compete for the same customers, often undercutting the guild's prices. They possess secrets of the forge that the guild claims as their domain. The Imperial Society of Smiths handles this by putting pressure on lords who would allow caravans to stay on their lands, and by spreading unsavory rumors about the Tharici.

Faith and Religion

The Tharici follow a dizzying array of traditions, including almost every known mystery cult. Those who keep to Akathia might even utter invocations to the Molten Sheik; Oresund-wandering Tharici are likely to reverence the Pentaverate, or older gods, as long lost as the land of Druma. In the Principalities, however, they worry more about avoiding the attention of the Redwood Throne than adhering to its tenets.

In addition to being well-versed in alchemy, ritualism, inscription, and Forge Magic, the Tharici have rites and practices that are all their own. Non-Tharici trade wild rumors of what the Tharici do when among their own kind, and the Tharici do nothing to dispel them. The most reliable accounts speak of mystical manipulation of flesh, blood, and breath, to gruesome ends.

Theme & Costuming

The Tharici draw on legends of the Romani and others who have been called "gypsies." They face the fear, awe, and resentment of the rest of the world. That is the price they pay for learning what others are too fearful to learn.

While "anything goes" for color in Tharici style, all shades of purple do tend to show up a lot. Although purple in general is a difficult dye to get, it seems to always end up in Tharici hands. Tharici style is all travel-ready, and usually multi-functional (Chameleons are a great example here; one garment can be a shirt, skirt, pants, shorts, dress, pillow, bag, or even kite if you add some sticks). Layering is very common, as are brightly colored in a hodge-podge of tints and hues, Tharici clothing is hardly ever dull. Jewelry is a common way for Tharici to keep their wealth, so many metals and gems tend to adorn all Tharici as anklets, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, rings, head-pieces, and belts. The spoked wheel is an important symbol, often worn as jewelry, or kept somewhere in a Tharici's home. The wheel symbolizes the circularity of time,

the change of seasons, and the roads Tharici travel. The rooster is also an important symbol which shows up frequently in jewelry and embroidery.

Cultural Advantages

Tharici pay two fewer points for any one of the following: Medium, Magic Sense, or Animal Empathy. Even if they possess several of these Advantages, they only enjoy the cost break once. They may buy any one of these Advantages after creation without Plot intervention.

Races

In addition to humans, the world of Dust to Dust has three other playable intelligent races. Homunculi are a race of people created by ritualists and alchemists as servants, stitched together from the flesh of humans. The Celestial Host descends, giving up immortality to fight alongside the mortals. The Returned are ancient heroes of the First Age, risen from their graves to reclaim the legends that they once were. Each race has specific abilities, advantages, and disadvantages. More information about racial rules can be found in Chapter 2: Character Creation and Races.

Celestials

The Host of Heaven descends upon Marath Suvla in an hour of great darkness. Shedding their immortality, they embrace the battle against the Most Foul. They wield a powerful magic unlike any the humans have seen. These messengers bear obscure messages, inscribed upon their flesh. Yet they have forgotten the perfection of Heaven and even the meaning of the message. They claim to serve the Light of Heaven, a name unfamiliar to the rest of the world's people. Celestials can draw upon their own nature to manipulate the energies of the world in ways that humans cannot duplicate. They can also learn ritualism, forge magic, inscription, and alchemy.

The Celestial Realms at a Glance

Government Style: Regimented Heavenly Host

Ruler: None*

Population: 50,000

Capital: None*

Alchemy: Rare

Ritualism: Uncommon

Inscription: Common

Forge Magic: Common

National Symbol: The Alchemical Symbol of the Sun; a perfect circle with a single centered dot.

The Celestial Halls

The Celestial Realm is perceived as a grand manse. The Manse of the Celestial Realm is, as far as anyone knows, made infinite by the creator. Though infinite, there are landmarks and distinct rooms. The Host of Heaven reaches these rooms in many ways. The will of the traveler determines the route of travel in the Manse. The realm being infinite, one may have as much privacy or as little as one desires for contemplation.

The Grand Hall

The Grand Hall is a large space that grows to offer even more space as needed. Its vaulted ceilings show the firmament of heaven. In the Grand Hall, all of the spheres come together. Only a few times in all of celestial history has the entirety of the infinite Host gathered in the Grand Hall. Its walls are gold-veined marble. The room is arrayed in vast steps so that all can see the Primarchs when they speak. It is in the hallways around the Grand Hall that the Eternal War of Shadows rages. Shades endlessly seek the expanse of, the Grand Hall, though none are sure why the Shades do so. Many of the Shades also seek the locked doors in the Hall of Doors, seeking...something. Not even the Hall of Whispers has yet to yield the answer to the purpose of this War. Some Celestials believe that only one with the knowledge the Manse could so evade the Hall of Whispers.

The Garden

The Garden is a showcase of the creator's beauty in the world. There are trees, birds, and plants in perfect and beautiful order. It is said that all paths in the celestial realm lead to the garden. This is true in a way, but the garden will sometimes block paths to it. The ways in which it blocks travel are unknown to most celestials. Some say it does so by the will of the Primarchs; others think it does so only at the command of still greater powers. Whatever the reason, the Garden is a place for the Host to remind themselves of the perfect beauty in creation. Many go there to reflect and meditate on the purpose for which they were created.

The Hall of Doors

The Hall of Doors is a place of traveling. The hall is seemingly infinite. It has doors on either side, all the way down its length. These doors open to many places inside the celestial realm and beyond. Many of the doors are locked. The doors that are locked can be opened with the right key, but the keys are known only to some. There are some doors for which no one has a key.

The Library

The Library is a collection place of all books. Any book created in the mortal realm can be found here. The Library is often filled with celestials looking for tomes on subjects of interest to them. The Library is for all, though the books may never leave. There is a section set aside for the Primarchs alone, where forbidden texts are kept. Any knowledge that is deemed corrupting by its nature appears in that section alone, never to be read. It is the duty of the Primarchs to determine the nature of the books, and it is by their declaration that knowledge is deemed forbidden or corrupt. The books in the library cannot be destroyed so long as any copy of the text exists in the mortal realm. Most Celestials believe that knowledge should be preserved, if only so that the chance exists to overcome the temptation of forbidden knowledge. Without temptation, there can be no purity of will. Many Celestials write books as well, and treatises on many subjects fill the Library, with the Library holding the only copies. The cultures of humanity comprise a large number of books, should a Celestial which to pursue knowledge of the mortal realm, though most do not.

The Hall of Whispers

The Hall of Whispers is a dark and low stone hall, with winding and confusing turns. The hall is a place of deep shadows where many secrets can be heard. If a celestial knows how, they may find any secret ever told in the mortal realm or the Realms Above. It might take moments or a thousand years, and even skilled listeners cannot predict this accurately. The Primarch Valanya has made it her life's work to find secrets here. The need for the Second Descent was first discovered here.

The Heart of the Storm

There is a room that winds into a stair. At the top of the stair, one steps into an eternal tempest. It is here, in the Heart of the Storm, that those who pursue that Realm gain their power. It is said that all storms are born here. The spiraling wind and rain are not for the faint of heart. A mortal would be torn to pieces in the maelstrom, but some celestials retreat here to find peace.

The Hall of Wisdom

Celestial free will leads to different views of the world. In the Hall of Wisdom those ideas are tested in debate. The Celestial Spheres and Philosophies differ greatly on some subtle aspects of the Light of Heaven's plan and his works. Debates on aesthetics and the nature of mortal corruption will go on for centuries in this place. The Tharamonian Mirei in particular frequent this place. It is not so much their place, but it appeals to their reasoning minds and purpose.

The many halls of the celestial realm are often found by seeming accident, perhaps guided by their creator's purpose. Many times a Celestial going about their duties turns a corner to find themselves in the Garden, or in the Hall of Doors. The legendary Light Celestial Oriset once found himself brought to the Hall of Whispers while training someone to fight. The Manse creates rooms as needed. As one seeks a place, if it did not exist and it can exist, it will exist in the halls of the Celestial Realms. The attempts to catalog or control the Manse have always failed, and it continues to have secrets for those who have existed there since the dawn of creation.

History

The concept of Celestials has been with humanity even prior to the first War with the Most Foul, when the Celestials descended from Heaven to turn the tide of the final battle. Created to battle the darkness in the Celestial Realms, the celestials themselves are beings of Order who understand their place in the divine fight between good and evil. While it is clear to celestials that there is indeed a supreme omnipotent, omni-benevolent being known as the Light of Heaven, the Gift of the Light of Heaven to all beings is that of Choice—that is, while celestials were created to battle the Darkness, they do so willingly. Free Will is one of the core concepts in the Celestial Realm. Without Free Will, the choices the Celestials make would hold little value. It is this value of Free Will that drives the Celestials to create different philosophies and Spheres so they might align and order themselves as their natures incline them to do.

The Celestials have descended to the mortal world once before, each given the choice to descend or not. Those that chose to descend did so with the knowledge that they would become mortal, and would not be able to return to the Celestial Halls. Many Celestials were slain in the Great War of Shadow, and for the first time, the Celestial realms knew true grief. The Host lost many

to the side of Shadow as well, as certain of their number pledged themselves in body and soul to the side of the Most Foul. This betrayal was a blow to the Celestial Host, and has caused a schism that exists even now. Some Celestials still choose to pledge themselves to the side of the Most Foul, known to their former brethren as the Fallen. Those who have Fallen depart the Celestial Manse, though where they go is not known in the Celestial Halls. Where the souls of mortal Celestials go after death is not known, not even to the Primarchs, though many suspect that like other mortals they are sent to the Grim Prison.

The Great War of Shadow bred many changes in the Celestial Realm, the not least of which was the creation of the Vanguard of Oriset. Oriset was a Celestial and member of the Host of Heaven sworn to the Sphere of Guardianship. It is after Oriset that the Oriseti Mirei philosophy is named. Oriset believed that guardianship and purity went hand in hand. In order to truly guard against the Shadow, one must eliminate those things that cause temptation. The ideal of the Light must be upheld, against all things, and the elimination of the things that threaten the Light is the worthiest of all goals. To this end, Oriset convinced others in his Sphere to join in him in developing methods to halt the tide of Shadow. His efforts were considered approved when the Primarchs Calithra and Liath bestowed a glaive to him to aid in his endeavors. There were many that followed him after this gift was bestowed, though the Primarchs offered no explanation as to why he was given this glaive. Oriset vanished in the Battle of Marath Suvla, reportedly throwing down his Glaive while weeping at the outcome of the battle. After his disappearance, the Sphere of Guardianship vowed to follow in his path, and officially established the Warrior Order of the Vanguard of Oriset to be those that set his example for others.

Among those of the original descent, a small number of Celestials, having won greatness and sanctity restored by their deeds, returned to the Celestial Manse as Primarchs. Celestials believe also that some of those who remained in the world and survived the Great War of Shadow were blessed by the Light of Heaven to do so, and to perform deeds in the name of the Light.

People

Created by the Light of Heaven to battle the darkness, many Celestials know of life prior to their Descent as endless cycles of conflict marked by periods of rest. The number of Celestials is steady at 50,000. If one Falls, another is created to take their place. While one of the Heavenly Host cannot be slain while in the Celestial Realms, they can be grievously injured and take the time of an entire mortal's life to recover. When not engaged in battle, celestials recuperate and regain their strength through contemplation and further discourse with those who have also chosen to champion a particular Sphere of Power. Lengthy discussions while consuming the manna and ambrosia of Heaven are common, and friendly debates between those of particular Spheres and Philosophies is a welcome distraction from the endless cycle of engagements with darkness.

Celestials are creatures of Order. Even after surrendering their immortality, they instinctively promote order in their lives, whether it is through the formation of “hosts” on earth, the pledging of their personal might to a particular person or cause, or by carrying out their daily activities in a ritualistic manner. Used to existing in a regimented state, celestials do their best to continue the traditions that they knew while in the Host of Heaven, though they have lost much of their specific memory of those traditions.

Celestial Spheres and Philosophies

Most celestials champion a particular Sphere, and depending upon their choice of how best to use their Celestial Ways, sometimes adhere to a Philosophy. This is not to say that the Sphere or Philosophy dictates or demands specific actions or behaviors; they are guidelines that present ways a particular celestial could find their calling within the Host. Each Sphere is guided by a Primarch, one of the greater Celestial beings that issues orders and commands to the Celestial Host. There are more Primarchs than there are Spheres, and power amongst the Primarchs is not determined by which guide Spheres and which do not. The Primarchs simply view this as one of their ordained duties.

The Spheres

Sphere of Power: Those within this sphere are focused on the channeling and release of spiritual energy, and sought to perfect their understanding of the Realms of Energy and the presence of the Realms both in the Celestial Halls and the mortal world, even to places beyond. The Primarch Tharamon guides this Sphere.

Celestials belonging to the Sphere of Power pay two fewer points for Magic Sense or Medium. They only receive this price break once.

Sphere of Guardianship: This sphere promotes protection and guardianship of an ideal, place, or even another person, but is usually broader than scope than a single individual. Home to many warriors, the Primarch Malanariel guides this Sphere. Erialian, the leader of the Vanguard of Oriset, is a high-ranking member of this Sphere.

Celestials belonging to the Sphere of Guardianship may begin play with Wear Light Armor for no cost, or receive a two point price break on Wear Medium Armor or Wear Heavy Armor. They only receive this price break once.

Sphere of Healing: Mastery of this sphere is not limited to the physical body, but to spiritual and mental restoration as well. The Primarch Calithra guides this Sphere.

Celestials belonging to the Sphere of Healing pay two fewer points for Healing Ways or Chirurgery. They only receive this price break once.

Sphere of Thought: Celestials within this sphere look to perfect the mind; they are concerned with the overcoming of fears, the receipt of inspiration, and of self-perfection. Many warriors are also of this sphere. The Primarch Liath guides this Sphere.

Celestials belonging to the Sphere of Thought pay two fewer points for Pain Resistance, Strong Will, or any Acute Sense. They only receive this price break once.

Sphere of Art: Encompassing all that is creative; this sphere oversees not only creation of works, but also the natural works of the world and the Celestial Halls. They seek to understand not only the Realms of Energy, but the Forms of Matter as well, and how they interact to create things wholly different and beautiful. The Primarch Haladal guides this Sphere.

Celestials belonging to the Sphere of Art pay two fewer points for any Craft or Lore skill for one single level. They only receive this price break once.



The Philosophies

The Celestials, being creatures of Order, naturally seek to align themselves with those of like mind. As such, a number of philosophies circulate within the Celestial Halls. These philosophies are often named after important figures within the Celestial Host, or after the Primarchs who most embody such philosophies. These are not the only philosophies of the Celestials, but are among the most common. Not all Celestials feel the need to belong to a philosophy, and no one forces them to adopt one. Those seeking to embrace their Celestial natures once they descend to the mortal world might have an easier time finding a willing teacher in the Host of Heaven should they adhere to a philosophy, but it is certainly possible to get teachings without doing so.

Oriseti Mirei: The Philosophy of Light Alone

The Most Foul is dead in body but alive in spirit, tempting and corrupting mortals. Only by purity of action may one ward off the Most Foul's influence. To exercise pure thought is to eliminate those things which cause corruption, greed, lust, rage, jealousy, egotism, and laziness. To be truly righteous, you must help others to avoid these influences in themselves as well.

Calithra Mirei: The Philosophy of Light and Fire

The world is corrupt; the righteous path is one of moderation. Only by moderation may you mitigate the influence of worldly corruption. You fight the corruption by enjoying the simple pleasures in creation. Causing unnecessary pain, allowing fear to command you: these are manifestations of corruption in the world.

Tharamonian Mirei: The Philosophy of Light and Ice

The world is not corrupt; individual emotions are. The Most Foul was truly destroyed, but the corruption manifesting in the world persists in the emotions and passions of mortals. By not allowing your emotions to rule you, by understanding nature, and by seeking truth, one may walk a righteous path. No nation or king should hold sway over a righteous being.

Kaiomai Mirei: The Philosophy of Fire and Storm

Sometimes destruction is needed, and it is within the created purpose of these celestials to bring that destruction. They are the hand of wrath. Destruction is not, in and of itself, wicked. If something is faced with destruction and survives, then it is made stronger and more pure. It becomes strengthened by the trials it has undergone, and emerges as a tempered instrument. If it is destroyed and wiped away, then it is something that needed to be destroyed, as its entire being was made corrupt and impure by the nature of the physical world. Much like steel, those objects which have many impurities are weaker than those with fewer impurities. It is only by destruction that the strong may be revealed.

Koukla Mirei: The Philosophy of Shadow and Ice

The Koukla Mirei believe that Free will is an illusion. All people are manipulated by things of the world around them to make their choices. For the greater good you may sometimes need to remove this illusion from them. Do not do so without need. It is part of the ineffable plan that this illusion remain in place, to dispel it is a thing that must only occur for the best of causes. If one must remove the illusion, one ought do so with another illusion, or through control. The marks of such methods are easier to remove those of physical damage. The illusion of Free Will is considered the first and most precious comfort to those who must live in the corrupt world.

Liathi Mirei: The Philosophy of Shadow and Storm

Death is the natural end to all life. It gives life meaning by giving it boundaries. Sometimes that means a righteous being must end a life. It is not done lightly, but for just and righteous cause. It is a holy duty, done as a mercy and a kindness. To kill out of anger, revenge, or for petty reasons is the highest of corruptions.

The Malachim Order

Centuries after the first Great War, a Ton Isiq scholar named Isandros of the Scales claimed to have received a visitation from a Primarch in which he was given a holy mission: to prepare, in secret, for the Second Descent. Driven by the idea that humanity's ultimate destiny was to ascend to greatness with the aid of heavenly knowledge, Isandros formed a secret society known as the Malachim Order. Spanning many nations and surviving the rise and fall of many rulers, the Malachim Order is rumored to have gathered wealth and fiscal power rivaling the mightiest of kings and guilds. Throughout the ages, many have sought to pry the location of the Order's treasure caches from supposed members, but the society has endured despite this misguided persecution. Centuries of harassment without any true results have taken their toll, and now the Order is seen as nothing more than a fanciful myth created by conspiracy theorists. In truth, the Malachim Order does still exist, and they are the caretakers of the investments made on the behalf of those philosophers who foresaw the coming of the Celestials.

Primarch Valanya, who discovered the need for the Second Descent, has located many of the Malachim Order and have given them divine knowledge that the Host will be descending once more to aid mankind. The Malachim Order eagerly awaits the return of the Celestials, and are ready to lend aid to their cause.

What makes Celestials great?

To begin with, you're an angel of the Host of Heaven. Though much of it is lost in translation to mortal form, Celestials still understand more of the cosmos than any other race. Celestial magic is flexible, requiring no advance preparation, and can be combined with a wide variety of other arts. They have fought the forces of the Most Foul for an eternity, and their Descent represents an act of heroic self-sacrifice; most of them will never return to the Celestial Manse or gain immortality. They are utterly driven in their purpose, which is nothing less than saving the world. They bring with them the Vanguard of Oriset, a warrior order uniquely suited to the battles they will face. Though partially cut off from their base of support, Celestials can still contact the Primarchs and have an entire secret society of humans dedicated to the success of their mission.

What makes Celestials less than desirable?

Celestials have come to a world that does not understand their mission or their nature. In return, the Celestials have little preparation for things like politics and shifting allegiances. Even empathizing with the humans they have come to save is a challenge for some. Accustomed to the ordered, military nature of life as one of the Host, Celestials find themselves much more isolated, in a world where for the first time death comes swiftly and the body is fragile. They face many kinds of temptation and the potential for ruin for the first time, and sustaining their sense of purpose is a challenge. Many in the world will see the Celestials as a means to an end, rather than messengers from Heaven.

Themes & Costuming

Celestials are, in a word, angels. Their entire existence is owed to the Light of Heaven, who has created them to be warriors against the darkness. While they have made the ultimate sacrifice of their immortality and have been cut off from the Light of Heaven, they can regain some of their former glory by choosing to learn Celestial Ways and achieve some small degree of the power they once wielded. They have descended from Heaven with the understanding that they are needed on earth, and bear messages of hope to the mortal races in the form of script emblazoned on their faces in any one of a multitude of languages.

Celestials wear White, lots of white. Their style is loose and flowy, materials often being light and airy. Clothing tends to be plain, but is sometimes adorned by touches of pattern or embroidery at the wrists or neck. Jewel-tone colors like Ruby Red, Sapphire Blue, Emerald Greens, Royal Purple, etc. are common as trim or as a layer over the main, pure white, outfit. Celestial outfits consist of a base of white-- white tunic, white pants or a white abaya underdress-- over which a caftan (also Kaftan) is worn. The fabric of the caftan is white or sometimes undyed fabric, and off the battlefield is usually made of a material that will easily flow and move unfettered with the Celestial. On the battlefield, the sheer flowing caftan is often shortened to tunic-length and made of fabric that is more durable and can withstand the rigors of wearing armor and swinging a weapon. Those Celestials who follow the path of Fire or Ice may wish to wear their caftans in jewel-tone colors to reflect their philosophy-- the caftan can be any pure hue over a base of white.

The Mortal Arts - Ritualism and Alchemy

The arts of mortals made their way to the Celestial Manse during the First Descent. Prior to this time, the Celestials simply did not know or practice these arts. However, when the Celestials descended, they lost much of their natural potency and facility with the Realms of Energy, to compensate, many turned the arts of mortals, such as Ritualism and Alchemy. Ritualism was the codified shaping and manipulation of the Realms of Energy that seemed very familiar to the Celestials, where as Alchemy, involving much more physical manipulation, was far stranger. When the Celestials that became Primarchs returned to the Host of Heaven at the end of the Great War, they brought these arts with them.

Alchemy is difficult to practice in the Celestial realms, as the raw components are just insufficient. However the knowledge and theory of the craft has proven very interesting to many of the Celestial Host with an interest in crafting and creation, as well as knowledge for sake of pursuing knowledge. Many Celestials believe that this art should continue to be cultivated in light of the Second Descent.

Ritualism is a very interesting topic of discussion for Celestials. Due to its very nature of manipulating the Realms of Energy, it serves alongside the nature of the Celestials. This causes many discussions and opinions within the Host. Ritualism is viewed in one of five ways:

I) Ritualism is a lesser form of what comes naturally to most Celestials. Celestials channel the Realms, capturing them and redirecting the energy to an object seems strange and backwards to them.

II) Ritualism is a way to store power that would otherwise dissipate immediately, and this bears study.

III) Ritualism is an unnatural and circumspect art that circumvents the very nature and purpose of Celestials.

IV) Ritualism is a way to work with Energy that is counter to the nature of Celestials. By understanding what is counter to the self, the self is better understood.

V) Ritualism is a weapon that may be used in the constant War against Shadow. This is something that would not normally be expected and might provide an edge at a key moment. Regardless of how it is seen, it remains a point of interest and debate in the Celestial Host.

The Craft of Heaven - Forge Magic and Inscription

The Host of Heaven has long practiced the crafts of Forge Magic and Inscription. However, unlike those in the mortal realms, the Host of Heaven taps directly into the Realms of Energy needed to power such effects. This makes their crafts very potent in the Celestial Manse, but nigh useless away from the Celestial Realms. Upon the mortal realm, they must work to regain their crafts, and once again be able to produce the feats they once accomplished. Being further removed from the Celestial Manse makes the Celestial rely much more heavily on materials found in the world that suit their purposes.

Racial Traits

- Celestials may relearn some control over the miraculous power that once suffused their being. They are the only race that may buy Celestial Ways.
- At character creation, a Celestial must select one of the following types of damage: acid, fire, ice, shadow, or storm. When struck by damage of this type, the Celestial is under the effects of an Intolerance. Defenses against those damage types work normally for the Celestial.
- Celestials gain the advantage associated with their chosen Sphere.

Makeup Requirements: A Celestial's face must be significantly covered with marks resembling text. Unusual alphabets are encouraged. The text is entirely capable of shifting from day to day, and need not be replicated exactly.

Homunculi

Homunculi are creatures, of predominantly humanoid shape, stitched together from pieces of humans and brought to a semblance of life through powerful magic. The rituals and alchemy that provide their vital spark were secrets long preserved by the Tarsikkans, but have been recently learned by the rest of the world. Many homunculi serve the ritualists or alchemists who created them, willingly or otherwise. Other homunculi have escaped cruel masters, or awoken with no memory of how they came to be. Homunculi are despised by the Redwood Throne and by the majority of humans, as it is commonly known that they do not have souls. Homunculi are able to graft the flesh of other creatures onto their bodies in place of their own limbs. The only magics they are able to learn are alchemy, inscription, and forge magic.

Homunculi At a Glance

Government Style: By nature homunculi do not gravitate to one form of government or another, but when left to their own devices they are egalitarian. Most see other homunculi as equals, since they are all made out of the same materials, sometimes literally. Homunculi generally have no say in actual government, since at best they are second-class citizens.

Population: 50,000 estimated throughout the world, with 30,000 in Tarsikka alone

Capital: None officially, Eurst unofficially

Alchemy: Widespread

Ritualism: None; homunculi cannot perform rituals, but can assist in them

Inscription: Uncommon

Forge Magic: Widespread

Racial Symbol: Stitches, needle and thread, blood and bloodstains. Homunculi have no official racial insignia but use the most obvious signs of their nature as their symbols. Such symbols are often disallowed by law for fear of the homunculi developing any sense of racial identity or loyalty.

The Land

Homunculi have no land of their own, but live among humans as servants, guards, slaves, and craftsmen. Most serve a ritualist (or a whole cabal), alchemist, or similar mystic power, bound by law or by magic to follow the orders of their master. They are most common in areas where magicians are common, such as major cities and centers of learning. Homunculi are found in every nation, but are most common in Tarsikka by far. In Tarsikka, body parts of criminals are often used to create homunculi bound to the service of the local lord or cabal. They are a common and accepted part of daily life in Tarsikka. While in other lands one can go a lifetime without seeing a homunculus, such is not possible in Tarsikka. They are rare in the Principalities, Oresund, and Akathia, where they are usually only found serving wealthy ritualists. In Gaunt and Athral Isle, they are all but unknown.

Though commonplace in Tarsikka, homunculi are second-class citizens at best. Most Tarsikkans assume any homunculus they meet is a criminal receiving his just punishment. Those bound to a particularly powerful individual, such as a member of a influential cabal, are afforded more respect, but this is respect for the homunculus's master and not the homunculus itself. By the laws of Tarsikka, any homunculus bound to someone else is the property of that master, and ownership may be transferred at the master's discretion. Freed homunculi are distrusted and

forced to live on the edges of civilization, though a small handful have made themselves useful enough to break through this barrier. Despite the existence of free homunculi, any homunculus on his own without a token of his master or proof of his freedom receives rough treatment from the authorities, if not outright arrested. Only the Tharici treat homunculi well, seeing them as kindred spirits and targets of undeserved prejudice. Tharici do not believe in binding homunculi magically, though there are exceptions.

In the Principalities, homunculi are only allowed under certain agreements with the Redwood Throne, due to their connection with ritual magic, which is itself illegal outside the auspices of the Church. These allowances for homunculi, called writs of bondage, are only available to those with significant political, economic, or magical influence. Writs of bondage can only be issued by bishops or higher echelons of the clergy, and the paperwork necessary to secure one takes years. Naturally, the time required is inversely proportional to the amount of money and political capital one spends. Most writs of bondage are owned by ritualists approved by the Redwood Throne, but a few are in the hands of powerful alchemists. In the history of the Principalities, a handful of homunculi have earned writs of bondage for themselves, allowing them to exist without Church interference, but these have each been extraordinary events. Homunculi without a writ of bondage are killed in short order, usually by burning. These practices vary some from Principality to Principality; they are generally ignored in the Duchy of Western Trempa and the Free City of the Hulder, but homunculi are treated with even more suspicion in the Prince-Bishopric of Brezha. Indeed, there have been some calls to make homunculi completely illegal in Brezha.

The Caliphate of Dusk is in many ways the most accepting of the homunculi, largely due to the efforts of Caliph Nazik Isveren, who was the Royal Alsimist before becoming Caliph. Caliph Nazik Isveren had been served for many years by a homunculus named Kayli, who had become the Caliph's friend over that time. This loyalty, combined with the devotion Kayli showed the Isverens over centuries of service, earned Kayli her freedom, and the Caliph declared that homunculi were no longer slaves, but instead indentured servants. Homunculi in the Caliphate are bound to their creator and his descendants for a period of no more than fifty years, after which they are free. This began at twenty years, but political pressure and other difficulties made it expedient for the Caliphs following Nazik Isveren to lengthen the term of service. Homunculi are still second-class citizens within the Caliphate and reviled by polite society, but they enjoy the same access to the Caliph's justice as other citizens. Freed homunculi are the most common in the Caliphate of all nations, proportionally speaking, but there are few homunculi overall.

On Athral Isle, homunculi are few and far between. Most Athral ritualists see the ritual to create homunculi as a disgusting abuse of the dead, and thus homunculi are something created by grave robbers and other villains. Though ritualism is openly practiced among the Athrals, ritualists with homunculi are likely to be treated poorly; those Athral ritualists who possess them keep them in secret, away from population centers. Homunculi have no official legal standing on Athral Isle; they are less than people or property in the eyes of the law. Freed homunculi are unknown on Athral Isle.

The Gauntish are people of extremes when it comes to homunculi; they either respect them for their strength, or see them as abominations to be destroyed. There is no in-between. Homunculi are rare enough in Gaunt that few actually have to make this choice. Homunculi in Gaunt need be extremely careful, as the Gauntish are a superstitious people, and a man made of corpses

obviously enflames such fears. Those homunculi who prove themselves before giving away their nature earn a place among the warriors of Gaunt with their great resilience and strength. A number of free homunculi have fled the Principalities or Tarsikka to find a new life among Gauntish raiders. The Gauntish are less concerned about where the homunculus comes from and more concerned about what it can do, allowing it to earn a place among the Gauntish if it is skilled enough. However, a homunculus made from the remains of a Gauntish warrior or using such remains to repair himself is giving a grave insult and will be killed.

Given the number of ritualists in Oresund, it is unsurprising that the largest population of homunculi outside of Tarsikka can be found in that frozen nation. The laws regarding homunculi in Oresund were established centuries ago by the royal decree of King Arhem Rosskjel. They are the property of the ritualist or cabal that created them. These laws have been used as political weapons over time; some historians or warrior kings weaken them to annoy the ritualists, only to see the old laws reinstated when a ritualist king sits on the throne. This political gamesmanship has died off during the rule of the last few kings. Homunculi are common in the urban areas of Oresund, but rarely seen elsewhere. Currently they are as much fashion accessories as servants among the Oresund cabals. Their owners dress them in foppery and make body modifications to them on a whim to stay with the latest trends. There are no legally recognized free homunculi in Oresund; all homunculi belong to a ritualist or a cabal, and any caught roaming free are either auctioned off or used as a political gift to a cabal in need.

While the homunculi have no nation of their own, they do rule one settlement. The hamlet of Eurst, located in the wilds of the Skattenmark in the Principalities, is populated almost entirely by homunculi, many of whom fled their masters to live there. This settlement of several score remains free of outside interference, leading some to believe that the local lord, Herras Orrin, is somehow in league with the homunculi. Some rumors also cite Eurst as the home of the murderer called the Copper Serpent, but thus far that villain has not struck near Eurst. The homunculi of Eurst keep to themselves, farming the surrounding lands, harvesting lumber, and trading alchemical goods and forge magic with neighboring villages. Neighboring villages have blamed the inhabitants of Eurst for everything from kidnapping children to curdling milk, but none of them have felt strong enough to make a move against the homunculi.

The History

The origin of the knowledge of how to create homunculi is lost to time, but the form of this knowledge, the Codex of Hand of Creation, is now in broad circulation. For ages it was a secret closely guarded within Tarsikka, but in 991, the wizard Haragand stole a copy of the Codex and sold it to others across the length and breadth of the continent. The Codex of the Hand of Creation was passed down within Tarsikka for at least one thousand years, and in that time has been copied, translated, and transcribed hundreds of times, creating myriad versions, translations, and interpretations. The core practice, the creation of a homunculus, has survived these alterations mostly intact, though some regional variations have occurred. There is a constant argument among cabals as to who has the oldest and truest copy of the Codex. These debates are largely posturing and bragging, with little way to measure the age of a copy definitively. Every few decades, a version is unearthed in a long-forgotten library or tomb that may predate existing copies, starting the debate all over again.

Homunculi are not widely represented in common versions of history, only occasionally appearing as minor characters. It is therefore difficult to create their history as a people, with so much of their past unknown or concealed. Among the free homunculi there is a common belief that ritualists and others in power actively suppress the history of the homunculi to keep them subjugated, ignorant of whatever great feats their people may have achieved. Such ideas rarely find much of audience among bound homunculi or others. In the games used to educate in many regions, homunculi are depicted as pawns, or pieces with unusual abilities but of little use to the overall conflict of the game.

The first legends to mention homunculi begin in around two millennia ago with the Ballad of Oyer Taise, a story of a ritualist warrior in Tarsikka who fought shadow creatures with the help of his homunculus sidekick, Rotgut. From there, homunculi appear in histories and stories, never commonplace but slowly increasing in frequency, as the sidekick, fool, or villain. Indeed, the stories of the common folk of Tarsikka and the Principalities paint homunculi as villains, blaming them for stealing the dead, children, and the infirm for their body parts. The exact origin of the homunculi is unknown, but it is clear they were first created in large numbers in Tarsikka and remained limited to Tarsikka for centuries before ritualists in other nations gained access to the Codex of the Hand of Creation. Homunculi spread through Akathia, Oresund, and the Principalities before reaching their current distribution. Emigration from Tarsikka began around four centuries ago, and was completed two centuries ago once homunculi became known on Athral Isle.

Tarsikka began using criminals as parts to create homunculi during the Crawling War, bolstering the nation's defense against the monsters assaulting them by creating monsters of their own. This was initially meant as a temporary measure to be maintained as long as the war continued, but after its end more soldiers were needed to secure the borders. Once the borders were secured, they needed still more manpower to repair the damage done during the war, and the cycle of reliance on executions to expand the homunculus workforce began. Tarsikka has relied on criminal-created labor by homunculi for almost four hundred years now and the system shows no sign of change.

Homunculi have been outlawed in the Principalities of Verdien as a product of ritualism since the creation of the Principalities, even though homunculi were not widely known at the time. Once homunculi became common in neighboring Tarsikka, the Patriarch placed them under the same proscription as ritual wizards. Writs of bondage were introduced when ritualists in service to the Redwood Throne began seeing some value to having their own homunculi. Patriarch Harman IV issued the first writ in 1080. This has allowed some homunculi to enter the Principalities legally, but they are by no means welcome.

In more recent times the homunculi population has begun to outstrip the population of ritualists due to the long lifespan and hardiness of homunculi. Many ritualists know how to create homunculi, but few know the rituals to bind them to service, relying instead on mundane means of control. As time passes, a larger proportion of the homunculi population is free from ritual control, and many of these free homunculi decide that servitude is not for them. Bandit groups like the Scorpions of Abendroth count homunculi among their ranks, while other free homunculi simply leave their masters and seek a peaceful existence elsewhere. This trend toward homunculi independence has caused many ritualists and lords to crack down on homunculi disobedience, especially in Tarsikka where homunculi are vital to national defense. This has had the desired

effect, but also fanned the flames of rebellion. Yet the homunculi cannot exist as a people without the ritualists who create them. Homunculi are incapable of reproducing, or of learning the rituals necessary to create more of their number, so they can never be truly free.

The People

Homunculi tend to adopt the cultural traits of the nation they call home, which is usually the nation of the ritualist or alchemist to whom they are bound. They have no culture of their own; they rarely gather in large numbers, and those who control them actively suppress the development of culture. Only in Eurst has any sort of purely homunculi culture begun to form, but that settlement is too new for a new culture to have overridden the traditions that the inhabitants brought with them. A few common practices appear among homunculi in defiance of cultural or national borders, leading some to believe that these are somehow instilled in them at creation, much like language and basic motor skills.

Faith and Religion

The Redwood Throne has declared homunculi to be soulless abominations incapable of Grace or real faith; they are to be destroyed where possible. In the last two centuries, three homunculi have proven themselves useful enough to the Throne to receive a declaration of faith, a proclamation declaring that they have gained souls through righteous deeds and service. Denied a fundamental place in church hierarchy, most homunculi have little interest in the beliefs of the Redwood Throne. Indeed, many are actively hostile to the Redwood Throne, but do not express this publicly.

The various mystery cults react to homunculi along cultural lines, with the notable exception of the Unending Sky, which actively supports the cause of their freedom. Unending Sky cultists help homunculi to flee their masters and reach regions where homunculi are more accepted. Many in Eurst owe their freedom to such efforts. The Light Under the Mountain has clashed with homunculi and their makers over treatment of the dead, but these conflicts have been few as corpses are easily found elsewhere. Regardless, the Light Under the Mountain does not welcome homunculi into their ranks.

For the most part, homunculi are not religious people, seeing their existence as being nothing more than the flesh that they are composed of. Beings of great power or political groups that claim divine guidance often receive nothing but disdain from homunculi; beings of great power are nothing to be worshipped and politics and religion are the tools most commonly used to keep the homunculi in their place. They have little interest in concepts of an afterlife and instead work to live as much as they can in this existence.

While homunculi are not much interested in religion, many do adopt philosophies to guide their life. Nihilism is common among those homunculi who are bound poorly treated as they see their existence as being a long life of pain and service. Those few homunculi who find their freedom tend to adopt more positive outlooks, seeing the centuries lying before them as time to be enjoyed and celebrated. Regardless homunculi are a people that do not miss a chance to be happy since at any moment their world could turn for the much, much worse.

A few, guided by the principles of alchemy and the grafting of flesh, seek spiritual transformation and continual refinement. Any flaw can be expunged with time and patience, be it

a flaw of flesh or of spirit. They wonder, then, what homunculi might become when they are free of the shackles of age, infirmity, and spiritual failing.

The Gift of Flesh

The process of creating homunculi requires at least some small piece from an existing homunculi, usually a finger, foot, internal organ, eye, or other moderately complex body part. This body part must be used shortly after removal from the donor. Parts from more than one homunculus can be used, but it is not necessary. Most homunculi have only one parent or sire, though some have as many as a dozen. Generally this body part is taken from any convenient homunculus, and the newly created homunculus is not told about the donor. Only particularly kind ritualists allow homunculi to know who their sire or sires were, and those are rare.

This requirement of a body part from an existing homunculus has created lineages of homunculi among those lucky enough to know their sires, which is only a fraction of the overall homunculi population. Learning of one's sire and ancestors has become a major social drive among homunculi, representing the only family they can have. It is entirely possible to have five or even ten generations of living ancestors. Free homunculi often research their ancestry to create a sense of family where they had none. In Eurst, these lineages are recited, honored, memorized, and recorded. None of the known lineages reach back more than fifteen generations, though that is far enough for many of them to find common ancestors.

There are rumors of a ritual that detects if two homunculi are from the same lineage and the strength of their relation, but this ritual has been nothing more but whispers among homunculi for decades. If it were to surface, its value would be immense to homunculi seeking to learn of their past.

Last Day

As far as is known, homunculi do not die of old age. When a homunculus dies and is not resuscitated, humans burn or bury the body as is their custom, but when homunculi are seen to the burial, they cut up the deceased and incorporate their organs and major limbs into the homunculi present. This practice seems to occur spontaneously among homunculi as a natural reaction to death, and has been witnessed even among newly created homunculi who have had no contact with other homunculi. Those who take part in this ritual, commonly called the Last Day, claim to see the memories of the deceased in dreams, but this is hardly provable.

What makes Homunculi great?

Homunculi have an incredible ability to recover from lethal physical trauma, given the relatively aid of any competent surgeon. Through grafting, they can adapt to a wide variety of situations and demands. Ritualists seek the aid of homunculi (and Ultaf warriors even more so) for many purposes in their magic, including some of their beneficial spells that work only on homunculi. The Ultaf warrior order can teach homunculi to be better bodyguards for ritualists, or to strike down spellcasters of all kinds. Those on the Path of Exaltation, the Krudrunis, derive even greater benefits from their grafts, becoming monsters. If you want to play a monster, a rebel, or a tireless and faithful bodyguard, or if you just think being a little creepy is cool, homunculi are ideal.

What makes Homunculi less than desirable?

Homunculi are among the most universally despised and downtrodden of all sentient beings, worse off even than the Tharici. Most people actively oppose the notion that homunculi have souls, in part to justify the things that are done to them. Some find reasonable or kindly masters to serve, but for most, life is pretty unpleasant. The mere existence of a homunculus is an abomination to some, while others look at them as a potential labor force or a source of power for rituals. Ultraf warriors of the Way of the Sentinel become even more tightly bound to their masters, while Krudrunis are hunted and feared more than other homunculi. Playing a homunculus is a kind of challenge that is significantly different from that faced by any other type of character.

Theme

Homunculi are still trying to find a place in the world so that they are not subjugated to the will of another. They are slaves, and even those who yearn for freedom rely on their enslavers for their kind to continue. As a people, the homunculi have only the place in this world their creators forced upon them. What will it take to break out of that?

Racial Advantages

- Homunculi may accept Grafts of various creature parts. These items directly modify their abilities. No homunculus may incorporate more than one Graft at a time, and a Graft must be completely removed to incorporate a new one. Doing so destroys the old Graft.
- The spark of unnatural life in a homunculus is surprisingly easy to re-ignite. If a mostly-intact homunculus has been dead less than five minutes (seven minutes with Improved Stamina), and the surgeon has at least one other natural creature within reach that has been dead for less than five minutes, the surgeon may resurrect the homunculus with five minutes of surgery. The homunculus suffers no weakening of the spirit as a result. The other dead creature is no longer “intact” afterward for purposes of resurrection.
- Homunculi may never initiate a ritual. A homunculus who buys ritual bones, however, may contribute them to a ritual as normal.
- All homunculi must start with one Disadvantage, for which they receive no additional character points. They gain points for other Disadvantages as normal, and this racial drawback does not count against the normal limit of 10 points of Disadvantages. Tarsikkan homunculi must select the Weak Willed disadvantage.

Makeup Requirements: At the very least, a line of stitches should be marked on the player’s face. Most homunculi have sharply contrasting skin tones making up their “complexion,” as they are composed of several people, in varying stages of decay.

The Returned

The graves surrender up their honored dead. No more shall the heroes of long ago lie forgotten; they too come forth to do battle. Though their skin bears the pallor of the grave, there can be no doubt that they have the will to be heroes once again. Yet even they can remember almost nothing of the world in which they once lived. They seek to reclaim the heroic legacy that is their true nature, and thus regain their humanity. As they remember more of what they once were, they find that a variety of incredible abilities can be theirs once again. They can also learn ritualism, forge magic, inscription, and alchemy.



The Returned hail from the long-disappeared nations of the First Age.

If you are considering playing a Returned, please read [Creating a New Character](#) for some things to keep in mind when writing your character history.

Racial Traits

- Returned may recall combat techniques and magical arts that have been entirely lost in the modern day, though they will be unable to teach these talents to others. For each Heroic Code rule that the Ancient adopts, he may spend 10 xp on the Arts of the Ancients.
- Returned recall rules of honor and virtue that are nearly forgotten now. Through these rules, they can regain the vitality that The Grim Prison leeched from them, and they can recall the Arts of the Ancients. Ancients are never required to adopt Heroic Code rules, but they will linger in a tormented half-life until they remember what they are meant to be. At character creation, a Returned may have one Heroic Code rule. At 100 xp, he may adopt a second; at 150, a third; at 200, a fourth; and an additional rule for every 100 xp thereafter. Some rules blatantly contradict one another; no one Returned may follow contradictory rules.
- All Returned characters have Diminished Healing: Celestial Light Magic and Totemic Light Magic at character creation. The characters receive no character points for this Disadvantage.
- Returned gain the advantage associated with their chosen Culture.

Makeup Requirements: At start of play, Returned appear as undead, with white skin, black around the eyes, and sunken cheekbones. Returned can reasonably expect to have their makeup requirements change or completely go away during play.

Druma

Government Style: Monarchy

Ruler: King Selas Jornson

Population: Four million

Capital: Fallengal

Alchemy: Uncommon

Ritualism: Common but mistrusted

Inscription: Rare



Forge Magic: Common

National Symbol: Black Wolf over a half-sun

The Land

Beyond the northern and western borders of Tharicia lay Druma, a land of stone and cold. A high mountain range reached hundreds of miles from inside Tharicia out to the cold Northern Ocean. A deep, wide inlet sea from the ocean came in nearly as far as Tharicia's border in the east. Off of this inlet were many fjords. Most clan lands were defined around a given fjord.

Clans tended to live near the water. Fallengal, the capital, stood at the end of the Inlet Sea. Brearkjin, home of Clan Khovald, was the next-largest settlement, near where the Inlet Sea meets the Northern Ocean. Beyond those large cities, there were many small fortified settlements found along the fjords. All of them were built around the harbor and expanded from there.

In the southern reaches of Druma, there were deep valleys which formed in the mountain range. There were several mining villages in those mountain passes and valleys. Some of the greatest craftsmen in Druma were found there.

The History

Warring bands and petty kings defined much of the history of Druma. The people of Druma pointed to far older empires from which they were descended, but historians could not agree on the details.

From time to time a kingdom rose, only to collapse at the death of its monarch. Most of these were centered in a coastal town, and made up of strong raiders who pillaged neighboring lands. Yet no king could last without the approval of the mysterious Shamans. The shamans stayed in the forests, away from the sight of men. They held to traditions older than any remembered, and recorded prophecies that only they knew.

When Tharician ritualists raised the Northern Beacon, it was to be a sign that Druma was a client nation to the Empire. There was a rebellion at first, but despite Druma's hardy and warlike people, the Tharicians were too many and too well-organized. The nation was conquered and a governor was appointed to oversee the land. Within a hundred years, though, Tharicia's garrisons and forts slowly emptied as the men were needed elsewhere in the empire. In time, the only signs of Tharicia's rule were the Northern Beacon, a few well-made roads, and the Governor, who stayed in a fortified manor house in the shadow of the Northern Beacon.

As Tharicia waned, petty squabbles flared to life once again. Would-be kings came to the city of Fallengal, where the Northern Beacon was located. They came to conquer the Beacon as a sign of their power. The first few wore each other down with infighting and rivalry. The ritualist cabals became involved in protecting the Beacon and the city itself, asserting themselves as a power. Through their agents, they stopped certain chieftains from rising to power and hired others to work for them. Through subterfuge, they became kings themselves. Within five generations, Druma was unified at last, under the rule of the Cabals.

The Beacons were founded to allow exploration of magic by insulating the wizards from Tharician politics. To protect the Beacon, they came to dominate the politics of Druma. They

soon abused their authority, in minor ways at first. In time, they made more onerous demands upon the chieftains, including goods, money, and even slaves. The cabals turned on each other, as some within the Beacon resisted the dark paths others pursued.

The coming of the Wolf King changed all of this. Upon his return, he overthrew the power of the cabals and became king over all of Druma. He established a dynasty of his own line and the families of his close friends. Though Druma's greatness continued beyond his death, the people continually looked to legends and prophecies of his return.

The People

Druma was a monarchy, and the high king assumed the throne by the proclamation of the clan chiefs. The Wolf King passed the crown to his eldest son, and so on through the years until the eventual fall of Druma.

Selas Joranson was the King at the beginning of the war against the Most Foul. He called his nation to war, and the nation answered. He called on the Ebon Aspect to follow him and his axe, and they came. Against the fury of Druma, even the Most Foul would surely fall.

The Wolf's Guard were the warriors in personal service to the king. In his absence, they had the power to make rulings on his behalf. These were traditionally men and women of the highest skill in arms. From time to time the king held tournaments to replenish the ranks of the Wolf's Guard.

Below them were the chieftains of the clans. At Druma's height, there were twelve major clans and several minor ones. A chieftain had the force of law in his own lands; only the king or the Wolf's Guard could oppose their will, and they did so only rarely. Chieftains approved marriages, tariffs, and raids, and presided over executions. The chieftain was a hereditary position that passed to the eldest male heir, legitimate or not. A woman chieftain was completely unheard of, outside of distant legends.

Below the chieftains were his thanes. Thanes commanded a chieftain's forces and spoke with his authority. They were rewarded for their service with ships, vassals, and land.

Beneath the thanes were the cabals. Druma still needed them even after removing them from power. They were consulted as advisors, particularly in the matters of the arcane. They were viewed as untrustworthy; a common expression was "as forked and as a ritualist's tongue."

Below all of these were the commoners. The basic member of Druman society worked the land, served in conflict, maintained his gear, knew how to sail a ship, and survived in even the harshest winter. The most prominent professions in Druma were sailors, raiders, and tradesmen. Many villages would lose two-thirds or more of their populace when the ships went out. Other common professions were smiths and fishermen.

The Rooks and the Shamans stood both within the Druman hierarchy, and apart from it. Rooks were travelers with no single home. They were often considered thieves and brigands, yet few halls turned one away. They carried both current news and legends of the days of yore. A wise chieftain employed a Rook to gather information on a potential enemy, for they could come and go from a place as easily as their namesake.

Shamans lived in the wilds as keepers of deeper truths. They helped people pass from the world when they were in pain, healed the sick, and preserved the people against life's storm. They lived apart, rarely seeking out the hall or the inn, and almost never found on ships. Shamanism was a solitary path, as they convened only in times of great strife. People sought them out when they needed aid or advice.

Druma often raided other lands, capturing men or women to keep them as thralls. They had no right to bear arms or freedom of movement, save what was granted to them by the local chieftain. They could earn their freedom, though, and many did. It was considered good luck for a chieftain to have a thane in service who had been a thrall from a faraway land.

Literacy was somewhat rarer in Druma than in other lands. It was not valued as highly in Druma as skill in arms, but it was not looked down on either.

The military in Druma was not unified as it was in other nations. The thanes of individual chieftains trained together, usually from early childhood. They favored shields, spears, and axes. Archery was also valued highly. When the king called on the chieftains, they brought their forces together. Though they were not used to working in disciplined armies, a swarming barbarian horde has a power all its own. When not fighting in masses, the forces of Druma favored ambushes and stealth.

It was common among the young of Druma to follow in the Wolf King's example. Many young raiders left home to become fighting men among the nations of the world. Druman mercenaries could be found as freebooters off the shores of Ophira or the guarding the cabals of Ton Isiq. Far and wide, they became heroes of legend like the Wolf King and his companions.

The people of Druma, whether chieftain or commoner, dressed plainly. A simple tunic was the most common form of dress, with furs and cloaks for the winter months. Ornamentation was a sign that the person was a fool or knew nothing of life's harshness. A simple torque or bracelet of skillful make might denote a chieftain. Many warriors marked important conquests or adventures with tattoos.

The Wolf King

Into this time came Brenad, the Wolf King, axe in hand, a soldier, a slayer, a reaver, with gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth, to tread the shadowed cabals beneath his booted heel. He had left the lands of Druma to serve in the Tharician military. In his time he learned their tactics and ways, but always kept the ways of his people in his heart. After his time in Tharicia he became a mercenary, traveling far and wide seeking his fortune. He returned with a cadre of soldiers from around the world. A dream had pulled him homeward: a dream of the great northern wolf.

He went forth into the wilderness and met with the Shamans, who knew the ways of the world. They were wise in medicine, magic, and knowledge of the spirits. They paid homage to certain spirits to gain hidden powers. For half a year he dwelt with them and learned many lessons.

From there he sought out the elusive Rooks, who wandered from the wilds of the wood to the halls of chieftains. Where the people went, so went the Rooks. They were the keepers of tales, but not above a little petty larceny. The Wolf King had once learned thievery from a Rook, and

he needed their advice. When he came before their Parliament of Tales, he told them of his travels in exchange for stories to aid him in battles to come.

He proclaimed himself throughout Druma as the Wolf King. He and his followers, including companions from his travels, Shamans he had swayed, and Rooks he had befriended, came to the western shore and marched toward the Beacon. As they progressed eastward, they freed villages from the servants sent by the cabals, and the people of Druma joined his force. He also found allies among those wizards who were not pleased with the darkness rising in the Beacon. For a month, Fallengal and the Beacon withstood both assault and siege. It was the long-forgotten Tharician hereditary governor, Reveka Alemnet, who eventually conspired to open a gate, with the aid and prompting of a Rook named Baldon. Brenad led the charge on the Beacon itself, and with the aid of the ritualists he had won to his side, the beacon fell.

In his mercy, only the most heinous of the ritualists were executed. Those who chose the arts and service of the Most Foul were hung from the walls. This marked the end of the ritualists' rule, but not their destruction. Rooks spread the tale far and wide, and it grew with the telling.

Soon after, the chieftains of Druma gathered and swore allegiance to the Wolf King as the first true king of Druma. It was by his axe that they became a nation. He ruled into old age, and when he neared his end, there came a prophecy. It said after the Wolf King's death, Druma would slowly fall, but in a time of great need, when all was lost, the blood of the Wolf King would return and bring glory greater still.

Faith and Religion

Druma primarily practiced ancestor worship. Only by their approval could one's spirit enter the Golden Halls. Every clan member was taught the names and deeds of his great ancestors. Orphans who did not know the names of their ancestors were believed to be cursed. Some dedicated themselves more deeply to the legacies of their ancestors. They marked their faces with black ash from a funeral pyre, and thus were known as the Ebon Aspect.

In times of old, the people of Druma also worshiped gods, great beings of light and wrath. Some isolated villages still worshiped those old gods and spirits. Far'n was remembered as the god of smiths, and sometimes his mark was placed on blades for luck. Petor was a god of warriors; some believed it was Petor, not the ancestors, who decided whether one was worthy of the Golden Halls. Pjorn was the goddess of luck and the sea. She was a trickster goddess, and people said "Pjorn's tricks be upon ye" in response to someone else suffering bad luck.

What makes Druma great?

The Druman people were strong and self-reliant. They stood in cold hard places, waiting for battle, and called themselves at home. A Druman warrior was not typically what many would call civilized. Their manners were rough, their ways were rough, and they did not respect those who did not command it, but they had bravery instilled in their hearts at an early age. A Druman respected traditions. All respected and feared the sacred wisdom of the Shamans, seeking them in their secluded forest homes. The Rooks were welcomed wherever they traveled, the true keepers of Druma's songs and stories. They would face great doom with a smile and a jest. The nation of Druma had a great ruler in the Wolf King and his return was looked for. His example justified

the Druman people. They were a nation of fierce heroes because Brenad was, and the warriors of Druma sought to walk his path and the paths of his compatriots.

What makes Druma less than desirable?

When all you have is a hammer, all problems look like nails. Druma was a hard place in which to make a home. They had little patience for those who were unwilling to forge their own living. They disdained sophistication and the scholarship of other nations. They believed in hard and painful lessons and tales told around the fire. Superstition often drove them as much as bravery. Whole expeditions would be abandoned due to a bad omen. They tolerated ritualists at best, and only if the ritualists understood that the sharp blade of an axe awaited a wrong move. They considered Outsiders weak, impotent, and ultimately, prey for the strong.

Theme & Costuming

Druma is a land of barbarians and strength. They are drawn from the old barbarian cultures like the Picts, Visigoths, and later Viking cultures. A fictional and slightly more appropriate comparison would be Cimmeria from the Conan novels by Robert E. Howard. They tend to be convinced of their own superiority. The culture values strength, but is also a culture of great mirth as well.

We encourage Returned players to wear tattered, stained, or dusty clothes when they rise out of the Grim Prison. However, Returned wear whatever clothing they can come across thereafter, possibly recreating the styles of their forgotten homelands. Drumans wore tough leathers and furs. Symbols of the wolf in front of the half sun were often worn as pendants or cloak pins. Blue body paint (similar in style to Pict tattoos) were frequently seen on the freshly Returned, as it was put on before important battles, and as a death-rite.

Cultural Advantages

Returned hailing from Druma pay two fewer points for Animal Empathy, Pain Resistance, or Rapid Healing, though they only receive the price break once, regardless of how many skills they purchase.

Endeiras

Government Style: Monarchy
Ruler: Empress Meadhbh (MAEV) of House Trahaearne (TRAH eer nyuh)
Population: Six Million
Capital: Uethil
Alchemy: Common
Ritualism: Government Restricted, Rare
Inscription: Government Restricted, Rare
Forge Magic: Common
National Symbol: a crown over an Oak Leaf



The Land

The Empire of the Oak, as the lands of Endeiras were sometimes known, once spread across much of the known world. Of course, this was before much of the world was known to anyone except those called the Firstborn. Though they spoke of it little, it was the growth of the human kingdoms and empires that slowly pushed back the Empire of Oak, as they were unwilling to come to conflict when the land was so vast and the number of people so small. Endeiras was always a nation of peace and diplomacy, especially in the early years of its contact with the humans in the lands that were once theirs. However, many of the humans saw this as a weakness, and tried to take by force that which was originally freely given. The humans were surprised to find that this was not an easy task, and suffered a series of heavy defeats before backing off in an unhappy truce. It was during this time that several great Endeiras bastions were created.

Uethil itself was a marvel to behold. It was built into a grove of trees that stretched up into the foothills of Méith Sliabh (MAY Slee iv). The buildings mimicked the nature of the trees themselves, granting the illusion that the forest was larger than it actually was. The buildings on the mountainside were like great spiring trees, far larger than could possibly exist on such a small and tree-filled mountain. Uethil was the leading city in allowing humans into the Empire of Oak. Uethil, being close to the sea, allowed the humans there to work in the lower reaches of the city, particularly in the harbor regions. Humans, due to past unsavory deeds, were not afforded the same rights as the Firstborn, and were not even considered citizens, unless they paid a substantial sum to the Empire. Non-citizens were not allowed to work magic unless a Firstborn hired them to do so. The human part of Uethil was known as Eallach (E loch). The second capital of Tière-A-Tun was much the same as Uethil, though it was headed by Sagart Niall (SAH gurt NEE ul), the head priest and magician of the empress. If possible, Tière-A-Tun was slightly harsher in their treatment of humans, considering them almost beneath their notice.

Humans were allowed in three other cities in the Empire of Oak. Mianach (MEE uh nuhk), seen as the sister city of Uethil, though not on the sea, was sometimes known as the City of Marble. Mianach was ruled by Prince Dolaidh (DO lee), the son of the Empress. Mianach was known for its great craftsmen, and for the Dtonnta Lasair (Jawn cha Luh ser), the celebration of the Twin Gods, Abhainn (UH wayn) and Anam (UH num). Humans, though still confined to a certain part of the city Eibhir (AE veer), could become citizens by serving in the military, excelling in a craft, or buying a title. The city of Miotail (MYOO tahl) was a town of fierce warriors that served the goddess Doileag (DOL ak). Any who pledged to her cause were welcomed as citizens. Miotail was controlled by Ceannasaí Caitir Tarbh (KEH nah shay KAH tcheer TURV), a woman of fair beauty, but carrying many scars, both on her flesh and in her heart. The final city was the city of Tá, the city in the shadows. Tá housed more of the experimental and secretive rites of the Empire of Oak. Humans that lived in Tá were expected to contribute, and to accept binding by a magical code. The penalty for betrayal, they say, was worse than death. Tá followed one of the darker gods for the Firstborn, Folaigh (FOE lek).

The History

Stories say that Uethil was the third primary capital in the history of Endeiras. The first two were, supposedly, destroyed after the mountains on which they built were eroded. That, they claim, was just the start of the empire, not the start of the Firstborn people. Humans scoff at this,

unable to believe that the Firstborn have been around as long as they claim. Yet there are ruins and artifacts, obviously of Firstborn make and design, that have long eroded and been ruined by time. Not to mention the fact that the magic practiced by the Firstborn, what they claim to be their natural magic, is seemingly unable to be reproduced via alchemy, ritualism, or even wholly in forge magic, much to the dismay of the humans. This added magical advantage made it difficult for humans to successfully war with them over the years, and played a large part in the victories of the Empire of Oak over the humans in the Home Wars. The Firstborn claimed to open this magic up to humans who become citizens in their empire, but it is against the law for them to speak of it.

Due to magic being so tightly controlled, many of the common magical practices introduced by the humans, such as inscription and ritualism, were allowable with approval by the empire only. This was seen as the Firstborn oppressing the humans, by the humans. However, the Firstborn that wished to practice these arts also had to request approval, something most humans did not stop and consider, or considered a formality, at best. The creation of homunculi required approval as well, once the art became known. For, indeed, this knowledge was something that came from humans, and the Firstborn did not know. Alchemy, on the other hand, was barely seen as a form of magic and allowed to be practiced by anyone desired. Priests, smiths and magicians all practiced alchemy within the empire, to varying degrees.

During this age, only the smiths of far north Druma rivaled the craftsmanship of the Empire of Oak. The Firstborn were known for their magnificent and powerful armaments. Master smiths were contracted by human nobles and kings throughout the known world in order to gain these weapons. It was rumored that some smiths had ways to create weapons more powerful than even the most potent forge magic crafted weapon. These weapons were whispered to have drives and desires with which their owners must compete. No accounts of these weapons remain, but writings discussing the rumors and legends of them have persisted.

However, the Firstborn were not untouchable. The empire began to face major problems when a wasteland began spreading across their lands. Firstborn began to get sick and die, where humans were unaffected by these plights. Firstborn began to be fearful and fled the safety of the empire, looking for cures and help. Alchemists and mages worked on the problem, with varying degrees of success, trying to use those that were immune to the plague as a way to halt it. Records of the plague and sickness are few and far between, but those few that remain report hideous boils and oozing sores, causing the victim to become violent and filled with an unnatural vitality, before dropping dead. As a result, most of the Firstborn began to leave the heavily populated regions of Endeiras, and most retreated to Tiere-a-Tun, where Sagart Niall and the Empress were preparing a Grand Working to help save their people. Rumors have the Empress falling to the illness or evil forces that were beginning to roam the land prior to this occurring, while others have her participating in the Working.

Not all Firstborn fled, but soon humans were the ones that were left in charge of the vacant empire. The implements and workings of the empire still remained, and the humans that lived there quickly gained in prominence and power with the rest of the humans, who envied and coveted what they now possessed.

The People

The empire itself worked because the nine houses of the empire worked together to sustain it. The nine houses of the empire shared the throne of the empire, and when one emperor or empress died, it shifted to the next house in line. In order of imperial importance, the houses were Tíogair, Alla, Bhfiach, Capall, Nathair, Trehaearne, Taifead, Francach, and Cuileog. The rule of the empire shifted in this way, following from one house to the next. The empire itself was divided into tasks best suited to the houses. The houses, each hoping to gain favor outside of their rule, carried favor with the particular ruling house at that time. Due to the long lifespans of the Firstborn, this caused great shifts in each house from one rule to the next, with the houses taking on aspects of the primary house during that given period. Conflicts between the houses were not unheard of, but the empire was swift to intervene in anything too obvious or overt. Corruption, war, murder and illegal activities abounded in the empire, but as long it wasn't too out of hand, it was permitted. The Empire of Oak was an empire of inertia and stagnation more than anything else. The Firstborn did not care for change, preferring tradition and history.

The majority of citizens in Endeiras belonged to House Cuileog (KOO lyok), which were mostly servants, farmers, workers, and what would normally be considered peasants. However, membership in even this lowly house afforded them the right to work the magic of the Firstborn, or the right to request to work the human magics. Members of House Cuileog did not often question or complain about their station, happy they were beneath the notice of most and could just go about their lives.

House Trehaearne was known as the house of grace, beauty, and diplomacy, though they were known for their skill in one-to-one armed conflicts as well, being some of the most skilled duelists in the world. The Empress was a member of House Trehaearne, it being their turn to rule the Empire of Oak. Members of House Trehaearne often served as seneschals, advisors, and diplomats for people within the empire.

Tíogair (TEE gayr) was the house of high nobles. They were great warriors and known to be fearless. Many of them worshiped Doileag, the goddess of war, battle, valor, death, and inspiration. Even though they were a house of high nobility, they were strange among their peers for allowing humans to join their ranks, provided they worshiped Doileag and were without peer in battle. They were known for their strong tactical mind, and for being great generals.

Nathair (NAH hayr) accepted humans as well, and was one of the houses in which titles were easily purchased. Nathair cared little for motives, only for coin, and opportunities that presented ways to make coin. Other houses looked down on Nathair for their greed and their less-than-moral activities. The leaders of the house, known as the Board, governed Nathair tightly, lest they attract the attention of the empire.

House Capall (KAH pull) served as merchants throughout the empire, and were often some of the greatest craftsmen as well. No humans were known to have joined this house.

House Francach (FRAN kach) were the priests, scouts, and wardens of much of the empire. They felt at home away from people, serving the gods and goddesses of the Firstborn. Humans were known to join this house, as they cared more for skill than propriety. Members of this house were often blunt to the point of insult. They often served as the local militia and guards for the major

cities, for those that did not want to be out in the wild. Some who spurned the traditional callings of the house were investigators for hire.

Bhfiach (VEECH) was the house of high magic and Workings. Their skills were unparalleled anywhere else in the empire, and their work with forge magic produced some of the most exquisite weapons the world had ever seen. No humans were known to be in this house. Bhfiach members constantly scrutinized, observed, and learned all they could from a situation.

House Taifead (TAY feet) were the record-keepers, loremasters, historians, and judges of the empire. They were amongst the smaller houses, and accepted almost no one outside of the other noble houses. Tradition meant more to them than to anyone else.

Alla (A luh) was the smallest house, and one of the most feared. Little is known about them, but when something unsavory needed to happen, or just happened on its own, they were likely involved. They were difficult to join as an outsider, but after passing their tests, woe to the person that insulted a human of that house.

Humans that were members of houses could expect better lives and treatment, from their own house at the very least. While they might be treated as weak and insignificant, belonging to a house afforded many privileges that couldn't be denied. From formal access to magic, to being able to collect a portion of taxes, to having leverage in certain groups and organizations within the empire. Once a human joined a house, they were protected and treated the same as any other citizen in the empire, though some prejudices remained. However, if physical harm was done to a human citizen, the full extent of the empire's weight was brought down on the perpetrator. It afforded less tangible advantages as well, such as permission to carry the exquisitely crafted weapons and armor of the Firstborn. Further, the wealth of knowledge and history stored in the Firstborn libraries and vaults was enough to occupy an entire nation of human scholars for several lifetimes. This was extremely attractive to human scholars and magicians.

Eifion and the World Beyond the Vale

Eifion (E feen) was the youngest son of the House Trehaearne aristocracy. He was not interested in ever assuming the throne, even if the thirty or so people before him in line had died. Instead, he spent most of his time discovering the secrets of the hidden world, or the World Beyond the Vale as he called it. He worked with the spirits and beings that he found there to learn their ways and magic. Swordplay was his other love, and he incorporated these secrets into his martial pursuits. One of his most prized possessions was a carved wooden recorder. Legends say that the recorder allowed Eifion to travel between the two worlds as he pleased. Traditionally, the lands of the Empire of Oak were known as the Vale, much as others would call their lands a kingdom or barony. The spirits and supernatural world of the Vale were quite well-known to the Firstborn, who often entered into agreements and relationships with them. Eifion sought out the spirits outside the known lands of the Firstborn, hoping to understand the entire world more fully, and usher in a new age of learning for his people.

When the Firstborn began to experience their great catastrophe, Eifion led groups of Firstborn across the seas, to the lands of the humans, to find answers. Nothing certain is known as to what happened to Eifion and those that traveled with him, but stories and accounts of humans depict him as a great hero and savior to all. If these accounts are believed, Eifion and his men traveled the world, seeking answers and saving those who needed their help. Stories say he was slain in a

great battle, but not before helping his people in some fashion, though it is unclear what exactly occurred. These same stories claim that if his recorder is played by an Endeiras citizen, he will return from Beyond the Vale to help his people once more.

Faith and Religion

The Firstborn, and the humans that lived with them, had a complicated and diverse variety of gods and goddess that they worshiped. Their ceremonies involved the natural world, sacrifice of some sort, symbolic or actual, and working with the spirits of a given area or desire. Gods and goddesses were seen as a part of everyday life, and were a matter-of-fact part of society. Priests were respected as those that communed with the gods, and it was their duty to do so. Powerful magicians believed they spoke with the gods as well, and there were few who disputed that fact. Ceremonies and celebrations of the gods were held regularly, and even the name Empire of Oak can be traced to Dair (Tayr), the god of nature, healing, and the forest. Though no one god held dominance over the others, many worshiped Dair, Doileag, and Folaigh.

What makes Endeiras great?

The Empire of Oak was the first known empire. It spanned across the sea and far to the East before the coming of man. The Empire gauged history based on the erosion of the mountains upon which its homes were made. The Firstborn ruled this Empire, and allowed humans amongst them, even after the humans of Tharicia attacked them. These humans so honored were able to bear witness to wondrous magics only otherwise seen in battle against their kind. The arts of crafting, particularly arms and armor, were especially advanced in the Empire, and this edge in combat was clear when they were driven to battle. Though unwilling to engage in conflict, when pressed, the nation of Endeiras was without parallel, and only rarely beaten. The Firstborn sometimes shared their arts with their human subjects, a rare and blessed gift indeed.

The Empire of Oak was at home with nature and the world in a way that no others were. The history and knowledge in the Empire surpassed that in most of the world at the time, and many humans flocked to the Empire to learn these knowledge and skills. Endeiras was a nation of culture and civility, if not equality. To be part of Endeiras was to be part of the aloof elite of the world, and to strive to learn all that that elite had to offer. Endeiras had a religion all their own, one that has been forgotten in most texts in the modern world, but one that helped drive the Empire. The Empress and High Priest were figures of guidance, strength, and love in the Empire, and the people supported their rulers absolutely. Endeiras was a land of high fantasy, romance, house intrigue and knowledge, as unseen elsewhere in the world.

What makes Endeiras less than desirable?

To not be a Firstborn in the Empire was to be a second class citizen, or to not be accepted at all. Not all houses permitted human membership, and the government tightly controlled what the people were allowed to do. Although this was true for all subjects of the Empire, these restrictions were even worse for the humans. Not only were these humans not accepted by the Firstborn in many cases, but they lost respect in the eyes of their human kin outside of Endeiras, who saw this as a betrayal. House conflict was subtle and humans were often used a bait and fodder in the politics of the Houses. In war and battle, humans were expected to show their loyalty by fighting with zeal, and always against their own kind. While many were rewarded with teaching, acceptance and money, they rarely were afforded respect on any large level. It was

a constant struggle to gain prominence and respect in the world of the Firstborn. As the Great War of Shadow progressed, the Empire began to sicken and die. Much of the land was ruined, and the Firstborn citizens became sick and crazed. By the end of the First Age, it was a land of dominance, terror, and fading hope.

Theme & Costuming

Endeiras was a nation of social mores, communion with the spirits of nature, and high magic. It was a nation convinced of its superiority, perfection, and favor amongst the gods. Endeiras draws from the druidic groups in Northern Europe, particularly the white-clad druids, the elves in the work of Tolkien, and the Dragaeran Empire in the works of Steven Brust.

We encourage Returned players to wear tattered, stained, or dusty clothes when they rise out of the Grim Prison. However, Returned wear whatever clothing they can come across thereafter, possibly recreating the styles of their forgotten homelands. Endeiras's style was very druidic. Colors were woodsy greens, browns, blues, and greys. House symbols featured heavily in ornamentation, with many heron, tiger, cobra, horse, rat, hawk, tortoise, and black widow images. Magic users wore loose robes, usually trimmed with leaf patterns. Intricate and filigreed jewelry was very common.

Returned may only be Humans from this culture, without the express consent of the plot committee.

Cultural Advantages

Returned hailing from Endeiras pay two fewer points for Medium, the first level of Weaponsmith, or the first level of Armorsmith, though they only receive the price break once, regardless of how many skills they purchase.

Mazhan

Government Style: Theocratic Monarchy

Ruler: The Paladin Queen, Her Holiness Ferina dai Dessa

Population: 3 Million

Capital: Malachite

Alchemy: Rare

Ritualism: Uncommon

Inscription: Uncommon

Forge Magic: Common

National Symbol: A horizontal greatsword over a sunburst



The Land

The island of Mazhan was 120 miles north and west of the coast of Druma. At around half the size of Endeiras, it is often out of sight and out of mind for the people of the mainland. The nation of Mazhan occasionally claimed a handful of colonies on the stony shores of Druma, but these faced fierce opposition from the native Nimori and other clans and never prospered.

The island was mountainous, with lush central valleys and ancient forests. Cities of austere grace grew there. The mountains gave forth stone and iron, the forests gave forth silkworms and timber, and the seas gave up fish and salts.

The great cities of Mazhan were Malachite, Crucible, Vision, Tower-Shell, Tempest, and Anathema. Malachite was a city on two hills, spanning a valley. Crucible stood at the foot of a long-extinct volcano. Vision was a city on the side of a mountain, with a monastery at its peak. Tower-Shell was a fishing city, named for a type of mollusk that inhabited its bay in large numbers. Tempest stood on the island's northern, storm-wracked coast. Anathema, built centuries after the others, was on a tiny, nearly barren island near Mazhan. It took its name from its populace of exiled heathens and blasphemers.

The History

Humans were long-established on Mazhan before its unification into a single nation. The five city-states of Malachite, Crucible, Vision, Tower-Shell, and Tempest contended for control of the island for ages. Isolated from the mainland by miles of ocean, they were culturally very similar, though they would have killed an outsider for saying so. Then Keheia dai Dalya, Iron Lady of the Crucible, went to the city of Vision and ascended to its monastery, barefoot and wearing a shift woven of nettles, to seek the blessing of the monks – to seek peace. They cleaned her sword in water from their sacred spring, gave her armor of iron-plated leather, and sent her forth to unite the Mazhani. Her forces waited at the foot of the mountain, half a day from Vision, and so it may have been with some cynicism that the monks conferred upon her the title of Paladin Queen.

She took this title and charge seriously, however, and returned to the lowlands with a new dedication. At Tempest, she drew the city's champion into single combat and slew him. She spared the city's army and invited them to join her battle-host. Tower-Shell heard tales of this battle, and the soldiers found that they could raise no hand against her when she strode through their lines. She raised her blade to challenge Tower-Shell's champion, but his will failed him and he shamed himself, falling to his knees before her. When he had pledged himself to her, she granted him absolution by permitting him to fall upon his sword.

Finally Malachite stood alone. Keheia's battle-host surrounded the city, and she entered the governor's negotiating tent. The governor poisoned her drink with a strong dram of the vilest poison man has ever known, but she drank it as though it were clean water. The assassin that hid within the tent, waiting to strike, found at the last moment that his blade had rusted away to nothing. With growing frustration, the governor uttered a dreadful curse against her, invoking names that no mortal should name. Keheia bowed her head politely and asked that he reconsider his hasty decision to make war against her. Thwarted at the last, the governor fled from the tent and into the wilds, and the Paladin Queen claimed dominion over all of Mazhan.

In the centuries that followed, each ruler chose as his or her successor the most enlightened warrior of his or her followers. The island had many Paladin Kings along with the Paladin Queens, and it was during the rule of one of the Paladin Kings that the city of Anathema was founded. The Paladin King Kahar don Teived ruled that it was morally untenable to execute heretics and blasphemers, who might yet be redeemed, and thus ordered their exile to a small island near Mazhan, where they could contemplate the errors in their thinking.

The People

The first Paladin Queen declared herself the fount of all honors, so that all official positions came from royal decrees and reverted to the Crown upon the death of the honoree or the monarch. Inheritance of every kind flowed to the monarch, to be reassigned to deceased's descendants in whatever measure the monarch saw fit. This incredibly high level of centralized authority drove the national ethos of service. This ethos dictated that one should honor one's ancestors by seeking to equal and surpass their service to the Paladin Kings and Queens, yet serving with humility. The Mazhani system of patronymics for men (don) and matronymics for women (dai) reflects this cultural obsession with honoring one's ancestors. The last element of any Mazhani name is the city of one's birth (or the city closest to one's village).

The people of Mazhan were fishermen, farmers, and tradesmen. The right to train with the Blades of Mazhan was a high honor reserved for those who demonstrated a measure of spiritual awareness and unswerving loyalty to the nation, in some cases even when that loyalty was at the expense of the monarch.

Appointed officials had the right to keep a retinue of warriors trained by the Blades, though many also hired less elite guards. A complex relationship existed between the warrior and his employer; until such time as he was declared to be in disgrace, the warrior had the right to seek favor elsewhere. If the official declared him to be in disgrace, he was cast out, and could not seek legitimate employ elsewhere on Mazhan, except within Anathema.

The prospect of exile to Anathema was very frightening to the average Mazhani, but it was seen as pressure valve for those who could not handle the demands of honor and loyalty. Some who lived in Anathema believed they could use the island as a foothold for a rebellion against Mazhan. They did not realize until too late that other exiles were willing to pay any price to redeem their honor.

Mazhani knew little of alchemy, ritualism, or inscription, though forge magic was treated as a respectable trade. The monks dwelling in Vision were the only significant practitioners of ritualism or inscription. In Anathema, there was a dark and secretive sect that practiced alchemy, particularly poison-making. If a Mazhani had no honor, he might turn to the House of the Silver Web to sell him a measure of poison, or to disappear the target completely.

Mazhani Warrior Code

The Blades of Mazhan, famed for their outright perfection of sword-fighting, held to a strict code of honor, guided by honor of the first Paladin Queen.

1. There is no shame in death, only in cowardice. The courage to face death redeems all disgrace.
2. Never boast of yourself, but speak well of your companions, that they may do the same of you.
3. Peace is a gift; be as willing to give it as receive it. Peace is a gift; be worthy. Peace is a gift; if your enemy is unworthy, deny it to him.
4. Speak not falsely, even in omission.
5. Discern true beauty from false beauty. Create only the former; extinguish the latter.

These warriors were famed for their deadly skill with blades of mismatched length, and for their incredible mental discipline. They were further expected to value art. There existed a strong tradition of warrior-poets. Second to poetry were weaving and pottery, pursued not for the use of their products but because the mental state of creating was believed to hone the intellect, and creating the ideal piece required attention to exquisite detail.

Faith and Religion

The people of Mazhan regarded their rulers, Paladin Kings or Paladin Queens, as mouthpieces and servants of the will of Heaven. The ruler was not intrinsically divine, but held the throne as long as Heaven permitted it to be so. Dogma stated that the people losing faith in a Paladin King was one of the signs that the favor of Heaven has been withdrawn, so even as a Paladin King demanded loyalty, he also had to court it.

The people of Anathema, found guilty of heresy or blasphemy, followed other traditions. The way of the Ivory Sun appealed to those who still believed in the core of Mazhani dogma but rejected the Paladin Kings.

What makes Mazhan great?

The Mazhani possessed a deep pride in their people and traditions, and thanks to their isolation those traditions have endured since time out of mind. They were solidly united in service to their Paladin Kings and Queens, and those monarchs in turn served their people and the will of Heaven with grace and dedication. Honor and obligation bound everyone together, from the highest to the lowest, save the outcasts of Anathema. Though spell-lore, alchemy, and other arts were little known, the monks of Vision possessed a deep spiritual wisdom not seen among other humans of the First Age. They gave great honor to the warrior's way; the Blades of Mazhan were an incomparable achievement in their time, the world's first warrior order. Correspondingly, they also achieved great things in the craft of Forge Magic.

What makes Mazhan less than desirable?

In their isolation, the Mazhani knew little of the people and the traditions of other countries, and their practice of many forms of magic was primitive compared to Endeiras or the mainland. The people of Anathema represented a festering wound in Mazhani society, in a constant state just short of open defiance of the laws of the Paladin Kings and Queens. Almost everyone accused of heresy, blasphemy, or non-capital crimes found themselves sentenced to transportation to Anathema, nearly always a life sentence. The code of honor and obligation was unforgiving, and many good warriors fell into dishonor as a protest of conscience against their lords.

Theme & Costuming

Mazhan's theme can be summed up in two questions: "What if Japan had been off the coast of Europe instead of Asia?" and "What if Joan of Arc had been Japanese?" Mazhani characters explore the possibilities implied in a fusion of these cultures.

We encourage Returned players to wear tattered, stained, or dusty clothes when they rise out of the Grim Prison. However, Returned wear whatever clothing they can come across thereafter, possibly recreating the styles of their forgotten homelands. Mazhani style was a fusion of

Japanese, Chinese, and Standard Fantasy. Clothing heavily featured loose vests, shirts, and trousers in linen, tighter, more closely fitting silks, and elegant patterns. Armor can range from samurai-plate to chainmail, whatever is most comfortable for fencing and swordplay. Tied knots and clasps were common adornments. Hair sticks featured in hair styles of both men and women. A common jacket style worn in Mazhan was similar to that of the Chinese. The wrap-style jacket in silk was also very popular.

Cultural Advantages

Returned hailing from Mazhan pay two fewer points for Short Sword, Longsword, or Bastard Sword, though they only receive the price break once, regardless of how many skills they purchase.

Ophira

Government Style: Constitutional Republic
Ruler: Caliph Tariq Silkinti, the Molten Sheik
Population: Roughly nine million
Capital: Kanat
Alchemy: State Controlled, common
Ritualism: State Controlled, very rare
Inscription: State controlled, very rare
Forge Magic: very rare, mundane smithing only
National Symbol: Eagle carrying a scroll on a white and gold field



The Land

Kanat, Havlama, and Temel, the great gem cities of Ophira. These three jewels of Ophira sparkled around the great inland sea of Aptal, often called the Sea of Glass. Aptal and the surrounding areas were the most populous areas of Ophira, stemming from years of drought and a slowly spreading desert region. Crops did not grow in the dusty and barren soil. Great storms of sand and dust roiled across the nation, parching the land and sapping strength from the citizens. Much of the nation became abandoned as people moved to the larger cities, hoping to find ways to sustain themselves, now that they were unable to farm and most game had fled the ravaged lands. This caused the few viable cities left in the nation to swell with people, leaving most of the nation prostrate. The three gem cities were hit the hardest, the cities bursting at the seams with refugees and people looking to survive. Great tent cities formed around them, and sprawled out around the inland sea of Aptal.

Eventually, the Caliph's guards and the military began to turn people away as they approached the city. They patrolled the tent cities endlessly, and were quick to dole out harsh sentences for any that broke the law or crossed the guards. Those who were turned away, or fled oppression in the tent cities, made their way to the east to the Bastion of Eagles, deep in the mountains. Elemarc, the Vice Chancellor of the eastern mountain range known as Raven's Crest, eagerly accepted the aid, building deep tunnels and immense underground structures. These were built as barracks for those working, and were used to store goods, treasure, and supplies. Elemarc believed that he would have the first completely underground city, affording rich minerals, shelter, and the best defense system of any known city. If stories are believed, at least one entire

mountain was riddled with tunnels, making their way through twists and turns to the Bastion of Eagles.

One entire city, the city of Harap, was abandoned during this period and became a scavenging ground for treasure hunters and criminals. Harap was originally a major city in the west, protecting the fringes of the nation.

The History

Thirty-one tribes converged to form the great nation of Ophira. The tribes, long separate and squabbling, came together under the spear-banners of Kacivat, Haragoz and Rasneddin. The three, each of the Ejderha tribe, had led the great offensive that subdued fourteen tribes, and decimated six more. Only after the public evisceration of the chieftain of the Akbaba tribe, one of the ten tribes left, not counting the Ejderha tribe, did the remaining tribes call an *Ateshkes*, or truce meeting, with the three leaders of the Ejderha tribe. It was at this *Ateshkes* that the ten remaining tribes gathered and spoke of assembling under the spear-banners of the Ejderha. The other nine tribes rejected absolute control by the three spear-elders of the Ejderha. Kacivat, Haragoz, and Rasneddin knew that should further war break out, many that now swelled their numbers might instead fight under their opponents' spear-banners. Instead, the three spear-elders agreed to a truce, as long as the Ejderha remained in charge of the formed nation. After ten days of deliberation and work, one for each of the tribes present, the document known the *Hukuk Kaydirma* was created.

This work laid out the Ophiran Caliphate. In it, it gave the Ejderha the rights of rulership over the other nine tribes, though within limits. Each of the other nine tribes, if they felt they were being unfairly treated or were pressed upon more than others, had the right to approach the non-ruling tribes and submit their grievance for consideration. If the nine tribes found the issue was grave enough, they could remove the caliph from power and instate another from the Ejderha tribe in his or her place. If the cause implicated the Ejderha tribe in its entirety, the nine would select a caliph from their own ranks. While not a perfect solution, all ten tribes eventually agreed to this. The *Hukuk Kaydirma* was changed only once in its long history. Eventually, the tribes had married and intermingled enough that only seven true tribes were discernible, three having faded away entirely. These tribes made up the council advisory potions that served the caliph.

In more recent times, Ophira faced the most pressing struggle of its history. Caliph Devimsi Silkinti was a man obsessed. Ophira was dying and nothing could be done. Devimsi had all of the alchemists and ritualists in the nation working constantly to bring rain and prosperity to the nation. Having failed, Devimsi sent scouts far and wide, in search of mythical creatures, hoping to use them find an answer to the nation's woes. At the time, stories of fighting to the west were spreading across the land, claiming that darkness waged war against the world. In Ophira, this had yet to be seen, and was largely discounted as rumor. Three scouts, Ghaliya, Hasim and Shihab, were dubious of finding anything, but went anyway. Time passed, and the caliph assumed they had failed. Eventually, they returned carrying not one, but two creatures, different in form, but both of mythical origins. The caliph's work still failed, even with the addition of the two creatures. However, a strange man arrived in the castle, offering aid. This man, calling himself Shahnaz, offered to solve the caliph's problems. Days passed, but eventually Shahnaz emerged from the rooms where the two beings were kept, bearing an exquisitely crafted gauntlet of copper and strange leather. This, he said, would aid the caliph. After that, the man left, never

to be seen in Ophira again. As Shahnaz assured, rain fell and Ophira began to flourish once more. However, as time wore on, the caliph grew more and more crazed, seemingly unable to quench his thirst for power and expansion. His son, Tariq, and the three scouts decided that the caliph had to be stopped before he did even more harm to the nation. Tariq and the others slew the caliph one night, though the battle was pitched and fierce. Stories of the battle, retold in later years by palace guards, spoke of thunder and lightning inside the palace that night.

Tariq at first was seen as a traitor and met with disdain. However, his good works and constant care for the Ophiran people won them over, and the remaining tribes and advisors came to follow his lead. Tariq was, they said, born to lead, and was the one destined to restore the wealth and prosperity of Ophira. As Tariq and Ophira recovered, rumors of war in the west grew so strong that they could not be ignored. Tariq and his three allies began to organize the forces of Ophira and move west, to lend aid if it was indeed needed. The land had not recovered from the ravages, and the weather still caused trouble for all, but the nation had hope once more.

The People

The majority of people in Ophira were farmers and hunters, with some being miners. Others were tradesman and craftsman, or direct servants of the Caliph. Most craftsman did not have access to the raw materials that the rest of the known world had, and Ophira had to trade for many goods. As such, they made weapons and armor of fine quality, but the art of forge magic was almost unknown, and its few practitioners did not have the means to pursue it. Others were alchemists, ritualists, or scribes under the authority of the Caliph and the advisors. Alchemists were by far more common, as ritualists were very secretive, and it was almost impossible to force them to work together as a cohesive unit. Scribes were plentiful, many of them Royal Scribes. The rest of the nation were spear-warriors, or spear-elders. Spear-elders were those warriors that had mastered the art of the spear, glaive, and halberd, and taught those that wish to learn. A spear-elder was a force to be reckoned with, single-handedly taking down entire units. Spear-warriors were those that followed their ways. This style was almost unheard of in the rest of the world. Entire forces of spear-warriors acted and fought as one in battle. This made them frightening to even well-trained forces, and devastating to those that were not. Spear-banners were among the most prized possessions of these spear-warriors.

Most followed the rule of the Caliph to the letter; to do otherwise was to court disaster. They grew more and more restless as Ophira faced trials, however, and small rebellions and skirmishes were increasingly frequent. The guards and military suppressed them violently. The Caliph's advisors had no thought of overthrowing his rule in such desperate times, preferring to remain unified and fight for the nation. Before this time, the people felt free to address their grievances with the various advisors to have their issues heard. It was a nation that worked to serve its subjects, and to create a land to stand alone and face the outside world. The murder of Caliph Devimsi Silkinti by Tariq and his conspirators threw the nation into turmoil. Those that supported the slain caliph were pitted against those that desired change. Many died in the ensuing struggles. Even after peace was restored, there were those that would not support Tariq, despite his broad popularity. These people withdrew to the Bastion of Eagles, hoping to serve Ophira far from the rule of the new Blood Prince, as he was known by those that distrusted him. However, still more grew to love Tariq, and to trust in his every decision. To these people, Tariq was a savior and a hero.

Spear-Banners

Spear-Banners played a long and colorful role in the history of Ophira. Spear-banners were long pieces of cloth tied to spears and planted near their owners when in battle. Spear-banners often carried the traditions and stories of other warriors on them, commemorating the storied warriors of the past. Each was unique to its bearer in battle, and these banners covered the field of battle when two tribes clashed. Each banner carried the colors of the tribe and a symbol to designate the warrior's tribe to avoid confusion of banners in battle. Tradition was that these banners were collected after battles, rather than during the conflict. To steal or destroy a spear-banner during combat brought dishonor on the one that destroyed it. These banners were often crafted by ritualists and alchemists that supported the spear-warriors. These spear-banners became prized possessions of tribes and were passed down, each generation adding to their legacy and enhancing them. Some spear-banners were reported to do amazing things when handled by those that owned the legacy scrawled across them.

Their great spears and spear-banners contributed to Ophira's reputations for fierce and disciplined warriors.

Faith and Religion

The faith of Ophira was split in two main groups: those who followed the wisdom and traditions of the original spear-seers of the thirty-one tribes, and those who revered the Speaker of the Thousand Suns. The Speaker of the Thousand Suns was primarily a children's story in which a man became the embodiment of the sun itself. Light and flame flowed from his mouth and hands as he condemned those who would rise against Ophira. He slumbered throughout the ages under the desert sands, but he vowed to return whenever Ophira was in danger. While many in Ophira would utter quick prayers to the Speaker, most also offered prayers and gave thanks to the forces of the land. The spear-seers believed that the myriad forces of the land, the dust and sand of the desert, the water and blood of people, were all the same, and were governed by very potent spirits. Ophirans thanked the spirits of water for rain and for births. They thanked the spirits of the flame for providing food and for revealing mysteries. They thanked their ancestors for their bodies, recovering from ills, and healing after injuries. Death was the purview of their ancestors as well. The forces of dust and sand were often both thanked and cursed. With the rise of Tariq, the open worship of the Speaker of the Thousand Suns rose as well. Tariq was a devout believer in the person and his ideals of protecting and serving Ophira, even from beyond the eyes of mortals. The two religions were interchangeable in Ophira, and no one was concerned with separating the two.

What makes Ophira great?

Ophira was a land in the throes of the early stages of being a nation. The ten tribes that survived to form the land still existed and played a very real part in the rule of the government. Ophira was a nation that supported its people. The Royal Scribes, Alchemists and Ritualists all found support within the land, growing the future tradition of knowledge and learning. The spear-warriors of Ophira were some of the toughest warriors in the world, and while they had not yet formed into the fearsome Sand Spire, the styles of spears and lances existed even in this age. The wise men of the desert existed in this age as well, being in tune with the land, and offering wisdom and guidance to the people of the new Caliphate. Ophira was a land that had been tested

with their Era of Dust, and come through hardened and focused. The Molten Sheik rallied the nation of Ophira under his banner and leadership, and strengthened them into one cohesive unit, rather than many disparate parts. His close advisors, Shihab, Ghaliya, and Hasim trained and sharpened the Ophiran people, readying them for the Great War and the era afterwards. Ophira is a nation on the verge of unity and enlightenment. People that enjoy a dynamic of old versus new and tradition versus progress should look to Ophira for ideas.

What makes Ophira less than desirable?

Ophira was a land of dust, pain, and guilt. The father of the Molten Sheik was slain by the four people now running the nation. The slain Caliph was responsible for much of the pain and suffering in the Caliphate, as well as many of horrors that were unleashed upon the Caliphate. His legacy required apologies and reparations to the people of the Caliphate, a burden that fell upon the Molten Sheik. Learning to trust the new Caliph was a slow process, as many saw him and his entourage as nothing more than common murders. The average Ophiran was still recovering from the Era of Dust, and famine, disease, and mistrust were at an all-time high. Enemies from the North, East and South threatened the nation, and the Great War of Shadow loomed in the West. Ophira was a harsh land, with harsh people. Those looking for solidity, a close knit society, and high culture should not look to Ophira.

Theme & Costuming

Ophira was a land with desert tribe roots, and the beginnings of a centralized government. The warriors were fierce and disciplined, being ordered in a world where not much order existed. Alchemy and mysticism were prevalent in society, with the mystery of each amplified by the state's control. The average person was very superstitious, and looked for the wisdom of the Caliph to soothe and guide them. Ophirans were passionate beyond all else, and woe to those that stood in their way once their minds were made up. Ophira draws much from the desert tribes of the Middle East, as well as such works as the Arabian Nights. This is a traditional land of desert, swords, and sorcery.

We encourage Returned players to wear tattered, stained, or dusty clothes when they rise out of the Grim Prison. However, Returned wear whatever clothing they can come across thereafter, possibly recreating the styles of their forgotten homelands. Ophiran style was mostly loosely wrapped robes, similar to desert tribesmen. Face coverings were ubiquitous, due to the constant sand and dust. The sun symbol of the Speaker of the Thousand Suns was very common imagery in jewelry and sashes.

Cultural Advantages

Returned hailing from Ophira pay two fewer points for Spear, Glaive, or Halberd, though they only receive the price break once, regardless of how many skills they purchase.

Tharicia

Government Style: Imperial Monarchy

Ruler: Emperor Miklos Gyla

Population: 20 million

Capital: Takresh

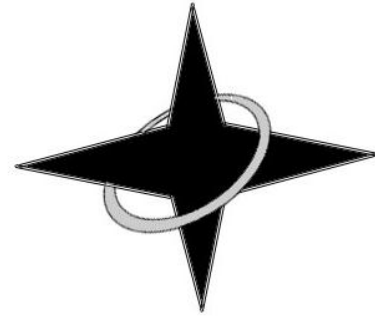
Alchemy: Accepted but Uncommon

Ritualism: Common

Inscription: Widespread

Forge Magic: Widespread

National Symbol: A four-pointed star with a silver ring around its intersection



The Land

The Ancient Empire of Tharicia rose in the First Age to make humanity the dominant race by the time of Great War Against the Shadow. The Tharicians were a fierce and robust people who subsumed other human communities as their borders expanded. They were known for wealth, arrogance, and an obsession with prophecy, but also for values of loyalty to nation and family, for great achievements in the arts and civilization, and for tireless courage in the war against the Most Foul.

At its height, Imperial Tharicia reached from the far western shores to its northwestern border with Ophira. It claimed all of Druma as a client kingdom for a time, and its reach extended far northeast into what is now called Troll Country. Tharicia's borders held chains of islands in the Bright Sea, trackless expanses of forest, fertile plains and valleys, silver-rich mountains, and dark swamps. In this vastness, it also had a population of millions. They lived in cities of marble and bronze, or towns of granite and brick. The greatest of these cities was shining Takresh, the capital of the Empire since time remembered only by the Firstborn.

Tharicia was divided into four unequal parts. The lands north of Takresh belonged to the Alemnet Tribe. The west belonged to the Gyla Tribe, as the east to the Strazha. The lands south of Takresh, the smallest of the domains, belonged to the Targovishte Tribe. Foreigners often crossed the empire's borders and settled on its frontiers. The Tharicians scorned these "barbarians," and made them serfs, but over the centuries the newcomers became as Tharician as their predecessors.

The History

For the Empire of Tharicia to rise, the Empire of Oak, Enderias, had to decline. When humans first came from the wilds of the east and for ages thereafter, the Empire of Oak called them friends and shared the land with them. The Firstborn ceded more of their land every year, until the humans came to view them as weak, and attempted to seize still more by force. At the Battle of the Black Spur, the Empire of Oak dealt a bitter defeat to the loosely-allied tribes of humans. The humans withdrew for a decade, fortifying their borders and rebuilding their forces, until the four tribes came together at the Stone of Takresh and formally allied, dedicating themselves to the defeat of the Empire of Oak. Their chief warlord was Nikolos of the Strazha Tribe.

Within a few months, the humans had suffered a second crushing loss at the Battle of Three Gods, overwhelmed by the magic of the Firstborn. The humans retreated again to the village at the Stone of Takresh. Nikolos defeated each of the champions of the other tribes in single combat and proclaimed himself Turannos over the Takreshi peoples. He built a city around the Stone, where he raised another army, the largest force the world had ever seen. Nikolos' army marched on Uethyl, the capital of Endeiras, where they were repelled again. In the Battle of Highgate, the humans slew some of the greatest warriors of House Tíogair, but again they were driven back, until finally Nikolos had no choice but to sue for a lasting peace. The three great wars that humans waged against the Firstborn would forever darken their relations. When Nikolos finally passed away, the highest echelons of the four tribes gathered, chose an Emperor from among their ranks, and defined a means of inheritance that would endure for millennia.

The Tharicians grew powerful, proud, and wealthy as their empire grew. They expanded northward until they ran into the wild tribes of Druma who would not be conquered. They were daunted by the fearless warriors of Mazhan, and made peace. Those who rejected the rule of Nikolos's successors built colonies along the sea and intermarried with the Ophiran tribes. The few explorers who sailed south past the barrier islands in the Bright Sea never returned, and none can say what they found.

They learned magic as well, and grew in power, though they were forever surpassed in this by other nations. Their mages sought solitude for their experimentation, and ventured to the edges of the Empire and beyond. Towers known as the Four Beacons were the most important such places. On the stony northern shores of Druma, the Alemnet Tribe built the Northern Beacon. The Western Beacon, built by the Gyla tribe, was said to be nearly tall enough to see the island of Endeiras on a clear day. In the east, the Strazha mages built the Eastern Beacon as a crossroads of magical lore between Tharicia, Ophira, and Ton Isiq. The Southern Beacon stood not far from the city of the Targovishte.

The People

In comparison to other lands, the commoners of ancient Tharicia had unimaginable wealth, and the nobles had orders of magnitude more. They had martial and mystical power as well, and they grew vain and arrogant. The common people (who bore rights and privileges above the serfs) wore fine cottons from Ophira, carried weapons of good steel, and might even own silks imported from Endeiras. In the Prophecy of Lygora they saw the promise of personal significance in a world in which everyone around them had the same incredible riches. They grew obsessed, and in that obsession turned their gaze away from external threats until it was nearly too late.

In spite of their many flaws, the Tharicians had many notable virtues as well. The average noble or commoner of Tharicia was loyal first to his own family, second to the Empire, third to his Tribe, and fourth to himself, though this self-loyalty typically expressed itself as pride. They added much to humanity's historical achievements in skill at arms and every kind of craft. They used these resources to make the land within their borders secure. They were gallant in battle, brave in exploration, clever in the arts, and tireless in pursuing their goals. When the Most Foul raised his banners in war against the world, Tharicians made up the bulk of the armies that opposed him, and hundreds of thousands of soldiers took up sword, spear, or staff to fight. Many would prove their heroism by giving their lives in that war.

The Prophecy of Lygora

The prophetess Lygora appeared during the reign of Emperor Stefano XV, though none could say whence she had come. When Lygora had proven that she bore the true gift of prophecy, the Emperor imprisoned her in the interest of state security and set a legion of scribes to copy every word that spilled from her mouth. In all, they recorded twelve volumes of prophecy before she abruptly fell forever silent. Neither kindness, nor cajoling, nor the pain of torture could elicit even another sound from her lips. She was, in the end, sent away to the Western Beacon as a curiosity.

The Lygoran Prophecies revealed the future in thousands of small ways, from the outcome of inconsequential duels to the name of the next Emperor, so long as one had the patience and wit to unravel their riddles. Noble and commoner alike became fixated on discerning the hidden future, and vast resources were dedicated to this study. The Emperor instantly ennobled or promoted those most talented at deriving meaning from the Prophecy; a single confirmed outcome foretold in any one of the twelve volumes was worth a provincial governor's villa. Those so bold and foolish as to attempt to deceive the Emperor on such matters were summarily executed.

As the First Age drew to a close, most of the specific pieces of the Prophecy had been accounted for in some manner. A thirteenth volume, previously unknown, was delivered to the hand of Empress Adona III. It offered answers about how the Empire could assure its everlasting greatness. After a year of careful study, and under heavy pressure from the Empress, the imperial scribes declared it a legitimate addition to the Books of Lygora.

What makes Tharicia great?

Tharicia was, without question, the wealthiest, mightiest, and largest of the human lands; Endeiras challenged their military might only prior to the start of the Great War. The raw power of the Empire has not been surpassed in any of the kingdoms of the Truce Era or the Regnal Era. They tirelessly sought to understand and settle the world around them, and were filled with a spirit of exploration and determination. They believed that their resources, ingenuity, and knowledge of the Prophecy of Lygora would allow them to conquer any obstacle. Until the start of the Great War of Shadow, it seemed that their victories might go on forever. Though they were not the world's greatest in any form of magic or craft, they were highly advanced in all of them, and unfettered with superstitions other than their precious Prophecy. Tharicians in general demonstrated a fierce loyalty to family and empire.

What makes Tharicia less than desirable?

The Tharicians were an arrogant, self-absorbed people convinced of their own manifest destiny, particularly in the words of the Prophecy of Lygora. They had little interest in the accomplishments of other countries, unless they seemed worth buying. The humans of Druma and the Firstborn of Endeiras had a long memory for the treachery and aggression of the Tharicians. Divisions between the four tribes caused fierce, often bloody, conflicts within the Empire, though they still stood together when facing external threats.

Faith and Religion

In the distant past, the Tharicians worshipped household gods, praying to them for the solace of the hearth, for protection from the storm and the things that walk the night, for preservation, and for hope. By the end of the First Age, even the commoners of Tharicia regarded themselves as too civilized and urbane for such backward, outmoded beliefs. A few communities of outlanders from Druma or the other lands still clung to their traditions.

The people of Tharicia believed that both their own personal fates and the fate of the Empire could be discerned from careful study of the Prophecy of Lygora. It became something very near a state religion in itself, with official interpreters. However, it offered no moral or ethical guidance, but rather a series of circumstances in which someone will be enriched or destroyed.

Theme & Costuming

Tharician arrogance and obsessions can easily take their inspiration from imperial Rome, or from modern-day America. We encourage Returned players to wear tattered, stained, or dusty clothes when they rise out of the Grim Prison. However, Returned wear whatever clothing they can come across thereafter, possibly recreating the styles of their forgotten homelands. Tharicia's style of dress reflects ease and splendor, most resembling the Italian and Spanish Renaissance. Doublets, silk trousers, and elegant bodices in rich brocades were commonplace in all social strata. Tharicia possessed a true middle class, as well as upper and lower classes.

Cultural Advantages

Returned hailing from Tharicia receive the first level of Fortune for free, or pay two fewer points for any other level of Fortune.

The City-State of Ton Isiq

Government Style: Magocratic City State

Ruler: Magus Cestacis

Population: 50,000

Capital: Ton Isiq

Alchemy: Common, though seen as a "lesser art"

Ritualism: Widespread

Inscription: Common

Forge Magic: Common

National Symbol: A white arched gate on the cover of a book



The Land

Ton Isiq was a city state on the shore of the Eastern Hidargo Sea. Blue waters and coral reefs could be seen from the city. The city sat at the edge of a natural bay that was often filled with ships. The land around the city was pastoral and green. Streams from a nearby mountain brought fresh water to the coast. Farms covered the rolling hills for miles around, and the city maintained local roads.

The city itself was a marvel to behold. The walls of the city stood high and wide, painted with the local coral. Numerous murals reflected scenes from history or legend. The city's buildings were equally colorful, in blues and deep reds, with roofs covered in gold leaf to catch the sun. It was said ships far out at sea, at certain times of day, could still see the gleam of the city.

The two most memorable sites in the city are the Grand Dome of the Cabals and the Palace of the Gate. The former stood well above the other buildings in the city and housed the Library of Halion Idana, the Magus's home, and halls where the cabals met and worked. The Palace of the Gate was built into the city's western wall. Most legal rulings were made here.

The History

The history of Ton Isiq is a history of magic. It was founded upon the ruins of an even older civilization. Over the ages, the ruins attracted scholars and wizards. Sometimes as many as a hundred cabals would come upon hearing of a rediscovered art. Unwilling to share the prizes they won from the ruins, the cabals clashed. They wielded magics of awful might in the constant battle for supremacy.

Through these conflicts, the number of cabals soon shrank to eleven. For a time, the eleven cabals ruled over the city as a council. The peace between them lasted over a century, until it was shattered on the Night of Secrets. The details of the night were ever after shrouded in rumor, conflicting stories, and mystery. Whatever happened returned the cabals to open conflict. The thousands in the city who were not wizards cowered in fear or fled the battle. The once-great city of mystical secrets seemed doomed to obliteration, but within a month, the fighting ended. With only nine cabals still standing, a new peace was forged by Sychiros, the first Magus.

This Grand Cabal-- Nine cabals of nine wizards each-- ruled the city, and a Magus ruled them in turn. The peace held for centuries, and as the war against the Most Foul spread, the powerful resources of Ton Isiq made a difference.

Portals to every corner of the world are found in Ton Isiq. It rightfully became a hub of manufacture and transportation in the war. Those who practiced forge magic made specialized weapons. Prisoners too powerful to simply kill were taken to the Ton Isiq Gate to be imprisoned for all time. The ritualists of the Great Order worked powerful magics to bar, bind and otherwise destroy servants of the Most Foul.

The People

The Magus is the supreme lord of the magocracy of Ton Isiq. In the six centuries of the Great Order's reign, there were four Magi. The Magus at the end of the First Age was Cestacis, the son of Anaxares, the previous Magus. He ruled with a light hand, as he was mainly focused on extracting secrets from artifacts of Sharat Gan.

The nine cabals of nine ritualists functioned much like a nobility. Each cabal had a head ritualist selected by its members and approved by the Magus. Beyond their ritual duties, they maintained order within the cabal. The cabals controlled specific areas of the city's governance, so as to avoid overlapping jurisdiction and other causes for disagreement. Unlike the present day, the cabals of Ton Isiq retained the same names and general character from generation to generation.

The cabals had chamberlains to handle much of the day-to-day bureaucracy of Ton Isiq's governance. They could not pass sentence for crimes, but in all else they spoke with the authority of those they served.

The people of Ton Isiq were an interesting mix. At the founding of the new city, there were no "native" people there. It was built by wizards and the adventurers followed them. Over the centuries, more came to seek their fortune. Some returned home, but many stayed, and their descendants were the people of Ton Isiq.

Most of the people of Ton Isiq were artisans. There were farms in the surrounding countryside and the land was verdant, but between trade and fishing, the agrarian class was unusually small. Craftsmen, though, were always in high demand. Wizards needed weapons, armor and other goods of the highest quality for their enchantments and experiments. Other nations prized finished goods from Ton Isiq. It was not uncommon for a noble of Tharicia seek out furniture from Ton Isiq as a status symbol. The jewelry made there was some of the most beautiful ever made. Fabled among these was the Ruby Heart of the Deeps; though among the most beautiful of gems, it was said to bring only ill fortune.

Education in the city was the most advanced of its era. In a city run by wizards, learning was considered a virtue. Almost the entire populace was literate, and the center of the city held the remarkable Library of Halion Idana. Free to all citizens of Ton Isiq, the library supported itself with fees levied on foreign scholars.

The militia of Ton Isiq was made up of volunteers from the citizenry. There was also a small standing army, called the Samonian Guard, though it was nothing like the mighty forces of Tharicia or Druma. They were loyal, well-trained, and some of the best-equipped troops in the world. More importantly, they were trained in the use of and defense against magic on the battlefield. One of the cabals, also named the Samonian Guard, commanded the army and handled the city's military defense. That cabal's leader at the end of the First Age was Ismene the Wanderer, famed for her waspish wit and skill with anything that bore an edge.

The Ton Isiq Gate

The Ton Isiq Gate was one of the wonders of the First Age. It was sometimes thought of as a vault, but was in truth a prison. It had stood for centuries, and the legends surrounding it were numerous. The most common legend says Sychriros built it into the western wall before the Night of Secrets. With this powerful magic he brought peace to the city. It is said he imprisoned those who caused the most conflict, and the rest fell in line.

Another legend states it has always been there, but knowledge of it was lost for ages. According to this story, it was built by the people of the prior civilization. More fanciful tales speak of travelers from outlandish and exotic places making the gate.

The gate itself was opened with ritual magic that took a full cabal to cast. Anything placed beyond the gate was removed from the world. Their influence on the world was ended more finally than simply dying. The secrets of its operation were unknown to most, but it did allow for the safe and seemingly eternal storage of people and objects too dangerous or too important to leave lying around.

Faith and Religion

The people of Ton Isiq were extremely pragmatic in their faith. They knew, in general terms, of celestial hosts and the Light of Heaven. This was not an obscure faith for them, but a pragmatic reality based on research and interacting with celestials. They were aware of the Most Foul even before the start of the war, and it was forbidden to learn his magics.

It was widely accepted that magic was a gift to allow humanity to approach the higher orders. Through research and learning, one could become something greater than his base materials. There was no particular priesthood as such, but a number of respected and famous philosophers. The subjects of morality and the origin and nature of the world were often the subject of discussion in all levels of society. Pursuit of truth was considered the highest purpose in life.

Ton Isiq society attracted many people from around the world over the centuries, and was very cosmopolitan and accepting of outsiders and their beliefs. As a result, there were small communities in the city practicing faiths from all over.

What makes Ton Isiq great?

Ton Isiq was a place of wonder. The citizens of Ton Isiq lived in the presence of magic. It suffused their lives. They had a legitimate claim of having the greatest collection of mages, ritualists, alchemists, inscribers and explorers in the ancient world. Certainly, most of the research done in the higher orders of magic was led by the Grand Cabal. The Ton Isiq Gate, the Hallowed Gardens, and a hundred other wonders attracted travelers from around the world. The artisans of Ton Isiq spread not only magical wonders, but artistic treasures to the far corners of the world.

What makes Ton Isiq less than desirable?

The line between confidence and arrogance is often hard to see. The people of Ton Isiq were prideful. They had all the latest and greatest magic. People came to Ton Isiq, not the other way around. It is easy to see how the city fell in the end. Pride goes before the fall. Also, despite its mystical might, the city had the weakness of numbers. The population of Ton Isiq would not even come close to the next smallest nation in the world. Even the warriors of Ton Isiq were expected to possess culture and learning. Intelligence, power, beauty, and sophistication were the measure by which all people were judged. Uncultured and blunt people were not well thought of.

Theme & Costuming

Ton Isiq was a city of magi. Magic here was glorious and majestic, as compared to the dark mysteries of Sharat Gan. Characters from Ton Isiq had a Greco-Roman look and feel. The city was very cosmopolitan and accepting. Returned characters from Ton Isiq come from one of the mystical and scholarly powerhouses of the ancient world. This a good place to be from if you plan on playing a Returned with a more scholarly bent, a world traveler, or a craftsman of great skill.

We encourage Returned players to wear tattered, stained, or dusty clothes when they rise out of the Grim Prison. However, Returned wear whatever clothing they can come across thereafter, possibly recreating the styles of their forgotten homelands. The fashion of Ton Isiq reflected the

very Greco-Roman feel of the city itself; togas, loose, flowing robes, and long, scholarly or 'goddess' style gowns were common. Jewelry was very subtle and understated, plain bands of gold and silver were worn as bracelets, circlets, and belts either. Belts of silk rope, sometimes ornamented with beads, were most fashionable.

Cultural Advantages

Returned hailing from Ton Isiq pay two fewer points for Ritualism Initiation at Character Creation.