

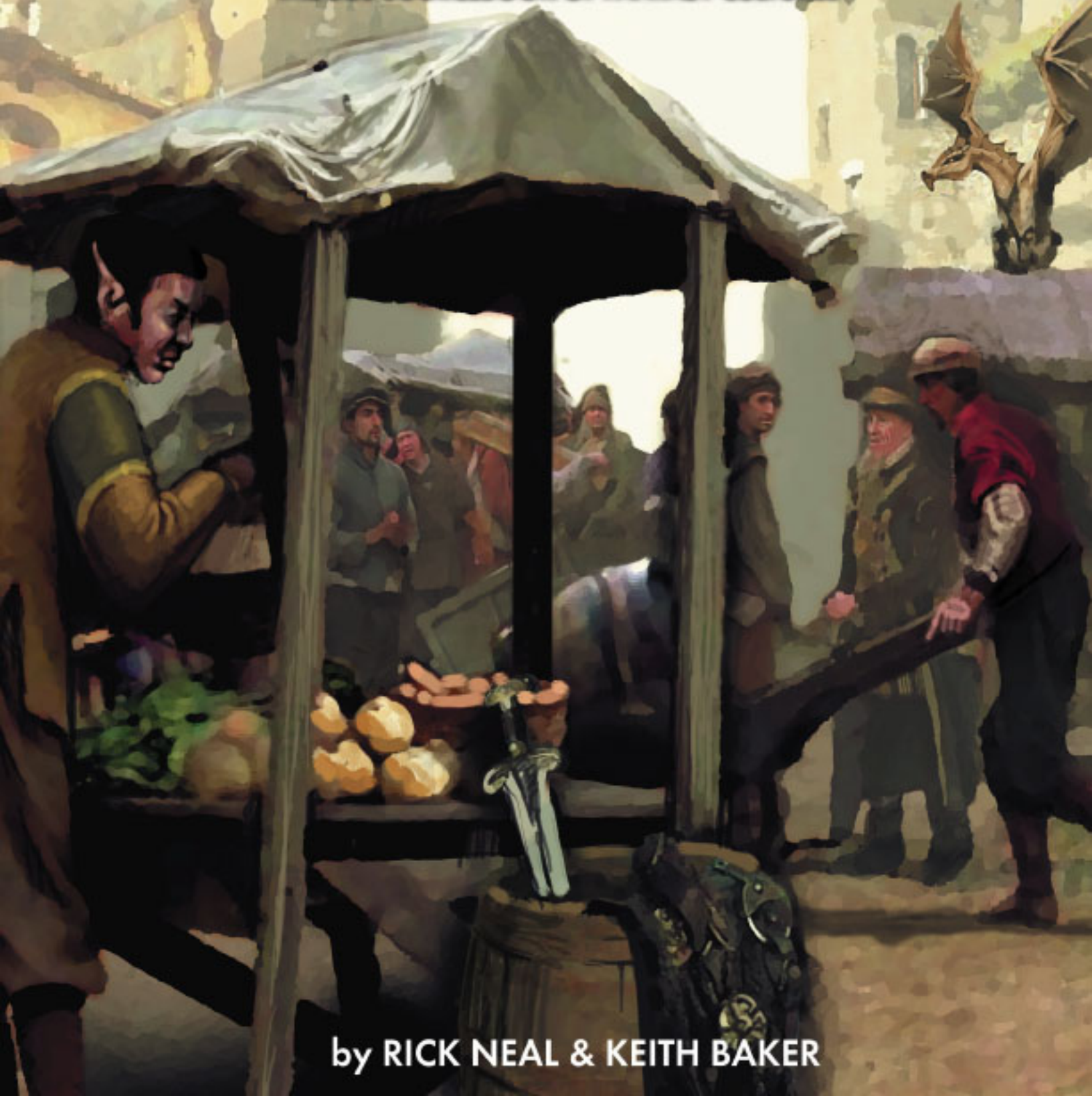
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# SEVEN CIVILIZATIONS

THE D20 SOURCEBOOK OF FANTASY CULTURES



by RICK NEAL & KEITH BAKER

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# INTRODUCTION

# CRAVING A CULTURE?

Politics, economy, history, personalities, location ... every GM knows how challenging it is to balance all the elements that go into a good game world. In this book, we've collected seven separate, detailed, ready-made cultures that do the work for you. Each one is designed to fit easily into your game, and provides just enough hooks to entice your players to move right in.

Each entry talks about how the culture came to be, what forces shaped its development, and the current political situation. We provide a few examples of notable characters and places, as well as new rules to give the culture some extra surprises. We've also included detailed discussions about how to play a character from each culture, discussing outlook, opinions, naming conventions, and a host of other hints that will bring the society to life.

As with all Penumbra products, this book is meant to be modular in nature. We've done our best to make it easy for you to take whatever tickles your fancy and drop it into your game with a minimum of work. Whether you're looking for an interesting civilization for your players to explore, or a new culture to fill out your own character's background, you should definitely find something interesting here.

---

## SECTION LAYOUT

Each of the civilizations in this book is presented in the same format for easy reference. Here's what you'll find in each section.

### OVERVIEW

Look here for a quick overview of the civilization. You'll get a basic feel for the people and setting, as well for how you can use it in your own game.

### PLACEMENT

Here you'll find important information on the culture's surroundings. Use this section to find the right spot for the civilization in your campaign world.

### HISTORY

This section talks about the origin of the civilization, its development, and the current situation it faces.

### LOCATIONS

Every civilization has its tourist spots. This meaty section describes the places that influence the people, including important buildings, natural spots, and other features. Scour this section carefully before your characters venture into the civilization, so you'll be ready when they do.

### PERSONALITIES

The people of a society steer its future. This section provides character profiles and statistics for the most important inhabitants of each culture, and for the most typical of its people.

### PLAYING A CHARACTER

This section takes a look at the inhabitants' worldview and common opinions, giving hints about how to play a character from this civilization. Whether it's cultural norms or character names, you'll find it here.

### ADVENTURE SEEDS

When you're ready to use the civilization in your campaign, look here for ideas on how to develop your ideas into adventures.

# THE DRAGON KINGS

*Candlelight glittered off the dazzling array of costumes in the crowd below. Bright colors and threads of gold and silver decorated the guests' robes. Everywhere the gowns gaped to display a fine pattern of scales, or flared to suggest great wings, or tinkled with overlapping enameled medallions. The ball was a fine excuse for the participants to display their heritage, inflated though it may be.*

*Val Orbis leaned on the balustrade above the dance floor, drinking in the splendor of the guests. He seemed relaxed, but his eyes tracked relentlessly, following a couple through the bright confusion of an ancient dance. A small smile turned up the corners of his mouth, and his long fingers traced the carvings in the marble railing. With his dark skin and black cloak he blended with the shadows where he stood.*

*The objects of his scrutiny were a young man and woman, both of Copper lineage, stepping through an intricate dance with practiced indications of good breeding and education. The gentleman was wrapped in pale gray robes, embroidered with swirled scrollwork of copper thread, and his hair was a deep, burnished auburn. A fine ridge ran along his spine, which his robe was cut to reveal; his was a Regal bloodline. The lady was in white robes of silk, strung about with jingling chains and copper medallions. Orbis knew the medallions were actually coins stamped with the face of the last Copper Emperor ... he had helped her pick them out.*

*She was to be the focus of the little drama Orbis had planned. She was Nevanna Tal Ree, and her bloodline was Cadet, two full steps below her partner's Regal breeding. Knowing the love the two shared, Orbis had helped her and her paramour, Moban Gaim, arrange invitations to this exclusive evening ... invitations Gaim's parents did not have. An evening in the company of the younger generation, less concerned with the bloodlines than their parents were. An evening when they could dance, talk, and perhaps kiss without fear of word reaching the Moban family.*

*So when Moban Lesh burst through the door, bellowing for his son to leave the Cadet strumpet he was with, Orbis felt a surge of triumph. Lesh had cost him some support in the Conclave, but he felt repaid by the mortified look in his enemy's eyes. The scandal would cost the entire Moban family a great deal of face in society.*

*Lesh caught sight of Orbis on the balcony above the dance, and his face flamed with fury. Orbis smiled, bowed low, and whispered a quiet phrase that vanished him from the hall as quietly as he had entered.*

---

## OVERVIEW

Ages ago, the Dragon Kings ruled the civilized world, by their reckoning. They mixed the blood and power of dragons into their own bloodlines, breeding powerful and dangerous sorcerers, and dominated all who opposed them. The entire world fell before their might and their magic.

Nothing lasts forever, though. Decadence brought about the end of the empire — though rebelling provinces helped — and they saw all they had built crumble before them. Now the Dragon Kings are a scattered remnant. They dwell in the shadows of their former glory, jealously preserving the bloodlines and what power they retain, dreaming of rising again to dominance.

---

## PLACEMENT

The Dragon Kings exist alongside other cultures, mingled within them but partaking of a separate cultural identity and society. With no homeland of their own anymore, they've spread across the world, forming small enclaves and groups in many widely scattered cities and countries. They are bound by history and by blood, not by geography or nationality. Therefore, a Dragon King subculture can be added to any established society in your game world. While they are not a secret group, they are insular, and it's not unusual for ordinary people to be unaware of a Dragon King society living alongside their own.

Dragon Kings are attracted to power. They naturally congregate in national capitals and other large cities where they often become involved in politics. In rural settings, a Dragon King family may be the lords of a domain, but are likely the only Dragon Kings in the area; Dragon King families don't willingly submit to rule by another.

There is one last requirement: adding the Dragon Kings to your campaign means their historical empire must have existed in your campaign setting. You can easily change the size and power of this empire to fit the needs of your campaign, but at some point, thousands of years in the past, the Dragon Kings must have been kings in practice as well as name. Of course, they may have ruled from some extraplanar demesne now separated from your game world, if you'd rather not worry too much about ancient history.

## HISTORY

In their heyday, the Dragon Kings used a complex cyclical calendar based on the rule of various bloodlines. These time periods, called Reigns, persisted as long as a particular bloodline held the throne, and were further divided by the number of Dragon King Emperors who ruled during that time. Years were further divided into ten months each, named for the ten different dragon types represented in the Dragon King bloodlines. Dates were thus given as “fourth day in the month of the Silver Dragon, in the Eighth Year of the Second Reign of the Ninth Black Dragon Emperor,” for example.

This arcane calendar went out of practice with the fall of the Dragon King Empire. The Conclave of the Dragon Kings, however, still records significant events using the old notation, and keeps track of the dates of the old calendar. All births and deaths in the official pedigrees are recorded in this manner.

In everyday practice, however, Dragon Kings make use of the local calendar. It’s easier for everyone involved, if symbolic of their cultural slippage.

## ORIGIN

Dragon King traditions state that, thousands of years ago, a group of powerful sorcerers bargained with a group of dragons in hopes of gaining their powers. Those original thirty sorcerers became the founders of the thirty Dragon King bloodlines, passing their powers and abilities to their offspring. This bargain became known as the Covenant.

With the power and gifts granted by dragon blood, the Dragon Kings carved themselves a kingdom out of the weaker nations of the world, eventually growing to become an empire. This empire existed for millennia, before decadence and thinning bloodlines — resulting in Cadet, Noble, and Royal dilutions as well as Imperial Dragon Kings — allowed subject states and races to rebel against their oppressors and gain their freedom.

The rebellions reduced the already-small number of Dragon Kings even further, even extinguishing several families. Stripped of their rule and shunned by their former subjects, the remnants of the once-proud race hid in obscurity, scattering themselves across the world.



## DEVELOPMENT

The Dragon Kings, as they exist today, are the result of a thousand years of pacts, gatherings, and power struggles. The following timeline is relative and completely mutable. Change it however you like to suit your campaign.

### **Long Ago: The Fall of the Empire**

The thinning of the bloodlines and the decadence that crept into the lives of the Dragon Kings made them easy prey for rebellion. Millennia of oppression were repaid in a bloody revolt that deposed the White Dragon Emperor, and destroyed many of the remaining Imperials. In the aftermath, the remaining Dragon Kings scattered, blending in with the human population to keep a low profile. Four of the thirty families were extinguished, and three more died out in the time before the Conclave was established.

### **A Millennium Ago: Establishment of the Conclave**

As the numbers of the Dragon Kings recovered, the heads of the remaining twenty-three families met to establish an organization to protect and advance Dragon King interests. One of the primary responsibilities of the Conclave, as the organization came to be called, is to keep the pedigrees of the Dragon King bloodlines safe, and to maintain them for the future.

Besides this responsibility, the Conclave provides a directing body to coordinate Dragon King efforts to regain power and recognition. It mediates disputes amongst bloodlines, lineages, and individuals, and acts as a court of last resort for those Dragon Kings who feel wronged. It also helps direct the breeding of the various families in an attempt to increase the number of Imperial and Regal Dragon Kings.

### **Seven Hundred Years Ago: The Last Imperial**

With a lack of fresh dragon blood infusions into the bloodlines and the increased number of Dragon Kings diluting the bloodlines by mating with humans, the number of Imperial Dragon Kings dwindled. Norromon Zinlos of the Gold lineage was the last Imperial known to the Conclave, and the last Dragon King of the Norromon family. She died at this time, at the age of 300.

### **Four Hundred Years Ago: The Grand Gathering**

With the compilation of pedigrees complete, and the number of Regal Dragon Kings waning, the Conclave

called for the Grand Gathering. Every one of the twenty-two remaining families sent at least a few representatives to the Gathering, to discuss ways of revitalizing their flagging vigor. The discussions lasted for several weeks and produced a renewed focus and hope in the Dragon Kings. The families agreed to allow the Conclave to determine mating pairs for all Dragon Kings, with an eye to bringing the strength of the bloodlines back to an acceptable level and a mission to breed a true Imperial again.

Cadet Dragon Kings are excluded from this guideline, but Nobles must choose their mates from a list compiled by the Conclave. Regal Dragon Kings have even less freedom, and must mate with an individual chosen by the Conclave to try to produce an Imperial.

There is some resistance to this from the unmarried younger generations, but the backing of the family leaders ensures obedience.

### **Two Hundred Years Ago: The Vanthalas Scion**

A Dragon King calling himself Vanthalas Robek appeared before the Conclave, claiming the seat of the Vanthalas family, long thought extinct. Robek, a Regal Blue Dragon King, explained he and his family had lately returned from distant lands, where his ancestors hid after the fall of the empire. When the Conclave had satisfied its doubts regarding Robek's bloodline, he was granted the Conclave seat, and Dragon Kings all over the world celebrated the return of a lost bloodline.

### **One Hundred Years Ago: The War of Cloak and Claw**

Strife within the Conclave spilled over into the daily lives of the Dragon Kings in a conflict known as the War of Cloak and Claw. This was a quiet war of sorcery and assassins, with reputations and fortunes as the targets of preference and physical combat seen as gauche and uncivilized. At least, that's the way it began.

As time progressed, more and more direct attacks were launched and four more families were wiped out in the fighting before the Conclave could unite and forbid further bloodshed. This ended the overt attacks, but character assassinations, thefts, scheming, and arranged accidents continue to the present.

The issue at stake is whether or not the remaining families should approach the dragons again, to bolster the fading bloodlines with the introduction of new draconic blood. The point of contention is not whether the task should be attempted, but which dragons should be approached and which families or individuals should take the lead. Little hope exists for a quick resolution to this conflict.

## CURRENT

The War of Cloak and Claw has been going on for a full century, but has largely devolved into a series of vendettas. Feuds exist between many families or between different branches of the same family. Alliances are constantly shifting and reconfiguring based on the latest attacks and gambits.

These days, the War is fought in the arenas of reputation and perception, with various families maneuvering to enhance their own standing while diminishing another's. The issue that sparked the War has been relegated to the heated rhetoric of the Conclave. Most Dragon Kings are concerned with the business of vengeance rather than any underlying issues of racial strategy.

### The Crimson League

Founded by Yevis Na Lossien, a Regal Red Dragon King, the Crimson League is an organization devoted to purifying the Dragon King bloodlines. In the minds of the League members, this translates into sterilizing those Dragon Kings of Cadet bloodline, and executing any Dragon King who mates outside his or her own lineage. This is, as one can imagine, a rather extreme reaction to the diminishment of the bloodlines, and is openly denounced by the Conclave.

Unfortunately, many family heads feel these extreme measures are necessary, and turn a blind eye to the excesses of the Crimson League. Membership in the organization is formally both secret and illegal, but for many membership is an open secret. The infrequent acts of the Crimson League involve attacks on those judged to have diluted the blood of the Dragon Kings, and are notoriously public and brutal. None of the League's well-known members ever seem to be involved in these.

### The Seekers

Founded after the discovery of the Vanthalas Scion, the Seekers are Dragon Kings devoted to finding any surviving remnants of the eleven extinct families. Different Seekers take different approaches to this: some use powerful divination magic to chase down leads, while others travel across the world looking for signs of draconic blood in everyone they meet. Though they've yet to produce any remnant of another extinguished family, they have recovered several members of the living families, which encourages them to keep trying.

The Conclave is not unanimous in its praise for the Seekers. Most of the Dragon Kings found by the Seekers

are of the Cadet bloodline, having had their blood diluted through generations of intermarriage. The Crimson League is especially critical of the Seekers, though they criticize only the results and not the goals.

### Young Rebels

The younger generation of Dragon Kings is not happy with the way their lives are set up for them. There is a growing and vocal movement decrying the dictates of the Grand Gathering. Noble and Regal Dragon King adolescents are forming lobbying groups, trying to persuade the Conclave to change the restrictions on marriage and mating.

The Cadet Dragon Kings, not being bound by these restrictions, are undergoing a period of popularity with the young rebels. It's fashionable among them to act as much like a Cadet Dragon King as possible and enjoy their freedom vicariously. Of course, the superior wealth, power, and respect of the Noble and Regal Dragon Kings still incites the envy of the Cadet bloodlines, and opportunists take advantage of "slumming" Nobles and Regals when they like.

### Falsebloods

A number of half-dragons over the years have tried to gain acceptance among the Dragon Kings, knowing the respect paid to Imperial Dragon Kings. They've never been able to pass the intensive screening conducted by the Conclave, as their blood always betrays them. Though they're viewed as fortunate individuals, they are not considered Dragon Kings, as they are not a part of the Covenant.

Some members of the Crimson League (and some other reactionary Conclave members) are more concerned with strengthening the draconic strain in their families than with the ancient Covenant, however, and have bred with half-dragons to purify their bloodlines. While this has added a strength to the bloodline, it marks the blood in a way that's obvious to Conclave eugenicists. The offspring of such unions are called Falsebloods, and are shunned by the rest of the Dragon King population.

Lately, however, a movement has begun amongst the Falsebloods to reclaim what they see as their birthright. They've been lobbying the members of the Conclave to consider them true Dragon Kings, arguing that they should not suffer for choices made by their parents. The Conclave is currently debating this novel argument, though no one can guess how they'll rule in the end.

# LOCATIONS

Two locations are central to the culture of the Dragon Kings. The first, the Conclave, is the one meeting place left to the Dragon Kings. The other, the Mountain of the Covenant, has a spiritual significance: it's the site where the original Covenant was made and the race of Dragon Kings began.

## THE CONCLAVE

The Conclave is a vast, tunnel-ridden sphere of stone floating in an extraplanar void. It was claimed by the Dragon Kings a millennium ago and bound with powerful magic to prevent outsiders from intruding. A huge, round chamber at the heart of the sphere houses the meeting place of the Conclave, where the representatives of the surviving Dragon King families meet to determine the course of their race.

Ranged in layers and rings around the central chamber are other rooms, used now as administrative offices, guest rooms, museums, and anything that strikes the fancy of the Conclave. In the outer ring ten portals are arranged, one for each of the Dragon King bloodlines. Representatives enter through these portals using special keys.

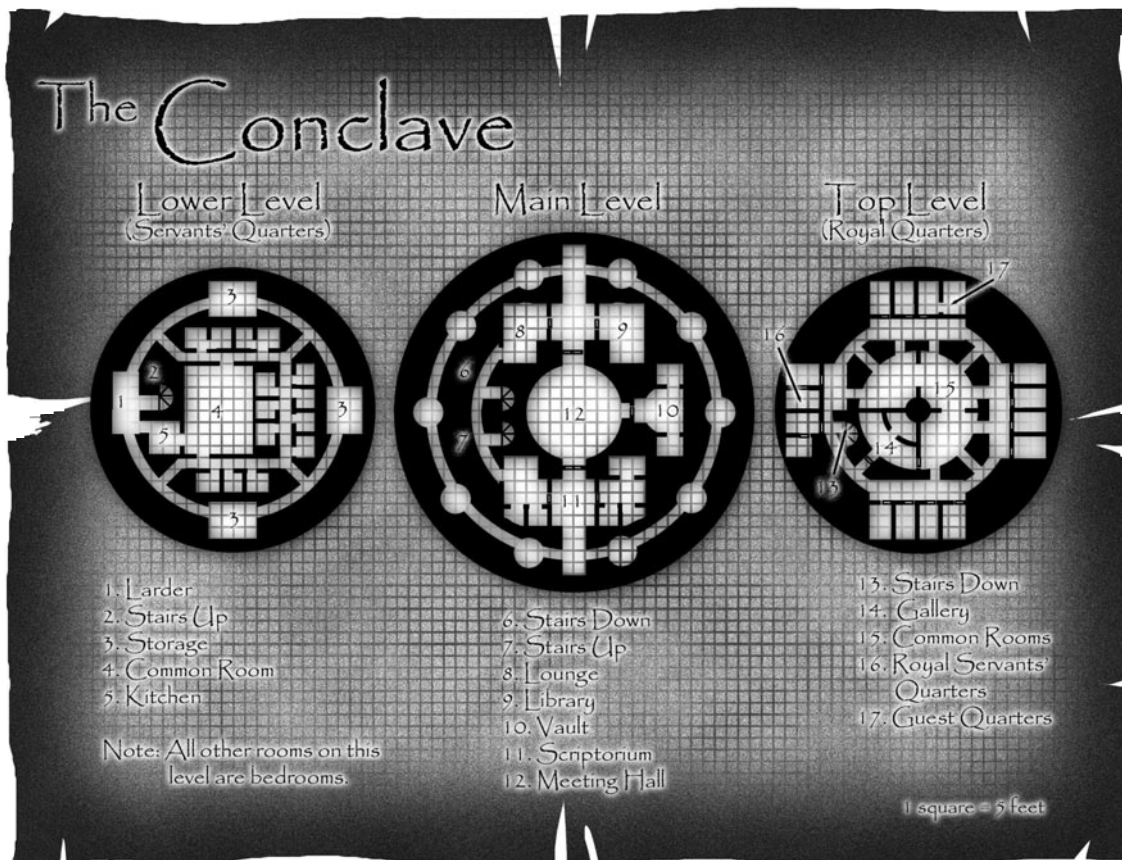
Locked in a vault near the inner chamber of the Conclave is the greatest treasure of the Dragon Kings: the collected

genealogies of the Dragon Kings. The birth, marriage, offspring, and death of every Dragon King is recorded in these books, along with the magical notation that describes their genetic heritage. Of course, there are gaps in the records stemming from the long period between the fall of the empire and the founding of the Conclave.

A small administrative staff resides at the Conclave, overseeing the defenses and the records of the Dragon Kings. Despite the much-diminished glory of the Dragon Kings, their sense of importance and love of ritual generates a large volume of paperwork.

Officially, visitors to the Conclave are discouraged. Of course, none of the Dragon Kings feels this restriction applies to them or their friends. Most Dragon King children find a way to tour the Conclave at least once while they're young, and many adult Dragon Kings attend parties and celebrations there or visit friends on a whim. Though the keys that allow entry are supposedly carefully controlled, a skilled sorcerer can duplicate one using common magical techniques; most Dragon Kings know someone who has at least one illicit key.

The Conclave can be placed in whatever out-of-the-way plane or dimension fits your campaign. The Ethereal and Astral Planes are easy choices, but it could be placed in a special demiplane or elemental plane, too. Even remote areas of the Material Plane (the heart of a mountain, the bottom of an ocean) work well.





## THE MOUNTAIN OF THE COVENANT

The Mountain of the Covenant is actually a tall hill in a remote, wild area. The top of the hill is concave, a raised bowl open to the skies. The floor was flagged at one time, but the centuries have hidden all but the suggestion of this beneath weeds, dirt, and silt.

Surrounding the center of the hilltop is a ring of ten stone statues representing the original ten dragons of the Covenant. The statues are worn smooth; the enamel, paint, gems, and precious metals have been removed by weather and vandals. Still, the statues are recognizable to anyone familiar with the various types of dragons.

Three smaller statues are arrayed in an arc before each of the dragon statues. These depict the original founders of the thirty families, and they have not fared as well as the larger dragon statues. Eleven of them lie in ruins. The only one with recognizable features is the statue of Vanthalas, which was rebuilt four hundred years ago with the discovery of the Vanthalas Scion.

In the very center of the area is a stone bowl nearly twenty feet across, stained centuries ago with the burning blood of dragons and the mixed blood of humans.

Not many Dragon Kings visit the site anymore. Few wish to be reminded of how far they've fallen. A few tradition-



### NEW MAGIC ITEM: CONCLAVE KEY

These ornate keys, crafted to look like dragons, allow the bearer to enter the Conclave. Once per day, with the appropriate command word, the holder of a *Conclave key* can cast *plane shift* as a 14th-level sorcerer, though the destination must be the portal in the Conclave to which the key is attuned. Each key is attuned to one of the ten portals in the Conclave, and it only brings users to that portal.

Strong conjuration; CL 14th; Craft Wondrous Item, *plane shift*, access to the Conclave portals or another *Conclave key*; Price 35,280; Weight 1 lb.



### NEW MAJOR ARTIFACT: BOWL OF THE COVENANT

This bowl of dark stone is the instrument with which the Covenant was made. It requires two willing subjects: a dragon and a creature of a mortal species. Each participant must bleed half his blood into the bowl, then the non-dragon must bathe in the blood for one hour, after which she gains the standard D20 half-dragon template, and Imperial Dragon King moniker.

alist families do still bring their children on pilgrimages to the site, however, to tell them the tales of the Dragon King empire. For the most part, though, the Mountain of the Covenant is just a holy place to swear by.

## PERSONALITIES

Though the scattered and diffused nature of the Dragon Kings means there are few widely recognized celebrities outside of the Conclave itself, the following characters are valuable exemplars of the civilization.

### VAL ORBIS

#### Master Manipulator

“I notice you seem to be in a tight spot. You’re welcome.”

Val Orbis is the epitome of a Noble Dragon King schemer. He has just enough power and prestige to be dangerous, and to whet his appetite for more. His duties as one of the Val family representatives to the Conclave give him ample opportunity to flex his political muscles.

He has made some dangerous enemies, though. Moban Lesh of the Copper lineage, in particular, is smarting after Orbis managed to humiliate him publicly by exposing his son’s romance with a Cadet woman. This greatly shamed the proud Regal, and he intends to see Orbis suffer.

Orbis, on the other hand, feels he’s just getting started with the Moban family. He doesn’t plan to stop his personal War of Cloak and Claw until the entire Moban family has had their power base destroyed. To that end, he is always alert for any hint of Moban weakness or scandal.



### VAL ORBIS

#### 6th-Level Noble Dragon King Sorcerer/ 4th-Level Rogue

CR 10; Medium humanoid; HD 6d4+4d6; hp 34; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (+2 Dex, +1 *bracers of armor*), touch 12, flat-footed 11; Base Atk +6; Grp +6; Atk +9 melee (1d6, masterwork rapier); Full Atk +9 melee (1d6, masterwork rapier); Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Sneak Attack +2d6, Spells; SQ Evasion, Familiar, Low-Light Vision, Save Against Magic, Spells, Uncanny Dodge; AL CE; SV Fort +6, Ref +9, Will +8; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 19

**Skills:** Bluff +13, Concentration +4, Diplomacy +10, Gather Information +12, Listen +3, Sense Motive +9, Spellcraft +4, Spot +6

**Feats:** Combat Casting, Expertise, Spell Focus (transmutation), Weapon Finesse (rapier).

**Languages:** Common.

**Evasion (Ex):** When exposed to an effect that normally allows a Reflex save for half damage, Orbis takes no damage with a successful saving throw.

**Familiar (Su):** Silvisir, a Tiny viper. A snake familiar grants its master a +3 bonus on Bluff checks, which has been included above.

**Low-Light Vision (Ex):** Noble and Regal Dragon Kings see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, torchlight, and similar conditions of poor illumination. They retain the ability to distinguish colors under these conditions.

**Racial Bonuses (Ex):** All Dragon Kings receive a +2 racial bonus on Bluff, Diplomacy, and Sense Motive

checks when dealing with dragons. Dragon Kings receive a +1 racial bonus to all Spellcraft checks.

**Save Against Magic (Ex):** Noble Dragon Kings gain a +1 bonus on all saving throws against magical effects.

**Sneak Attack (Ex):** Any time his opponent would be denied a Dexterity bonus to AC, or when he is flanking an opponent, Orbis deals an additional 2d6 damage with a successful melee attack. Ranged attacks under the same conditions only count as sneak attacks if Orbis is within 30 feet of his target.

**Spells (Sp):** (6/7/6/4) Val Orbis knows the following spells. Saving throw DCs, where applicable, are 14 + spell level. Transmutation spells have an extra +2 to their DC.

0 Level — *detect magic, ghost sound, light, mage hand, open/close, prestidigitation, read magic*

1st Level — *change self, comprehend languages, expeditious retreat, spider climb*

2nd Level — *detect thoughts, levitate*

3rd Level — *gaseous form*

**Uncanny Dodge (Ex):** Orbis retains his Dexterity bonus to AC when caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker.

**Equipment:** masterwork rapier, 4 *potions of cure light wounds*, *potion of darkvision*, *potion of neutralize poison*, *potion of cure moderate wounds*, *scroll of hold person*, *bracers of armor +1*, *cloak of resistance +1*, *wand of invisibility*.

## MOBAN LESH

## Staunch Traditionalist

“We owe it to the memory of Moban to keep pure the blood he bargained for in the Covenant.”

Lesh is a Regal Dragon King of the Moban family, and he never lets anyone forget it. He takes immense pride in his lineage, bloodline, and family — pride so encompassing he doesn’t even think about it any more. His bony brow ridges with the bright copper hues and vestigial tail speak of the purity of his blood. It shines through in all his actions and decisions: he is one of the elite, and rightfully so. Any who oppose him must also oppose everything the Dragon Kings hold dear, and they must therefore be corrected.

Many of his acquaintances find this attitude somewhat tiresome. His enemies — and he’s made many — find it infuriating. Not that Lesh really notices; he knows there are a lot of people who don’t agree with him, but they’re mostly of a lesser bloodline or family, and so don’t count.

Moban Lesh has done everything right for his family, especially his children. He has worked hard to instill a sense of pride and responsibility in the youngsters, and to build a respect for their heritage and position. He has taught them their genealogies, taken them to the Conclave, and even shown them the Mountain of the Covenant and the statue of Moban. This is why it hurts him to see his son Gaim straying, going out in public with that Cadet woman. After the public shaming orchestrated by Val Orbis, Lesh fears he will have to disown Gaim to save face for the family.

He’ll do it, too.



## MOBAN LESH

## 15th-Level Regal Copper Dragon King Sorcerer

CR 15; Medium humanoid; HD 15d4; hp 41; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 19 (+3 Dex, +1 *amulet of natural armor*, +2 *ring of protection*, +3 *bracers of armor*), touch 13, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +7/+2; Grp +5; Atk +11 melee (1d6-1, +1 *rapier*); Full Atk +11/+6 melee (1d6-1, +1 *rapier*); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Spells; SQ Darkvision, Familiar, Low-Light Vision, Save Against Magic, Spells; AL LG; SV Fort +5, Ref +7, Will +10; Str 7, Dex 16, Con 11, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 26

**Skills:** Concentration +14, Diplomacy +16, Knowledge (Arcana) +16, Knowledge (Eugenics) +16, Knowledge (History) +16, Spellcraft +17

**Feats:** Combat Casting, Craft Wand, Martial Weapon Proficiency (rapier), Maximize Spell, Scribe Scroll, Weapon Finesse (rapier)

**Languages:** Common, Draconic, Celestial.

**Darkvision (Ex):** Regal Dragon Kings can see in the dark up to 60 feet. Darkvision is black and white only, but it is otherwise like normal sight, and Regal Dragon Kings can function just fine with no light at all.

**Familiar (Su):** Harkree, a hawk. A hawk familiar grants its master a +3 bonus on Spot checks in bright light. Moban rarely travels with Harkree any more.

**Low-Light Vision (Ex):** Regal Dragon Kings see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, torchlight, and similar conditions of poor illumination. They retain the ability to distinguish colors under these conditions.

**Racial Bonuses (Ex):** All Dragon Kings receive a +2 racial bonus on Bluff, Diplomacy, and Sense Motive

checks when dealing with dragons. Dragon Kings receive a +1 racial bonus to all Spellcraft checks.

**Save Against Magic (Ex):** Regal Dragon Kings gain a +2 bonus on all saving throws against magical effects.

**Spells (Sp):** (6/8/8/8/8/7/7/5) Moban Lesh knows the following spells. Saving throw DCs, where applicable, are 19 + spell level.

0 Level — *arcane mark*, *detect magic*, *disrupt undead*, *light*, *mage hand*, *mending*, *open/close*, *read magic*, *resistance*

1st Level — *blood assay*, *burning hands*, *comprehend languages*, *expeditious retreat*, *magic missile*

2nd Level — *detect thoughts*, *flaming sphere*, *levitate*, *protection from arrows*, *see invisibility*

3rd Level — *blink*, *dispel magic*, *lightning bolt*, *protection from elements*

4th Level — *dimension door*, *locate creature*, *scrying*, *stoneskin*

5th Level — *cone of cold*, *contact other plane*, *sending*, *teleport*

6th Level — *chain lightning*, *eyebite*, *true seeing*

7th Level — *limited wish*, *prismatic spray*

**Equipment:** +1 *rapier*, *potion of cure moderate wounds*, *scroll of domination*, *scroll of prismatic spray*, *amulet of natural armor* +1, *ring of protection* +2, *bracers of armor* +3, *gloves of Dexterity* +2, *wand of magic missiles* (9th-level caster, Maximized), *cloak of Charisma* +4

## TYPICAL DRAGON KING

### Decadent Sorcerer and Dilettante

"I've found this positively *delightful* new elven musician. You *must* come hear her play."

While the members of the Conclave work to bring about a return of lost glory, the majority of Dragon Kings do little more than pine for their halcyon days with an almost ritualized nostalgia. They seek pleasures, diverse and fleeting as they may be, in their current situation, paying only lip service to the greater aims of their dwindling race.

The rules they follow have become traditions, devoid of any real meaning to them. The breeding directives of the Conclave are followed simply because it is not socially acceptable to ignore them; no one really believes the Imperial bloodline can be revived. The political infighting in the Conclave is good for gossip and diversion, but has no real impact on the world where the Dragon Kings must live, interacting with the races their ancestors once enslaved.

Faced with the repetitive litany of how they are superior to the rest of the world and the retelling of great losses of the past, most Dragon Kings do little more than indulge themselves. Their magical ability can produce a great deal of comfort and wealth, which they readily spend on whatever diversion catches their eye. This leads to the impression

that most Dragon Kings are jaded, superficial, whimsical creatures, and the impression is not necessarily wrong.

## PLAYING A DRAGON KING

Dragon Kings are a proud, pompous, decadent people, reveling in and yearning for the glory of their past, but generally unwilling to work to regain it. They are raised on stories of what they're owed by virtue of their breeding and the respect due to them by lesser races. This leads to a feeling of entitlement and privilege that does not encourage effort or achievement.

## BLOODLINE, LINEAGE, AND FAMILY

More than their individuality, Dragon Kings are defined by the three axes of their race: bloodline, lineage, and family.

Bloodline is the measure of purity of the Dragon King's blood. There are four degrees of bloodline recognized by the Dragon Kings: Cadet, Noble, Regal, and Imperial. Of these, the Imperial bloodline is considered to be lost, and



## TYPICAL DRAGON KING

### 5th-Level Noble Dragon King Sorcerer

CR 5; Medium humanoid; HD 5d4; hp 14; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (+2 Dex, +1 *bracers of armor*), touch 12, flat-footed 11; Base Atk +2; Grp +1; Atk +1 melee (1d6–1, rapier) or +4 ranged (1d4–1, dagger); Full Atk +1 melee (1d6–1, rapier) or +4 ranged (1d4–1, dagger); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Spells; SQ Familiar, Low-Light Vision, Save Against Magic, Spells; AL varies; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6; Str 8, Dex 14, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 18

**Skills:** Concentration +3, Diplomacy +6, Knowledge (Arcana) +2, Knowledge (Eugenics) +3, Knowledge (History) +2, Spellcraft +5.

**Feats:** Combat Casting, Martial Weapon Proficiency (rapier).

**Languages:** Common.

**Familiar (Su):** Snake familiars are popular among Dragon Kings. A snake familiar grants its master a +3 bonus on Bluff checks (not included above).

**Low-Light Vision (Ex):** Noble Dragon Kings see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, torch-

light, and similar conditions of poor illumination. They retain the ability to distinguish colors under these conditions.

**Racial Bonuses (Ex):** All Dragon Kings receive a +2 racial bonus on Bluff, Diplomacy, and Sense Motive checks when dealing with dragons. Dragon Kings receive a +1 racial bonus to all Spellcraft checks.

**Save Against Magic (Ex):** Noble Dragon Kings gain a +1 bonus on all saving throws against magical effects.

**Spells (Sp):** (6/7/5) Saving throw DCs, where applicable, are equal to 14 + spell level.

0 Level — *detect magic, light, mage hand, prestidigitation, ray of frost, read magic*

1st Level — *change self, magic missile, message, shield*

2nd Level — *flaming sphere, invisibility*

**Equipment:** dagger, rapier, *potion of cure moderate wounds, potion of cure serious wounds, 2 scrolls of invisibility, 2 scrolls of acid arrow, 2 scrolls of web, bracers of armor +1, cloak of resistance +1.*

## SEVEN CIVILIZATIONS

the Cadet bloodline is almost indistinguishable from normal humans. The Noble bloodline is the description applied to Dragon Kings with a majority of Noble-blooded (or better) ancestors in the last four generations. To qualify as a Regal bloodline, a Dragon King's family must have at least two grandparents who were of the Regal bloodline, and all other ancestors in five previous generations must be of the Noble bloodline or better. In theory, an Imperial Dragon King would have at least two Imperial grandparents, and all other ancestors in six previous generations would need to be of Regal or better bloodline.

Lineage depend upon the type of dragon that bestowed its power and heritage upon the original founder of the family. Thus, there is a Silver lineage, a White lineage, a Brass lineage, and so forth. As most breeding takes place

within the same lineage, the majority of Dragon Kings have unmixed lineages. The infrequent mixing of lineages creates something of a problem: only magical divination can determine the measure of lineages in the Dragon King, and assign the correct title of lineage. There has been no record of mixed lineage Dragon Kings with balanced lineages; all fall into a single lineage in the end.

To a Dragon King, family is the descriptor for a line of descendants from one of the original thirty founders. All Regal and Noble Dragon Kings belong to one of the surviving nineteen families, and say their names proudly. Only about half the Cadet Dragon Kings still have the name of one of the original families; the others have taken the names of the human families that interbred with them.



### NEW RACE: DRAGON KING

Dragon Kings are an offshoot of humans, which traces its lines of descent back to the original thirty families of the Covenant. There are four different bloodlines. One, the Imperial, is an extinct half-dragon strain and one, the Cadet, is indistinguishable from normal humans. The other two bloodlines, the Regals and the Nobles, are detailed below.

**Physical Description:** Noble Dragon Kings look very much like humans, but their coloring is indicative of their lineage. Hair, eyes, and skin are all variations of the color of the dragon that founded the family, so Red Dragon Kings have red hair, reddish complexions, and red eyes, while White Dragon Kings are almost colorless.

Regal Dragon Kings are colored similarly to Noble Dragon Kings, but also have features that further accentuate their dragon heritage. Small tails, patches of scales, vestigial wings, horns, fangs, and claws are all common.

**Alignment:** Dragon Kings are usually the same alignment as the dragon that founded their family, though there are exceptions. This is a result both of the dragon blood and the traditions of the family.

#### Dragon King Racial Traits

- Noble Dragon Kings: +2 Charisma, -2 Constitution; their dragon heritage is plain to see, but they lack hybrid vigor. Regal Dragon Kings: +4 Charisma, -2 Strength, -2 Constitution; they are even more inbred and weaker than Noble Dragon Kings, but have greater magical ability and are more physically impressive.
- Dragon King base land speed is 30 feet.

- Low-Light Vision: Noble and Regal Dragon Kings see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, torchlight, and similar conditions of poor illumination. They retain the ability to distinguish colors under these conditions.
- Darkvision: Regal Dragon Kings can see in the dark up to 60 feet. Darkvision is black and white only, but it is otherwise like normal sight, and Regal Dragon Kings can function just fine with no light at all.
- All Dragon Kings receive a +2 racial bonus on Bluff, Diplomacy, and Sense Motive checks when dealing with dragons.
- Regal Dragon Kings receive a +2 racial bonus on saving throws against all spells and spell-like abilities. Noble Dragon Kings receive a +1 racial bonus on saving throws against all spells and spell-like abilities.
- Dragon Kings receive a +1 racial bonus to all Spellcraft checks.
- Regal Dragon Kings receive a +1 racial bonus to the saving throw DC of any arcane spells they cast.
- Automatic Languages: Common. Bonus Languages: Any (other than secret languages, such as Druidic). Dragon Kings have assimilated themselves into many different cultures, and thus are exposed to many languages.
- Favored Class: Sorcerer. A multiclass Dragon King's sorcerer class does not count when determining whether he or she suffers an XP penalty for multiclassing. The pursuit of sorcery is the highest goal of Dragon King society, and their dragon heritage grants them the ability to excel.

## SEVEN CIVILIZATIONS

These three aspects shape the attitude and destiny of a Dragon King. Bloodline determines personal power, lineage determines basic outlook, and family determines loyalties and goals. The three balancing forces, and the attitudes associated with them, are driven into the minds of young Dragon Kings by their parents and mentors, and shape their identity and outlook for the rest of their lives.

### Marriage and Family

Marriage among the Noble and Regal bloodlines is generally dictated by the Conclave. It is an arrangement based on equal parts eugenics and political maneuvering, as all families seek to improve their standing by improving their bloodlines. While Noble Dragon Kings have a limited choice when it comes to their spouses, Regal Dragon Kings are assigned a spouse by the Conclave. All marriages are expected to produce children.

Children are frequently raised by nannies or other caretakers while the parents pursue their own interests. Parents involve themselves peripherally in a child's life, usually as a remote ideal to emulate. Certain roles are designated for the parents, however: the pilgrimage to the Mountain of the Covenant, teaching the child his or her genealogy, and presenting the child to Dragon King society when he or she is of age.

Genealogy is important to the Dragon Kings. All children can recite their family trees for at least six generations, and all families have books of genealogy tracing the family line back to the family founder. Of course, Cadet bloodlines don't always follow this tradition, but those who wish their children to advance to Noble bloodline are fanatical about it.

### Names

As might be expected in a society where so much emphasis is placed on ancestry, family names come first for Dragon Kings. Personal names are usually single words or short phrases in the dragon language; references to ideals, virtues, or poetic phrases. There seems to be little

logic distinguishing between male and female names; the division is simply traditional.

Some examples of male personal names and their translations: Ar Talak (Fierce Blade), Beshanro (Prosperous), Egana Yorem (Dancing Wind), Gaim (Splendor), Lesh (Resolute), Myz (Small), Pa Uutos Nef (Bright Morning Star), Orbis (Magnificent), Riquentu (Curious), Robek (Striving).

Some examples of female personal names and their translations: Avisnom (Beauty), Jal Da Hai (Skin of Silk), Komeel (Wisdom), Lupnagin (Quiet), Na Lossien (Night Flower), Olanof (Glimmering), Rahes (Willful), Tal Ree (Sunrise), Va'enos (Mirror), Zinloss (Calm)

### The Thirty Families

Of the original thirty families, only nineteen are known to have survived to the present day. All Noble and Regal Dragon Kings belong to one of these families, which define and shape their loyalties. Roughly half the Cadet Dragon Kings belong to one of the remaining families.

The original thirty families (and their lineages) are: Abeann (Gold), Adworewyr (White, Extinct), Aferrav (Brass, Extinct), Arag (Bronze), Asaleder (Copper), Baymar (Green, Extinct), Brumas (Green, Extinct), Chieseth (Gold), Ciractred (Red), Daewyn (Brass), Droatrem (Blue), Dwa (Brass, Extinct), Fic (Silver), Gliedric (Black), Gwuldan (Green), Kaeliwan (Bronze), Moban (Copper), Nevanna (Copper), Norromon (Gold, Extinct), Prilimar (Silver, Extinct), Rharewan (Bronze, Extinct), Rheliwan (White, Extinct), Taor (Black), Thaes (Blue), Val (Black), Vanthalas (Blue), Waleg (Red, Extinct), Wicaetha (White), Ybigocred (Silver, Extinct), Yevas (Red).

## MAGIC

Magic is a hallmark of the Dragon Kings, and most aspire to be powerful and skilled sorcerers. Indeed, the pursuit of magical power is seen as the only truly fitting occupation in their refined society. Excellence at arms, scholarly studies, or any other pursuit is considered to be



### NEW SKILL: KNOWLEDGE (EUGENICS) (INT; TRAINED ONLY)

Knowledge (Eugenics) covers training and familiarity with the study of genealogies, bloodlines, and breeding, with an eye towards understanding pedigrees and selective breeding.

**Check:** Answering a simple question about eugenics, like what sorts of traits may be inheritable, has a DC of 10. Basic questions, like odds of a particular trait being passed on to the next generation or what lineage

and family a Dragon King comes from, have a DC of 15. More precise questions, such as who a particular creature's parents were or how many generations back elf blood entered the family, has a DC of 20 to 30.

**Retry:** No. If you don't know, you don't know.

**Special:** As with other Knowledge checks, an untrained check is simply an Intelligence check, and the character only knows common knowledge.

## SEVEN CIVILIZATIONS

compensation for those unable to draw upon the magical power of their blood.

While magic is considered the ultimate expression of a Dragon King's power, only sorcery is considered to be pure magic. Wizards and others who must prepare their spells are seen as lesser spellcasters, unable to harness the magic of their blood directly. Of course, some Dragon Kings pursue both paths, bolstering their inherent sorcerous power with wizardly studies, but they are careful to emphasize their sorcery over everything else.

Magical items are also of great importance to the Dragon Kings, being the physical manifestation of their arcane heritage. Most Dragon Kings who pursue magic can make at least minor magical items such as potions, scrolls, and the like, and most families have collections of powerful magical items created by famous family members in times past, kept as heirlooms.

An important magical ability the Dragon Kings have developed is the evaluation of their own bloodline purity and heritage. With a specialized spell and their own knowledge of the various bloodlines, families, and lineages, a skilled Dragon King can determine the ancestry of another Dragon King, and even make some good deductions about creatures of other races. Every family has a few members who have devoted themselves to this study, and act as keepers of the family genealogies.

## LANGUAGE

In everyday circumstances, Dragon Kings use the common language of whatever nation they dwell in. They teach their children the dragon tongue as a matter of cul-

tural identity, though most don't use it for anything but ceremonial purposes. Indeed, most adult Dragon Kings are no longer fluent in the language, but can speak a few common phrases: "hello," "thank you," "burn in the abyss," etc.

## CULTURE

Dragon King culture stagnated the better part of a millennium ago, and hasn't been revitalized since. Everything about the society is a tribute to glory that has passed and will never return. This means many aspects of the culture are baroque in the extreme, and very few understand the meaning behind the traditions.

### Manners

What the Dragon Kings consider to be good manners are complex relationships of precedence, dominance, submission, and deference. Superiority of bloodline and family determine who has the power in any exchange, and the first part of any negotiation (or conversation) between two Dragon Kings is the determination of their relative status. Because of the schisms it can cause, lineage is never used to determine precedence, though it often colors the relationship between two Dragon Kings.

Once relative status is determined, the lesser Dragon King is expected to defer to the greater. The greater is not to be interrupted, contradicted, or insulted. The lesser enjoys no such protection. Non-Dragon Kings are automatically inferior in such relationships, but hard-won experience has taught Dragon Kings not to press the point.



## NEW SPELL: BLOOD ASSAY

Divination

**Level:** Sor/Wiz 1

**Components:** V, S

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** Touch

**Area:** Creature or object touched

**Duration:** Concentration, up to 1 minute/level

**Saving Throw:** None

**Spell Resistance:** No

You examine a creature or sample of blood or flesh and determine a number of things about its ancestry. The amount of information you receive depends on how long you study a particular creature or sample.

*1st Round:* Type of creature (Aberration, Humanoid, etc.).

*2nd Round:* Specific type of creature (human, Dragon King, etc.).

*Each Additional Round:* With a successful Knowledge (eugenics) check (DC 15), you can determine one additional fact about the creature's ancestry: race of parents, grandparents, and so on; lineage, bloodline, or family of Dragon King; percentage of mixed blood; identity of a specific ancestor; and so forth.

Each round, you may examine a different creature or sample, or you may continue to examine the same sample.

Elaborate rituals exist for greeting, parting, eating, courting, singing, dancing, going to bed, getting up, and almost every other aspect of life. Most Dragon Kings only pay attention to these rituals when in the company of those they wish to impress with their purity and respect for tradition. In less formal company, abbreviated forms of rituals are used, or the rituals are ignored entirely.

### Clothing

Clothing is usually loose and many-layered, embroidered or decorated with dragon motifs. Dragon King fashion has a predilection to metallic or enameled scales, wing-like sleeves, tail-like trains, and other accoutrements that stylistically approximate a draconic body.

Regal Dragon Kings wear clothes that reveal and accentuate their draconic features. Those with ridged spines wear open-backed robes, those with facial or forehead horns often drape them with jewelry, those with scaled skin expose as much of it as possible. Displaying the physical features of their heritage is a statement of pride.

Of late, it has become fashionable among the younger crowd to wear a rapier, whether or not one can actually use it.

### Art and Music

Very little new art or music has been produced by the Dragon Kings since the founding of the Conclave. Most new works are heavily derivative pastiches of works done in the distant past or pointless, decadent, simplistic experimental pieces. Artistic endeavor is now the province of wealthy dilettantes.

Art produced by other races is rapidly and eagerly embraced, indulged, and then rapidly abandoned. The artistic world of the Dragon Kings is a series of fads and nine-day wonders; styles that rage through the society, capturing everyone's imagination, then fade away in the face of the next new thing.

### Food

Dragon Kings have simple tastes in food: whatever is expensive, rare, and ornate is the best. Banquets are popular recreations, where the guests gorge themselves on delicacies of food and drink, eating ornate little tidbits and sipping rare and delicate wines.

## POLITICS

Politics is the lifeblood of Dragon King society. Scheming is as natural as breathing, and they read shifting alliances as easily as a bird reads shifting winds. It is such an integral part of their lives that Dragon Kings seldom have just a single reason for doing something, and lie about it if they do. They are entirely unabashed about deception.

They also assume everyone else is scheming as much and as often as they themselves scheme. Any attempt to deny it is seen as dishonest, and any proof of innocence is seen as naiveté.

This predisposition to politics and treachery gives them the tools necessary to gain power in many arenas, as long as they can bring themselves to treat the "lesser races" as equals. Dragon King advisors are much sought after in certain nations, and those involved directly in the politics of other races are truly forces to be reckoned with.

## ADVENTURERS

Dragon Kings get drawn into adventuring out of boredom. Sure, some young scions of the metallic lineages feel the call and go out to combat evil and make the world a better place, and some ambitious descendants of the chromatic lineages are interested in building their own power base and wealth through looting and treasure-hunting, but the majority of Dragon Kings just don't care passionately enough about any of that to make the effort. They see adventuring as a new kind of entertainment, more exciting than the bulk of their usual diversions.

The magical abilities of the Dragon Kings mean most families are at least comfortable, financially speaking, with ample opportunities to indulge in all manner of escapades. Lately, the fashion has been for fencing, and it's rare now to find a wealthy young Dragon King who hasn't learned to use the rapier. This, coupled with their sorcerous training, leads many to feel there is no challenge they cannot master, and thus strike out to face adventure.

An adventuring career has only recently come to be acceptable to the hardliners in the traditionalist factions. While adventurers are no longer considered one step below tradesmen, they still don't receive the kind of respect politicians and layabouts get. Respected and established Dragon Kings have other people adventure on their behalf.

## ADVENTURE SEEDS THE NEW CHAMBERLAIN

Here are three ideas you can use to involve the Dragon Kings in your campaign right away.

### PLAYING WITH THE BIG BOYS

A group of young Dragon Kings is invited to a ball at the Conclave by their family representatives. This is a wonderful opportunity to mix with others in the corridors of power, show off new clothes, and perhaps get a leg up in politics. The rest of the guest list consists of the movers and shakers in the Conclave, and perhaps some adventurers invited to tell tales and give a worldly air to the evening.

Of course, a group of naïve fresh faces in the mix of such a politically charged event has the politicians circling the party like coyotes around a wounded fawn. During the evening, each PC is taken into confidence by a variety of elders, each offering some advice or looking for some information, sounding out their standing on various political issues, and making sure everyone sees them talking, so as to start gossip.

At the height of the party, it's announced that someone has broken into the vaults and made off with a number of genealogies. Most surprising to everyone involved, divination magic reveals the culprits are the PCs! Pandemonium reigns as everyone tries to use this to their advantage and the characters find a way to prove their innocence in a nest of accomplished schemers.

A noble of the characters' acquaintance has recently taken on a new chamberlain, a Regal Dragon King. This new retainer has quickly made herself indispensable, offering sound advice and suggestions that have caused the noble's star to rise in court. All she asks in return is a couple of jobs for her relatives.

Soon, the court is peppered with Dragon Kings, lounging around, bickering, scheming, and getting into the occasional duel. On top of it all, the chamberlain has been asking for bigger and bigger favors from the noble. He thinks she's up to something, but doesn't know what. Can the characters penetrate the Dragon King family and unravel their tangled plans before the chamberlain has sunk her claws into the throne ... or the PCs?

### LITTLE GIRL LOST

The new hope of the Wicaetha family has gone missing. The White lineage has been faltering for some time, with only a single family left of the original three. Now, the first Regal Dragon King to be born to the family in this generation has disappeared from school. The family is in a panic, and are calling in favors to find Wicaetha Komeel.

The truth of the matter is that the twelve-year-old girl has gotten bored with all the pressure being put on her to uphold her family's reputation and traditions. She's decided to sneak off on her own, to make her way in the world without any demands from stuck-up, reactionary elders. She's decided to become a thief.

The PCs need to track her down, then decide what to do with her. How do they react to her pleas to be left alone? Do they leave her to live out her life on her own terms, or do they drag her back to the family she hates?

# CHAPTER TWO

## TAKALAS

*The council of wizards sat around the long ebony table. Translucent servants drifted about the room, clearing away the silver dishes and setting out a course of sherbet and chilled raspberries. Dalleon raised his hands and conversation stopped.*

*“First, I would like to welcome my daughter Mirialen del, who today passed the test of the sixth circle and who will now sit on our councils.” Polite applause followed, and Mirialen blushed and looked down at her sherbet. “Second, we are approaching Stromheim and we must plan our course of action. We need lumber and salt, but more importantly we need to find ten more pounds of silent crystal if we’re going to meet our quota. Talianna, you’ll be in charge of sales ... see what you can do with the potions in the eastern storeroom. Dori, I want you to take Siasha and head out into the city. The scouts say that Winter has come to Stromheim, and we need to know what they’re up to. At the least, they’ll try to stop us from getting the crystal. But I have a feeling that there’s something larger at stake here.” Dalleon paused to take a bite of the sherbet, which was beginning to melt. “Anyhow, I’ll leave you to discuss it,” he said. “It’s my turn to drive the wagon.”*

## OVERVIEW

Gnomes are a magical race, and illusion is their birthright. By merging their innate gifts with millennia of mystical research, the gnomes of Takalas have mastered the arts of wizardry and alchemy, and magic is used in all aspects of everyday life. Takalas is a realm of wonders and dreams, where the impossible is to be expected. Music grows on trees, crystal towers touch the sky, and rainbows flow across the land like water. This surreal paradise is well hidden, and foreigners are rarely welcome. But the gnomes of Takalas spend most of the year away from their homeland, so adventurers may encounter them in one of their strange nomadic communities.

## PLACEMENT

There are two aspects to the civilization of Takalas. The first is the physical nation — a small valley hidden by powerful illusions and protected by magical wards. You can place Takalas in any relatively isolated and inhospitable area: a mountain range, a swamp, a dense jungle, or a similarly unpleasant location. It’s not on your maps because it’s not on any maps. Even the gnomes memorize the location and never write it down so maps cannot fall into the hands of outsiders.

Player characters are more likely to encounter one of the traveling communities of Takalas before they discover the land itself. The people of Takalas are divided into four clans, and each clan spends one season out of the year in the homeland. The rest of the year is spent traveling: trading, gathering resources, and feuding with members of other clans — gathering material for the stories that will be told during the next season in Takalas. The nomads travel in magical wagons, and what appears to be an old covered cart carrying an elderly alchemist and his wife may actually contain a community of 45 gnomes. You will need to decide how far these wagons range on their 9-month migration, what paths they take, and what nations they pass through. In order to avoid bandits the gnomes conceal their wealth and magical sophistication from all but trusted business associates, so it is not unusual that the player characters have never heard of the nation of Takalas.

## HISTORY

To understand the gnomes of Takalas, one must understand their history: how Takalas was founded and how it came to be the city it is today.

## ORIGIN

Gnomes have a natural gift for magic, but few fully develop this talent. Thousands of years ago a community of gnomes began a focused and intense study of the arcane arts. They excelled at wizardry and were soon developing new spells and mystical techniques. But their activities drew the attention of a human warlord — a superstitious barbarian who feared the “fiendish works of the bearded imps.” Despite their growing skills, the gnomes did not have the power to resist his mighty horde, and those who did not flee were killed. For years the gnomes roamed the land in search of a safe haven, with barbarian warbands snapping at their heels. Finally they discovered a fertile valley hidden deep in the heart of an untamed and dangerous wilderness. This vale was

## SEVEN CIVILIZATIONS

a focal point of mystical energies, and the roaming gnomes were able to draw on this power to conceal the valley behind webs of illusion. The barbarians scoured the land for signs of their tiny enemies, but passed by the hidden refuge without ever suspecting its existence.

The gnomish refugees named their sanctuary “Takalas,” meaning “Bright Fountain” in an old Gnome dialect.

### DEVELOPMENT

Takalas was a beautiful and idyllic realm, and the gnomes had little interest in returning to the hostile world outside. Centuries passed and the gnomes continued to perfect their arcane skills. Shielded from all dangers and distractions, the people of Takalas made impressive advances in the arts of spellcraft and alchemy. But as the centuries passed, a swelling population began to pose a problem. The resources of the land were virtually depleted — both common resources like wood and rarer materials needed for arcane research. Tensions grew and factions formed around schools of magic and ancestral bloodlines. Feuds and skirmishes ultimately led to a devastating conflict known as the Time of Broken Seasons. Magical fire scorched the land, wishes twisted the fabric of reality, and

for a time it seemed that Takalas would surely be destroyed. After more than half of the population had been slain in battle, the leaders of the four surviving factions met to discuss terms. The final decision was a simple one. All of the gnomes bore responsibility for the damage done to the land, and all would suffer equal punishment. Each faction would be allowed to remain within Takalas for only one season out of the year, and during this time they would devote their talents to repairing and improving the ancient sanctuary. For the rest of the year, the factions travel across the world, gathering information and critical resources for Takalas. After a period of intense preparation, three of the seasonal clans set out to begin the first migration.

### CURRENT

Centuries have passed since the Solstice Council set the first migration in motion. Takalas has become a realm of wonders, as each clan seeks to outdo the others with their contributions to the homeland. While the gnomes hide their true wealth and power, the neighboring nations have gotten used to the presence of the traveling tinkers and alchemists. In some communities the Takalas gnomes are considered troublemakers, but in others their coming is a time for festivals.



While it rarely shows on the surface, bad blood still runs between the gnomes of different seasons. Feuding clans often engage in subtle battles of wits and words; one of the greatest coups a gnome can achieve is to find a way to prevent a rival from returning to Takalas for his season. These feuds are more like elaborate games than bloody vendettas, and there has been little open violence between families since the Time of Broken Seasons. But there are those who feel the Winter gnomes have been behaving strangely, and these skeptics wonder what dark plots may be brewing in the hidden chambers of the Winter wagons.



## LOCATIONS

The following locations are of special note.

### TAKALAS

#### Large Town, special

Conventional (Solstice Council); AL CG (Spring, Summer), NG (Autumn), N (Winter); Population 2,400 – 3,600 adults (varies by season); 15,000 gp limit (see below); Assets 36,000,000 gp; Isolated – 99% Gnome, 1% mixed other races.

Takalas is a remarkable place, and it does not conform to the usual rules for communities. Despite its small size, the magical skills of its inhabitants have created an affluent paradise filled with wonders. The gold piece limit is increased to 150,000 gp for purposes of obtaining magic items or alchemical goods, although some gnomish artisans will not sell their creations to outsiders. Magic is everywhere: see the description of *magical tools* to get a sense of how the gnomes use magic items in the course of their everyday lives.

The population of Takalas shifts every season, but the valley always has an impressive concentration of powerful wizards. When checking for the highest-level local characters, roll 1d8+12 for wizards and 3d4+12 for experts. Roll five times for each class, and when determining lower-level characters triple the population every time you halve the level. Thus a 20th-level wizard generates 3 10th-level wizards, 9 5th-level wizards, and 27 2nd-level wizards. Wizards are usually specialists; illusion is the most common school, but students of all paths can be found. In addition, Takalas contains a large number of expert/wizards. To determine the number and level of these characters, roll 1d8+12 five times; the character's levels should be split evenly between expert and wizard. Make normal checks for bards, clerics, druids, fighters, rangers, rogues, and warriors, using the standard +3 community modifier. During the spring, use a

+9 modifier for the level check for druids and +6 for rangers, while during the summer use a +6 modifier for bards. The other classes — adept, aristocrat, barbarian, commoner, monk, paladin, and sorcerer — are not found in the gnomish population of Takalas. The remainder of the population — those not accounted for in the level check — are 1st-level expert/1st-level wizards. The gnomes are extremely paranoid about revealing their paradise to outsiders, and only a handful of foreigners have been allowed to settle within the realm. Admission into the hidden vale requires a personal invitation from a respected member of the community, and such an invitation is generally only extended to foreign wizards who have performed great services for the gnomes.

In addition to the characters determined by the level checks, Takalas includes one 3rd-level illusionist/6th-level mystic theurge/10th-level druid, three 3rd-level expert/17th-level wizards (two illusionists and a diviner), and four 5th-level archmage/14th-level wizards (two illusionists, a transmuter, and a necromancer). These are the members of the Solstice Council. They maintain order within Takalas, and use their magic to protect the land from outsiders. Generally, this involves maintaining the spells that shield the town from the outside world (*alarm*, *hallucinatory terrain*, *illusory walls*, *screens*, and others), but with the magical forces at their disposal the council could take on an army of invading soldiers.

Beyond these mystical defenses, Takalas is an amazing sight. The landscape is lush and fertile. Orchards and groves are filled with *awakened* trees and wondrous plants produced through magical and alchemical experimentation: synaesthetic trees that produce music when in bloom, bushes studded with *dancing lights*, and flowers that seem to be formed from light and shadow. Towers made from spiderwebs and starlight rise vast distances into the sky, and illusory plays and stories are performed in crystal auditoriums. Rainbow rivers provide water, wine, ale, honeyed milk, and a dozen more cool and refreshing beverages. Over the years many animal species have been *awakened*, and badgers and magpies engage in cheerful conversations in groves of silver trees. Anything that can be provided with magic — light, music, animated or spectral servants — is provided. In short, if it could be found in a faerie tale, it can be found in Takalas. Due to the strong flow of magical energy through the region, all magic is Enhanced in Takalas, and all spells are Enlarged and Extended.

While the population of Takalas is generally limited to gnomes of a particular season, there are a number of residents who remain year-round. The members of the Solstice Council are always found in Takalas. The representatives of the current season hold authority, but the other six councilors have a voice throughout the year and look out for the interests of their families. A seat on

the council is held until death or until the councilor voluntarily steps down. Whenever there is a vacancy, the clan gathers for a test of magical skill. From Takalas on down through the wandering communities, leadership is ultimately based on arcane talent. In addition to the councilors themselves, each councilor selects a dozen attendants to help maintain Takalas throughout the year. Finally, expectant parents are allowed to return to Takalas to give birth, and to remain in the city for the following year.

Besides Takalas itself, the gnomish communities are entirely mobile. Most communities are made up of a single *manor wagon* belonging to a particular family of gnomes, although there are a few convoys scattered across the land. Like Takalas, these communities possess greater wealth and more talented individuals than size would normally indicate. An example of a wagon community is provided below.

## DIASENDORF

### Thorp, special

Conventional (family-based council of wizards); AL CG; Population 30 adults; 2,000 gp limit; Assets 60,000 gp; Isolated – 100% Gnome. Prominent NPCs: Dalleon dan Diasen (CG male gnome Exp3/III11); Talianna tial Diasen (CG female gnome Exp 6/Div6); Hadrian dan Diasen (CG male gnome Clr3/III3/Mystic Theurge2); Dorian das Diasen (NG male gnome III7); Siasha sil Oladen (CG female gnome Brd6).

The Diasen family are members of the Summer clan. Their *manor wagon* is painted a brilliant green with a bright red roof and wheels. As Summer gnomes they love to celebrate, and their illusionists and bards often put on performances for the communities that they pass through. The Diasen gnomes are always interested in acquiring new stories or sagas that they can share upon their return to Takalas, and player characters will be pressed for tales of past adventures. In addition to information, the Diasens are currently searching for a supply of silent crystal — a rare substance the Summer gnomes need to enhance the crystal theatres of Takalas. In addition to the wagon itself, the Diasens possess an assortment of *magical tools*, two *faithful mounts*, a set of *eyes of the eagle*, a *housescope*, a *metamagic rod* (lesser Extend), a *ring of distant speech* (2 uses/day), three *spirit porters* (two type II, one type III), a *trusted servant*, a *wand of color spray*, a *Small glamered chain shirt +1*, and an assortment of potions and alchemical goods (the family's trading stock).



## PERSONALITIES

The Takalas gnomes are skilled and colorful individuals, and every *manor wagon* has its own share of interesting personalities. The following characters are not necessarily important individuals, but they serve as examples of different types of Takalas gnomes.

## MALLEUS KEN CORRIDAN

### NE Male Gnome Lich III13/Archmage5

“Swift currents underlie even frozen waters.”

Malleus is one of the elders of the Winter gnomes. The Winter clan has always had an interest in death magic, and while the families respect the wishes of the Solstice Council, the true power of the clan lies in the hands of a cabal of lichs — wizards who have guided the families since the Time of Broken Seasons. Most of these undead gnomes remain hidden deep in their *manor wagons*, relying on *rings of distant speech* to discuss plans and to provide direction to their descendants. Malleus is one of the few elders who regularly interacts with the living, using his mystical powers to claim resources that the clan requires for its plans. He generally cloaks his appearance with illusion or transmutation spells, assuming the form of an albino gnome with a long white beard. He is completely ruthless, and will sacrifice anything or anyone to achieve the goals of the Winter cabal. He has no sense of humor, and no regard for life. He has a special hatred for elven wizards, due to an old conflict when he was still alive, but he generally prefers to inflict extended psychological torments on his enemies instead of simply striking them down with his magic.

## CALIAN OLIN DASTER

### CG Female Gnome Rgr4/Brd1

“It was only a joke!”

Calian is a mischievous young woman from one of the Spring families. She serves as a scout, traveling ahead of her family and searching for signs of gnomes of other seasons. She loves to play tricks on other families — especially Winter gnomes — and adventurers may be caught up in one of her schemes. Calian is surprisingly muscular for a gnome, and despite the fact that she is only 58, her short hair is already fully white. She has a great love of rabbits, and she is often accompanied by an *awakened* rabbit named Kalat.

## JIADRAN DELA SORRILAN

### NG Female Gnome Div7

“Heed my words before it is too late!”

Jiadrán is a daughter of the Autumn clan. At 49 years old she has already developed astonishing mystical talents, and her family is certain that she will rise to the Solstice Council in years to come.

Jiadrán is slightly built and has auburn hair, a rarity among gnomes. She is always serious, and seems to be looking beyond the material realm. She has prophetic dreams, and during the migration her family often pursues strange quests based on these visions. The Sorrilans might try to engage the services of adventurers to help with one of these quests. Jiadrán also tells fortunes, and she might provide a PC with a cryptic clue about the future.

## PLAYING A TAKALAS GNOME

The life of a Takalas gnome revolves around his homeland. A gnome is always thinking about the return to Takalas: what supplies he needs to acquire, what he can do to impress the other families, and how he can leave a mark for future generations. Beyond Takalas itself, the gnomes are obsessed with arcane magic. This is not limited to the wizards of Takalas. Many gnomes who follow mundane classes learn to perfect their own innate powers of illusion, and warriors and experts alike love to discuss the latest innovations in spellcraft or arcane lore. Magic pervades every level of life in Takalas: the gnomes live in magical mobile villages, cook their food using enchanted griddles, use illusions to as entertainment, and speak to distant friends using magic rings or enchanted stones. But outside of Takalas and their manors, the gnomes take pains to conceal this level of wealth and sophistication, to prevent outsiders from developing an interest in the treasures of the hidden realm.

When passing through a community, a Takalas family will usually sell potions and alchemical goods in order to acquire gold and the other resources they seek. If supplies are low or a community cannot afford such goods, the gnomes may offer other services. They may use their spells or innate powers of illusion to entertain crowds, or they may offer to perform menial tasks like cleaning or mending. While this work rarely generates any meaningful wealth, it helps to mask the gnomes' true affluence, and it provides young gnomes with a chance to practice low-level spells. Of course, many a juvenile gnome has succumbed to the temptation to play tricks on the people

he is serving, and as a result the traveling gnomes have a questionable reputation in many nations.

## PERSONALITY

The personality of a Takalas gnome is strongly influenced by the season of his family. The Spring clans are mischievous and cheerful, and have a strong bond to the natural world. The Summer families are often seen as hedonists, and are renowned for their celebrations and skills with illusory storytelling. The Winter clans are cold and grim, and have an intense devotion to mystical research. The Autumn families stand in the middle; they are not as serious as the gnomes of Winter, nor as frivolous as the gnomes of Summer. Autumn gnomes are seen as the most sensible of the families, and the clan has produced some of the greatest artisans and diviners of Takalas. Autumn gnomes also tend to be the peacemakers of the nation, who step in to soothe conflicts between members of the other three seasons when they escalate to dangerous levels.

## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Takalas gnomes are short for their race, averaging 3 feet in height and 30 to 35 lbs. Most have light skin and fair hair, which often turns pure white at an early age.

## RELATIONS

As a nation, Takalas avoids contacts with all other races and countries. As individuals, the gnomes maintain a friendly façade with everyone they encounter. When dealing with other races, the only people that they usually take seriously are wizards. A wizard who shows innovation and intelligence will immediately earn the respect of a Takalas gnome. But if a wizard is arrogant, a Takalas gnome will often go out of his way to humiliate and embarrass the pretentious mage. This behavior is especially common among the Spring gnomes, and has caused a considerable amount of friction between the traveling gnomes and elven nations.

## ALIGNMENT

Typical alignment varies by season. Spring and Summer gnomes are wild and chaotic, while Autumn and Winter families lean more towards neutrality. Takalas gnomes are usually good-hearted, but Winter gnomes are typically true neutral — and a growing number are slipping towards neutral evil.

## RELIGION

The gnomes of Takalas have a very open-minded view of religion. As students of arcana they accept the existence of multiple deities, and view choice of religion much like joining a guild: it's something that may help you get ahead in life, and it provides a focal point for social activities. Some simply choose their gods based on the quality of the myths associated with the religion. In any case, a Takalas family may follow almost any religion that matches its moral leanings.

Due to this relaxed view of religion, Takalas gnomes rarely progress very far as clerics. Druids are common among the Spring gnomes, and gnomes often have more success with this path.

## LANGUAGE

Amongst themselves, the Takalas gnomes speak the standard gnome tongue. As they spend much of their time traveling, all children are taught to speak the common language. If a family follows an annual migratory path through a nation where another language is spoken, children will be encouraged to learn that language as well.

### Male Names

Takalas gnomes have two given names: a gate name and a birth name. The gate name is chosen a year after the child is born, when he is about to leave Takalas for the first time. The birth name is given immediately after birth, and in the case of a multiple birth all children share the same name. Once a child has a gate name, his birth name is written in lowercase letters. Common gate names include: Alwin, Dalleon, Hadrian, Medwin, Orleon, Pepin, Rasequin, Trumble, and Tylwin. Birth names are usually shorter: ban, das, del, ken, lan, wel.

### Female Names

The *ia* combination is common in female names, and birth names may be longer than their male counterparts. Common gate names include Calian, Dalianna, Jiadren, Mirialen, Orlianna, Siasha, Tanedra, and Tylia. Birth names include dela, mia, olin, sen, tas, and yara.

### Family Names

The *-er*, *-an*, and *-en* suffixes are all common in Takalas family names. Examples include Corridan, Daster, Diasen, Oladen, and Sorrilan.

## ADVENTURERS

Most Takalas gnomes remain with their families throughout the year, living in the *manor wagon*. But some young gnomes break free from their families for a decade or two. Most are simply interested in seeing the world beyond the path of migration. Others hope to make new mystical discoveries or to find treasures worthy of a place in the Eternal Museum, assuring a place in the history of Takalas. In addition, each clan maintains a few teams of specialists ready to respond to the needs of the season, including defense, conflicts with other seasons, and acquisition of items or resources that the clan requires for its future plans. Such a Takalas strike force could easily form the basis for a group of player characters.

### Typical Classes

Specialist wizards are by far the most common class in Takalas, and most gnomes have at least one level in one of the arcane paths. Experts are also common; gnomes place great stock in craftsmanship and knowledge. Other classes vary by season. Druids and rangers are frequently found in the Spring families. Bards are found throughout the families, but Summer places the greatest emphasis on bardic arts and traditions. Loremasters, diviners, and transmuters are often found in Autumn. And Winter has long studied the arts of necromancy, as winter is the time of darkness and death.

### Typical Skills and Feats

Craft, Profession, and Knowledge skills are valued throughout Takalas, and a great deal of importance is placed on Knowledge (arcana) and Craft (alchemy). As for feats, Takalas gnomes have been honing their natural magical talents for ages, and many have greater control over these spell-like abilities than other members of their race. These feats are provided later in this chapter. Item creation feats are also common among spellcasters; every wizard hopes to create a wondrous item that will revolutionize the lives of the Takalas gnomes.

### Typical Equipment

Takalas gnomes often carry a variety of small but useful magic items. Common equipment includes 1st-level potions or wands, or minor wondrous items like a *faithful mount* (1 use/day) or *trusted servant* (1 use/day). Clothing styles are influenced by season: Summer gnomes wear bright, festive outfits while Winter gnomes usually wear simple traveling clothes in somber colors.

## NEW FEATS

Gnomes are inherently magical creatures. The gnomes of Takalas place great importance on their natural powers of illusion and work to focus and develop these powers. While these feats are commonplace in Takalas, you could allow gnomes and other characters of any culture to use these feats.

### Call the Messenger [General]

Your bond to the natural world is so strong that you can convince tiny animals to perform simple favors on your behalf. This feat is especially common among the Spring gnomes of Takalas.

**Prerequisite:** Gnome, Woodland Tongue

**Benefit:** You may use *animal messenger* 2 times/day as a spell-like ability; the effect lasts until the next sunrise.

### Fey Talent [General]

Gnomes have a natural gift for minor illusions and tricks. You have honed these talents and can use your magical powers more often than your cousins.

**Prerequisite:** Gnome, Charisma 11+

**Benefit:** You may use *dancing lights*, *ghost sounds*, and *prestidigitation* 2 times/day as spell-like abilities. The caster level is half your character level.

**Normal:** A gnome can use each of these abilities once per day, as a 1st-level sorcerer.

**Special:** You may take this feat multiple times. Every subsequent time that you take Fey Talent, the number of times you can use each power per day increases by two: 4 times/day, 6 times/day, 8 times/day, and so on.

### Focused Illusion [General]

You have learned to channel your natural powers of illusion to enhance the effect of spells that you cast.

**Prerequisite:** Gnome, Fey Talent, Cha 11+

**Benefit:** You may expend one daily use of either your *dancing lights* or *ghost sounds* spell-like ability in order to increase the effect of an illusion spell that you cast. This increases the effective caster level of the spell and the difficulty of the saving throw by +2. You can't expend more than a single use on a particular spell, and you can only enhance illusions in this manner.

### Fortune Teller [General]

Through your devotion to the art of divination, you have learned how to gain a glimpse of the future.

**Prerequisite:** Ability to cast 2nd-level arcane spells, Wis 13+

**Benefit:** You can prepare the following spells as if they were wizard spells: *augury* (2nd level) and *divination* (4th level). You can prepare these spells without a spellbook, as if using the Spell Mastery feat. You may also receive dreams or visions that provide clues about future events, but this is a plot device that occurs entirely at the discretion of the GM.

### Image Weaver [General]

You have mastered your innate gift for illusion, and you can weave sounds and lights together to create coherent images. In Takalas, gnomish entertainers use this talent to bring songs and tales to life.

**Prerequisite:** Gnome, Fey Talent, Cha 11+

**Benefit:** By expending 2 daily uses of your *dancing lights* ability, you can use *silent image* once as a spell-like ability. If you expend 2 uses of both *dancing lights* and *ghost sounds*, you can use *minor image* once as a spell-like ability. The caster level is equal to half of your character level.

### Imaginary Friends [General]

Between your overactive imagination and your natural gift for illusion, you have developed the ability to produce a host of illusionary companions. This talent is common among the warriors of Takalas, who are more interested in the martial applications of illusions than their entertainment value.

**Prerequisite:** Gnome, Fey Talent, Cha 11+

**Benefit:** By expending 2 daily uses of both *dancing lights* and *ghost sounds*, you can use *mirror image* once as a spell-like ability. The caster level is equal to half of your character level.

### Tinker's Touch [General]

Some gnomes have a gift for illusion. You have a talent for the household tricks that humans often associate with the fey folk – the ability to clean a filthy fireplace or a stained dress with a wave of your hand, and to add color and flavor to a dull world. Gnomes with this talent often work as innkeepers, using this gift to heat and flavor food, chill beverages, and keep a clean and tidy establishment.

**Prerequisite:** Gnome, Fey Talent, Cha 13+

**Benefit:** You may use *prestidigitation* at will. This is a spell-like ability, with a caster level equal to your character level.

**Normal:** A gnome can use *prestidigitation* 1/day as a 1st-level sorcerer.



### Woodland Tongue [General]

Gnomes have an innate bond to the natural world. You have developed this talent and have a gift for communicating with animals.

**Prerequisite:** Gnome

**Benefit:** You can use *Speak with Animals* 3 times/day as a spell-like ability. This takes the place of your racial ability, but it is not limited to burrowing mammals. The effect lasts for 1 minute for every 2 character levels that you possess.

**Normal:** Without this feat a gnome may *Speak with Animals* once per day, but can only speak with burrowing mammals.



## THE MAGIC OF TAKALAS

The mage-artisans of Takalas can produce any traditional magic item: magical wands, rings of protection, enchanted swords, and so on. But they have also developed more mundane and practical applications for magic – labor-saving devices and tools for communication and transportation. A few of these mystical innovations are described below.

### New Wondrous Item: Faithful Mount

A *faithful mount* is a platinum brooch engraved with a stylized horse. With a command word, the wearer can call the image off of the brooch, summoning a light horse or pony complete with bit, bridle, and saddle. A second word restores the horse to the brooch. It returns to the medallion if killed.

A standard *faithful mount* can be used at will for unlimited periods of time. However, the wizards of Takalas also produce cheaper *faithful mounts* that can only be used once or twice per day for two hours per use — these are useful for elderly gnomes who only plan to use the mount on weekends. If the mount is killed, the user must wait for two hours before it can be summoned again.

Faint conjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *mount*; Price 1,800 gp (unlimited use), 720 gp (2 uses/day), 360 gp (1 use/day).

### New Wondrous Item: Houserope

A *houserope* provides a traveler with a safe and secure shelter from weather, beasts, and banditry. A *houserope* is a 10-foot length of silk cord. It can produce the effect of *rope trick* once per day, providing an extradimensional shelter for up to eight people. The dimensional pock-

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et lasts for up to 10 hours, but the owner can end the effect by removing the rope or by using a second command word. When the effect expires, any objects or creatures in the extradimensional space fall to the ground.

A *houserope* can be placed within another extradimensional space without danger, but it cannot be activated in such an area.

Faint transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous Item, Extend Spell, *rope trick*; Price 5,400 gp; Weight 2 lb.

### New Wondrous Item: Magical Tools

This is actually a broad category of magical items: simple tools that perform invaluable mundane functions. Examples include a stewpot that cooks and flavors soup in seconds; a broom that cleans an entire room with a single sweep; a musical box that plays a variety of different tunes; a rod that chills any beverage with a tap on the mug; a basin that cleans any clothes or dishes placed within; or a knitting needle that mends any torn cloth. A *magical tool* generally duplicates a single aspect of *prestidigitation* or *mending*, producing a single effect or repairing a specific type of material, but tools can be created that perform any effect of a similar power level. While these effects are fairly minor, they are tremendously convenient.

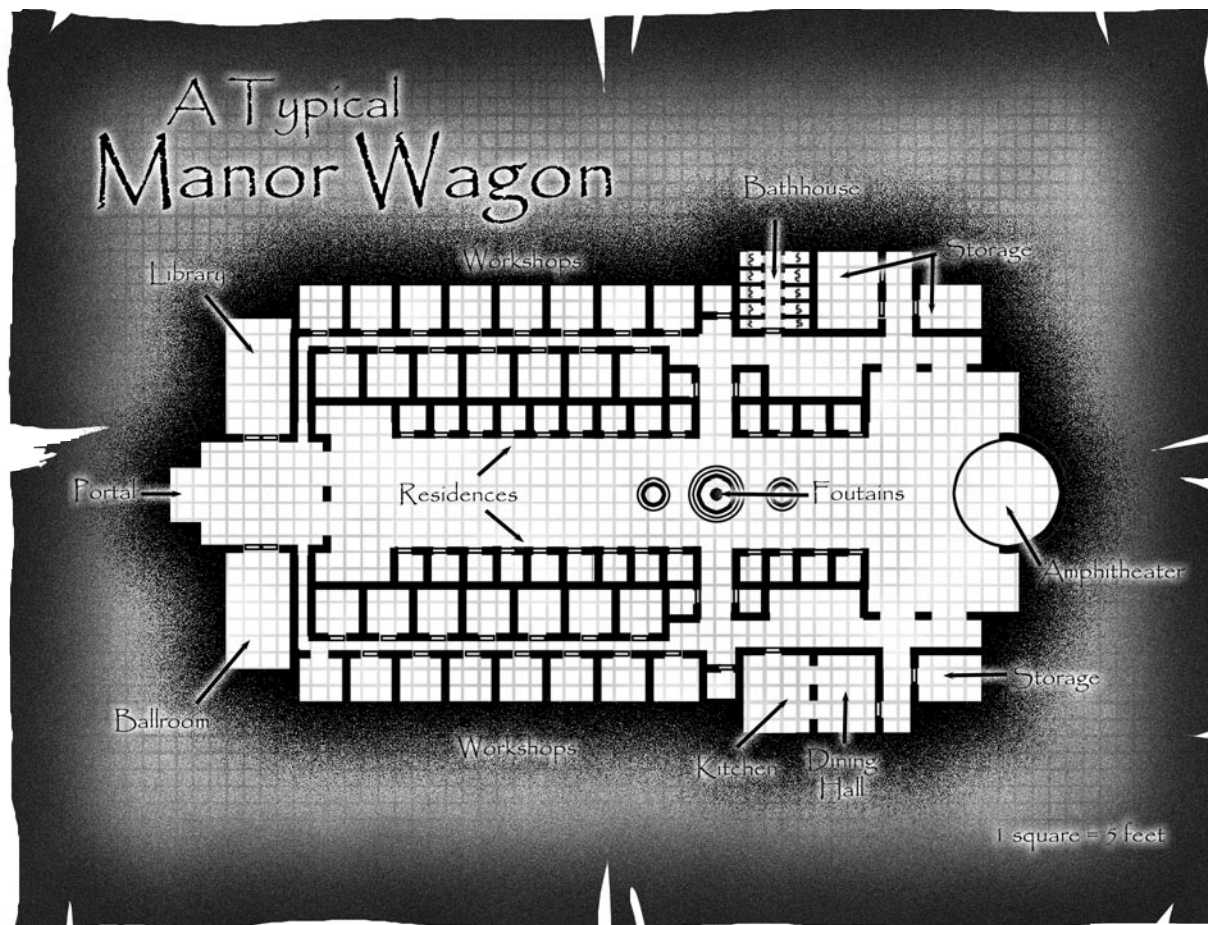
While most *magical tools* can be used at will with the utterance of the appropriate command words, the wizard-artisans also produce tools that can only be used once per day. When activated, the power of the tool lasts for up to an hour, so even when limited to a single use per day a magical broom can easily clean an entire house. With this restriction, the price of the enchantment drops to a mere 90 gp, and as a result the average Takalas household has a few of these treasures.

Considering the low cost of *magical tools*, you may want to decide why they aren't found across the world. It's possible they can only be produced by using the natural *prestidigitation* power of a gnome, or it may just be an art the gnomes of Takalas have been perfecting for hundreds of years.

Faint universal; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *mending* or *prestidigitation*; Price 450 gp (unlimited use), 90 gp (1 use/day); Weight varies by item.

### New Wondrous Item: Manor Wagon

*Manor wagons* are a cornerstone of the society of modern Takalas. Each wagon is a mobile community, a thorp on wheels. From the outside, a *manor wagon* seems like a simple coach. Spring and Summer gnomes favor



bright, painted exteriors, while Fall and Winter wagons are unremarkable. Inside the mundane-appearing coach, there is a door on the back wall that has no matching door on the outside. When this door is opened, a hazy translucent portal is revealed. Each wagon has an associated key, and only those who have received an invitation from the bearer of the key can pass through the portal. The invitation remains in effect until it is formally revoked. The restriction on travel through the portal is strictly one way, and anyone who has gained entrance to the manor can always leave it. A *knock* spell opens the portal for 1 minute, but the keybearer automatically senses the disruption.

The manor on the other side of the portal is vast and luxurious. It is fully furnished, warm, and well lit. A *manor wagon* has a total area of 9,000 cubic feet, designed when the wagon is created. A typical wagon includes a bathhouse, a dining hall, a library, a small auditorium, accommodations for 45 people, workshops for alchemy, artificing, and other crafts, and a number of storerooms. As the wagon is designed for gnomes, the ceilings are only 5 feet high throughout most of the manor, but the typical manor has a larger foyer with two rooms designed with Medium guests in mind. Up to 30 spectral servants appear as required, and these translucent gnomes will follow the instructions of anyone who has received an invitation from the keybearer. The kitchen can produce a sumptuous meal for up to 180 people per day. This can be split into multiple meals, so a wagon with a population of 45 gnomes can eat up to four meals a day before they need to resort to normal supplies.

Destroying the wagon will not destroy the manor, but the portal will become immobile. In the long term, it is possible to build a new wagon around the portal, which takes half as much time, XP, and gold as building an entirely new *manor wagon*. If the key is destroyed, the manor unravels, expelling all creatures and objects inside into the Material Plane.

If another extradimensional space — a *bag of holding* or *portable hole*, for example — is brought into a *manor wagon*, the smaller item is destroyed with no impact on the manor. *Gloves of storing* and *houseropes* are not destroyed, but cannot be used within the wagon. *Rope trick* and *secret chest* cannot be used while inside a *manor wagon*.

Strong conjuration; CL 15th; Craft Wondrous Item, *magnificent mansion*; Price 96,000 gp; Weight 1,000 lbs.

### New Magical Ring: Ring of Distant Speech

Swift communication can be a valuable part of business or adventure, but it is an expensive luxury. A *ring of distant speech* allows its wearer to exchange telepathic mes-

sages with a remote individual, just like the spell *sending*. However, the user can only contact an individual who is also wearing a *ring of distant speech*. To activate the ring the wearer must speak two command words: one to activate her own ring, and another that identifies the ring she is targeting with the message. The effect targets a ring and not a person, so if a ring is stolen characters may inadvertently send messages to the thief.

The standard *ring of distant speech* allows unlimited communication at will. Less-expensive models can only be activated once or twice a day, with each use allowing the wearer to send and receive a 25-word message. There are also receiver rings, known as *distant ears*. A *distant ear* cannot be used to initiate a conversation, but it allows the wearer to be targeted by a *ring of distant speech*, and he can send a 25-word reply to each message that he receives.

Moderate evocation; CL 7th; Forge Ring, *sending*; Price 25,700 gp (unlimited use), 10,080 gp (2 uses/day), 5,040 gp (1 use/day), 2,570 gp (*distant ear*).

### New Wondrous Item: Spirit Porter

Gnomes are not known for their physical strength. This item helps to overcome the limitations of size and sinew. The *spirit porter* is a small metal disk engraved with runes of evocation. When it is thrown in the air and a command word is spoken it becomes a *floating disk*, just like the spell of the same name. *Spirit porters* come in a variety of models; this determines the amount of weight that the disk can support and the maximum amount of time that it can be used each day.

|                 | Weight<br>Limit | Max<br>Time | Caster<br>Level | Evoc.<br>Aura | Porter<br>Price |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| <b>Type I</b>   | 100 lbs         | 10 min      | 1st             | Faint         | 360 gp          |
| <b>Type II</b>  | 400 lbs         | 1 hr        | 4th             | Faint         | 1,440 gp        |
| <b>Type III</b> | 800 lbs         | 12 hrs      | 8th             | Moderate      | 2,880 gp        |
| <b>Type IV</b>  | 1,600 lbs       | 1 day       | 16th            | Strong        | 5,760 gp        |

Aura variable evocation; CL varies; Craft Wondrous Item, *floating disk*; Price varies.

### New Wondrous Item: Traveler's Cloak

This useful garment shields the wearer from temperature extremes, duplicating the effect of the spell *endure elements*. The enchantment is usually woven into a tough oilskin cloak, but it can be applied to fancier garments for the courtier who needs to keep cool.

Faint abjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *endure elements*; Price 1,000 gp; Weight 2 lbs.

**New Wondrous Item: Trusted Servant**

This item is a small locket containing a portrait of a cheerful gnome in livery. When the locket is opened and a command word is spoken, an *unseen servant* is summoned, just like the spell of the same name. The servant can wait upon its master for up to one hour before dissipating. Under normal circumstances it can be resummoned immediately, but less-expensive lockets can only be used a limited number of times per day. If the servant is attacked and slain, it cannot be re-summoned until an hour has passed.

Faint conjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *unseen servant*; Price 1,800 gp (unlimited use), 720 gp (2 uses/day), 360 gp (1 use/day).

**New Wondrous Item: Windstone**

A *windstone* is a less efficient but considerably less expensive alternative to the *ring of distant speech*. The user activates this small, polished disk of stone by speaking two command words, followed by a message of up to 25 words in length. The message is then sent in the form of a *whispering wind* to another *windstone* (identified by the second command word). The message travels at a top speed of 1 mile every 10 minutes, and it has a maximum distance of 3 miles; in addition, when it reaches its target it can be heard by everyone in the immediate vicinity. The user does not have to know the location of his target, but he does have to know the command word that identifies the target *windstone*.

Faint transmutation; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *whispering wind*; Price 10,800 gp (unlimited use), 4,320 gp (2 uses/day), 2,160 gp (1 use/day).

Alternately, a group of adventurers may hear of Takalas without ever meeting the gnomes. Rumors of an ancient land filled with magical treasure will bring out the greed in most adventurers, and they may not learn that it's inhabited until they break through the illusory barriers. Of course, once they have found the vale the adventurers pose a threat to the security of the gnome homeland; will they be allowed to leave?

**THE BONES OF WINTER**

Passing through a region of ruins, the party hears tales of the tower of an ancient lich. The lich was slain long ago, but rumors say that its treasure remains. If the heroes follow up on these tales, they are faced with a few traps and guardians — but it is clear that someone else has stripped the tower, and recently. After the expedition they are approached by a young female gnome, who addresses one of the characters by name. This is Jiadran dela Sorrilan, a diviner of the Autumn clan. She has had a dark vision, and believes that the *Ebon Skull of Eiren Dos* has fallen into the hands of a group of Winter gnomes. She does not know what they intend to do with it, but she is certain it must be recovered as quickly as possible — and according to her vision, the adventurers are the only ones who can accomplish this task. The party will have to locate the *manor wagon* of the Winter gnomes, infiltrate the manor, find the skull, and escape before the wagon reaches its destination and delivers the skull to Malleus ken Corriden. Depending on the power level of the party this could be a straightforward slugfest, or it could require extreme stealth. Success will earn the party an ally in the Autumn clan, but the Winter gnomes will certainly seek revenge.

**ADVENTURE SEEDS**

The gnomes of Takalas are spread across the world, and it is possible to use the nomadic communities without ever visiting the nation itself. Adventurers may be caught between feuding families, or hired to procure rare resources a family needs or exotic artifacts they want to present to the Eternal Museum of Takalas. If one of the PCs has a unique artifact, he may be targeted by a Winter family who wants to study the item.

**GHOSTS IN THE MANOR**

As mentioned earlier, each seasonal clan maintains a few teams trained to respond to any disasters that face the clan. For a change of pace, the players could assume the role of a Takalas defense force. The Autumn clan has lost contact with the Merriorn family, who are some of the more prominent arcane researchers of the clan. The Autumn gnomes of the Solstice Council believe that the

**NEW MAJOR ARTIFACT: EBON SKULL OF EIREN DOS**

This human skull appears to have been charred by flames, but despite its fragile appearance it is virtually indestructible. It radiates a strong aura of evil, and its malevolence can be sensed by anyone who touches the skull. The artifact is useless to living beings, but a lich

can wear the skull as a mask (it stretches or contracts to fit the head of any Small or Medium lich). While a lich is wearing the skull it may apply either *Quickened Spell* or *Maximize Spell* to any arcane spell it casts without increasing the slot used by the spell.

## SEVEN CIVILIZATIONS

Merrion clan must have lost control of a mystical experiment. The adventurers are given a *ring of distant speech* (*distant ear*) and sent to find the Merrion's *manor wagon*, breach the portal, find out what has happened to the family, and, at the very least, recover the manor key and return the wagon to Takalas. But why won't the councilors tell the PCs what the Merrions were working on? What horrors are lurking in the depths of the haunted, roving manor?

### LITTLE GIRL EXTREMELY LOST

Gnomes are curious creatures, and curiosity can be dangerous. The Daster family are a group of Spring gnomes. They had traveled to a major metropolis to acquire a

large supply of goldenale and to restock their magical components. But during the stop, 13-year-old Halia sela Daster disappeared into the depths of the city. To make matters worse, she stole the key to the *manor wagon* — and if anyone were to find the key and determine how to use it, they could expel the gnomes from their home. The Dasters don't know the city, and they offer to provide the party with a considerable supply of potions if they can locate the wayward Halia. Can the adventurers find the young gnome before she is snatched by slavers, killed by deadly vermin, or captured by a rival gnome family? And what happens if she has lost the key to the wagon? Should the PCs succeed, conversations with Halia will reveal the existence of the manor inside the wagon. This information and the gratitude of the Dasters will give the party a foothold for further encounters with Takalas.

## CHAPTER THREE

# THE WIND RIDERS

Rivannon sat astride his belorn, drowsing slightly as he watched the herds of belorns and cattle graze in the shallow valley. The kylorn riders circled in the sky above him, watching the plains for any sign of strays, predators, or raiders. It was Rivannon's job, along with the other ground riders, to watch the skies for the same thing, but the sun was warm, his belly was full, and he was having trouble keeping his eyes open.

Something flashed in the sky, drawing a low caw from his belorn, and snapping Rivannon instantly awake. It was just a hunting hawk, too small to threaten the herds or riders, but Rivannon knew that such birds were sometimes used as advance scouts by the wise men and women. He pulled his bone whistle from inside his tunic, and blew the high, shrill string of notes that would alert the kylorn riders to investigate. One of the great birds overhead wagged its wings in acknowledgement, and banked over to pace the hawk.

The hawk, obviously overmatched by the kylorn, flew at speed off to the west, and out of the area. Now that the matter had been dealt with, Rivannon felt himself slipping into a drowse again, and began singing a hunting song softly to himself to help keep him awake. His belorn, recognizing the song, began to chirrup along, stepping its way through the graceful hunting dance with the strange, long-legged delicacy that characterized the bird's movement.

He was still singing and dancing when Jimma came to relieve him, and her belorn fell into step opposite Rivannon's with no encouragement. They circled each other through the complex steps and swoops of the hunting dance, shifting easily and naturally into the war dance, shaking their wind lances at each other, goading their belorns into greater leaps and swipes of fierce hunting claws.

Other ground riders, on their way out to post or back to camp, stopped to watch the two riders pace their way through the stylized combat, making a loose circle about the dancers with their own belorns. The stamping and chirping of the watching birds, and the singing of the riders, drove Rivannon and Jimma to greater exertions, each trying to be the first to touch the other with the wind lance. Even the kylorns above came to circle above the contest.

Suddenly, Jimma's belorn threw itself into a leap at Rivannon, hunting claws slashing through the air, beak snapping fiercely. Rivannon rolled off the side of his bird, swinging under its belly to rise on the far side and strike with his lance, but Jimma wasn't there; the saddle of her

belorn was empty. He had only a split second to realize this before her wind lance prodded him none too gently between the shoulder blades. He turned to her, and placed his lance at her feet, surrendering. The watchers cheered, and began drifting on their way.

"You jumped off before your belorn leapt," he said.

"You should have caught that," she replied, "You taught it to me."

"Well, name your forfeit. You beat me well."

"Not yet," she said, eyes twinkling.

"No?"

"No. I'll claim my forfeit tonight, after dinner. Be ready." And she rode off to her watch post.

Rivannon rode back to camp with a grin on his face, singing a different type of song.

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## OVERVIEW

The Wind Riders are a loose affiliation of nomadic clans that roam the open plains, owing fealty to none, tending their herds of cattle and giant birds. They are proud, individualistic, and quick-tempered, but they are also generous, fun-loving, and honorable. The only real warfare they practice is raiding other clans for livestock to increase their breeding stock, and most of this is non-lethal, though accidents do happen. An elite segment of the warriors of the clans actually ride giant flying birds called kylorns, while the rest ride flightless relatives of these called belorns.

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## PLACEMENT

The Wind Riders need a fair bit of space to inhabit. They roam in wide circles across plains and rolling hills, tending their birds and cattle, following a yearly migration that has persisted for generations. This means you need to place them in an open area with sufficient forage for livestock, lots of game for hunting, plenty of fresh water, and the occasional stand of trees to provide construction materials. The bulk of the area should be plains or grassy hills, with abundant streams and rivers, and little or no civilization.



Because of the individualistic nature of the Wind Riders, they are not very welcome in settled areas. They have almost no concept of borders or owning land, though they do know some people get angry with them if they take game or wood from select areas. This makes it somewhat problematic to place the Wind Riders in a heavily-settled area, or powerful kingdom. Border provinces, wild plains, and rolling steppes are the best places for them.

## HISTORY

History, for the Wind Riders, is what happened last week. They don't much care about tracing the development of their people, or their clan, or even their families. What little history exists is couched in songs that tell of great deeds of past heroes, funny stories, famous vendettas, and other touchstones that do more to instill the cultural mores than record events. Because of this, anything that has been going on for a generation or more is considered to have always been that way, unless the event that caused the situation was interesting enough to make into a song.

This also means there is no really effective way to distinguish between fact and fiction in the songs. As far as the Wind Riders are concerned, everything they sing about, even the impossible things, happened. If challenged on the point, they generally shrug and say, "The world was different then."

As far as dates are concerned, the Wind Riders don't use a calendar, *per se*. They have wise men and women who keep track of the seasons and the stars to determine when it's time to move on from a particular grazing spot, but that's as far as it goes. Sometimes, if a particular song tells of the Wind Riders interacting with a more civilized nation, the date can be established by examining the records of that nation, but that's only effective if the event actually happened and was important enough to the other nation to warrant recording.

## ORIGIN

The traditional origin story of the Wind Riders recounts a young man named Triamin who, while wandering lost and lonely across a plain, found a young belorn with a torn leg. He befriended the bird, brought it grain to eat, and bound up its leg so it could heal. He and the belorn, who told him its name was Kri'ik, traveled far and wide, having many adventures, and becoming friends.

One day, they found a kylorn nest, full of eggs, and a pack of hyenas sneaking up on it. Triamin and Kri'ik fought off the hyenas and guarded the nest for three days against larger and fiercer attacks, until the kylorn returned from the sky and scattered the scavengers. The kylorn, who said its name was Skraaa, pledged eternal friendship to Triamin and Kri'ik.

No mention is made in the song of Triamin finding a wife or having children, or of how the other kylorns and belorns came to ally with the Wind Riders, but all the clans agree this is where the Wind Riders came from.

## DEVELOPMENT

The wise men and women of the Wind Rider clans all agree their songs come from a time long ago, though they don't know exactly when. The order they are presented in is traditional, and may reflect the order the events happened. On the other hand, they may just be an aesthetic arrangement of events to form a larger narrative cycle. Scholars don't know, and the Wind Riders don't care.

### The Song of Leaving

The Wind Riders tell of a terrible monster, part army, part storm, and part fire, that drove them from their traditional plains long ago. The Song of Leaving is their account of that ancient battle and their flight from the lands they knew to the lands where they now dwell. The song goes on at length about how horrible the monster was, how terrible it was to leave their old lands, and the great deeds of the leaders and heroes in their travels to protect the Wind Riders and their herds.

### The Song of Stone Tents

This song is usually considered to be a sub-section, or accompaniment, of the Song of Leaving. It tells of the Wind Riders' journey through a strange land where the people lived in tents of stone they were unable to move. The song tells many tales of the ways these strange people tried to trap the Wind Riders, to stop them from ranging across the world, but the clever nomads outwitted all their plans, finally leaving them behind, because their homes would not move.

### The New Sky Song

This is also called the Song of Arrival, or the Song of the New Homecoming. It tells of the arrival of the Wind Riders to the plains where they now live, and their early exploration of their new home. It is a celebration of the freedom to spread out and explore, to fly free across the sky, and to roam the land at will.

### The Skymap Song

The story behind this song is the construction of the Skymap, telling how it was sung into existence by the collected power of the wise men and women of the Wind Riders, drawn forth from the bedrock of the plains. It repeats the song the wise ones sang, which describes the constellations important to the Wind Riders, and their positions during various seasons.

### The Sundering Song

This song tells the origins of the current structure of Wind Rider clans. As the nomad group grew too large, disputes over grazing territory, camping spots, and other matters occurred more and more frequently. Finally, a Wind Rider named Webon killed another named Halynnon over whose belorn would drink first at a stream.

Faced with a rising tide of strife and anger, the wise ones convened to determine what to do. They decided the Wind Riders must divide in order to survive. The warrior chiefs were told to recruit favorite friends and followers, take their herds, and make their own way in the world. The wise ones divided themselves amongst the clans that formed, and the Wind Riders split into seven clans.

### The Blood Raid Song

Also called the Song of Winter Wind's Fall, this song recounts one of the bloodiest events in the history of the Wind Riders. The Winter Wind clan, one of the original seven clans formed from the Sundering, was attacked by an alliance of the Rainfall, Rippling Grass, and Swooping Hawk clans in order to claim their herds. In an epic pursuit across the plains, the Winter Wind clan was hunted to extinction, and every man, woman, and child was slaughtered.

The other clans were horrified, and sought out the offending clans under the guidance of the wise men and women. They attacked each clan when it was isolated, and captured the sky chief, ground chief, and the wise men and women. These captives were hamstringed and left to wander the plains, outcast from all the clans. The three criminal clans were given the option to change their names, and all three accepted.

### The Song of the Moot

The Moot was a gathering held shortly after the Blood Raid, a meeting of all the clans at the Skymap. Fourteen tribes are mentioned by name in the song, giving the impression that the Blood Raid and the Moot occurred a long time after the Sundering.

The Moot's stated purpose was to prevent more violence of the kind that wiped out the Winter Wind clan, and the chiefs and wise ones talked for long hours in search of an agreeable set of rules. The problem was violence and raiding were such an ingrained part of Wind Rider life that they couldn't be completely eliminated without the leaders losing the support of their people.

After much debate, a compromise was reached: raiding would continue, but killing would be outlawed. A warrior who killed another in battle would have to pay a death price to the clan of the victim. To balance this, if a warrior could defeat a foe without killing her, the defeated would have to pay a forfeit to the victor. There are layers of rules surrounding allowable forfeits, and these are all listed in the song.

### **The Song of Massen and Borena**

Massen and Borena were a man and woman who met during a raid. They fought on opposite sides, but were unable to best each other. They were equals, swept apart by the fighting before a true victor could triumph.

Goaded by what they each saw as a failure, Massen and Borena sought one another out at every opportunity, urging their clans to raid each other whenever the chance presented itself. Always, they struggled through the fighting to face each other. And always, something interfered in the challenge before it could be resolved.

Years passed in this fashion, and the two became more and more obsessed with each other. The songs end with Massen and Borena, each now middle-aged, facing a dragon together to save their clans, and perishing in battle against it. This is the seminal romantic story of the Wind Riders.

## **CURRENT**

As mentioned previously, Wind Riders pay little attention to history unless there is a good story in it. The same can be said of current events. A few important songs have been made in the past few generations, though.

### **The Drinking Pig Song or the Song of the Sleeping Pot**

These two songs, from the previous generation, reflect a major schism in the Wind Riders. The Drinking Pig Song tells of Hamenoth of the Storm Runner clan who, while visiting his prospective wife's people in the Falling Dew clan, became so drunk that he bedded his fiancée's sister, and vomited on the sky chief's tent. He was

stripped naked, shaved bald, had a pig's nose stuck on his face, and then chased for miles across the plains.

The Song of the Sleeping Pot is the Storm Runner version of the event. It tells how the treacherous Falling Dew clan drugged Hamenoth and shamed him while he slept, stripping him, shaving him, and sticking a pig's nose on him before chasing him across the plains.

The two versions of the song have been circulating for some time, and have polarized the Wind Riders. Many clans have chosen sides in the dispute, and numerous raids and vendettas have sprung up based on disagreements as to who is telling the truth. The wise ones fear the schism may spread into other matters and split the Wind Riders as a people.

### **The Stone Road Song**

As Wind Rider territory has expanded, new people have been encountered. Some of these have the same strange ideas about land that the Stone Tent people do, and they have begun making inroads into the grazing lands of the Wind Riders. The first sign of this is the stone road being laid through Wind Rider territory.

The Stone Road Song comically tells of the strange, pointless task of the road builders. The bewildering event is not clearly understood by the Wind Riders, but the wise ones fear the lengthening road and new settlements. They just don't know what to do about it yet.

### **The Song of Watching Gold**

One definite benefit to come out of the encroaching civilized nations is a new job for the Wind Riders. Merchants are willing to pay them to escort their caravans through their territory. In many cases, this escort duty is simple extortion, an easy way for Wind Riders to make some profit without having to actually attack a caravan, and the merchants recognize it as such. Still, the Wind Riders have embraced the new occupation, and this song tells of the strange sights they see while guarding the caravans.

### **The Night Raider Song**

This song is only sung late at night, when the children are asleep, and everyone is ready for a good scary story. It tells of the outcasts of the Blood Raid, and how they have returned, riding skeletal kylorns and belorns, to take their vengeance on the Wind Rider clans. No one is sure when this song was written, but the old men and women of the clans say they've only heard it sung in the past few years. There have been some devastating raids on various clans late at night, but no proof that the Night Raiders have anything to do with the Blood Raid outcasts.

## The Song of the Coming Dawn

This song is unusual for the Wind Riders in that it speaks of the future instead of the past. It prophesizes that a messiah will come to the Wind Riders and free them. It is unclear what this messiah is supposed to free the Wind Riders from, but there are many guesses. Indeed, it seems everyone has their own idea of what they will be freed from, and some heated arguments have sprung from disagreements. Perhaps the cage has yet to be closed, and some darker time looms.

## LOCATIONS

There is only one permanent structure the Wind Riders care about: the Skymap. Other than it, all buildings are hide tents, woven grass lean-tos, and some minor earth fortifications. The vast majority of Wind Rider buildings travel with them.

## THE SKYMAP

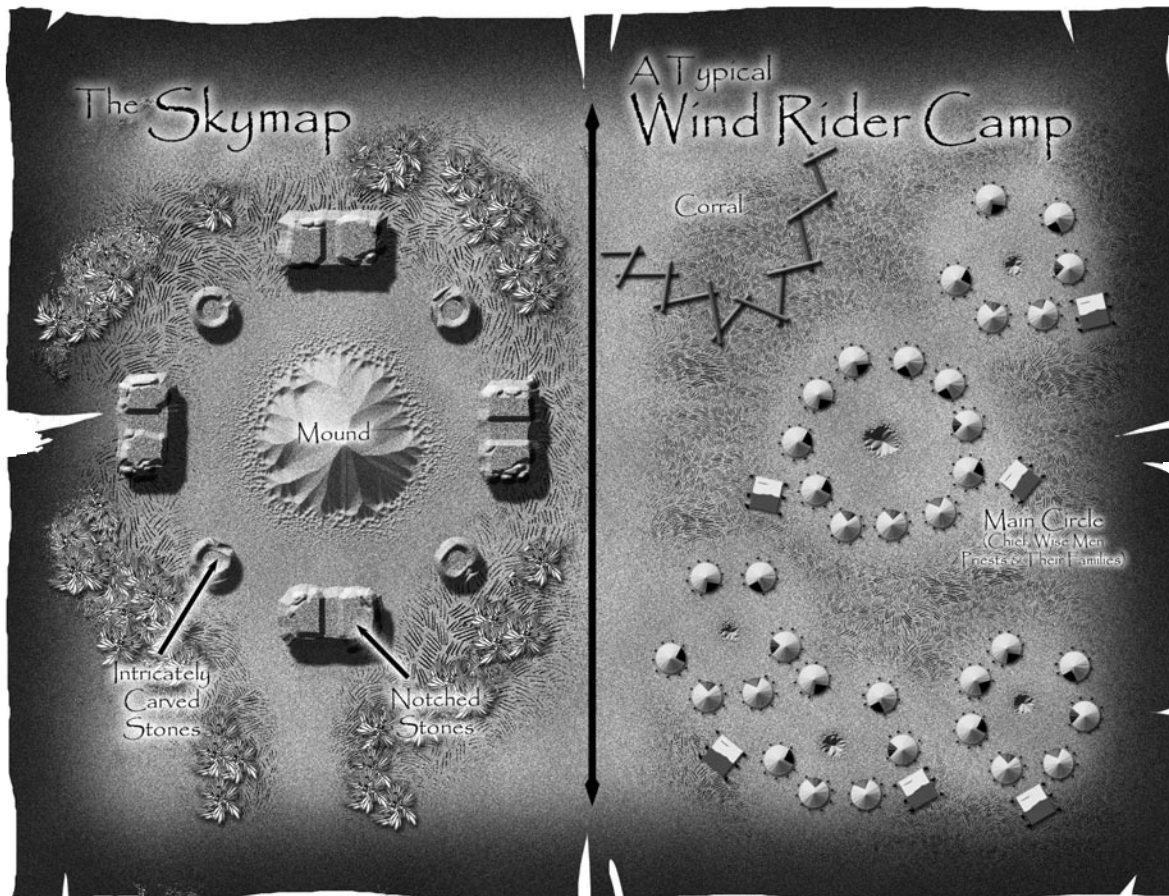
The Skymap is a ring of standing stones on a hilltop near the middle of Wind Rider territory. The ground of the Skymap is earth, grass, and flowers, with a single bare mound rising in the center.

Four of the stones — those at the cardinal compass points — are taller than the rest, and notched at the top. Four more stones — those bisecting the arc between the taller stones — are elaborately carved with various depictions of birds, wind, grasses, and other imagery recognizable by all the clans. A person standing on the mound at night can use the stones to sight and locate various constellations, determining their precise positions.



This allows characters with the Knowledge (Astronomy) skill to determine the date and time with precision (DC 12). If your campaign uses the Astrologer PC class from *Occult Lore*, the Skymap grants a +4 circumstance bonus to Astrology rolls.

The Wind Rider wise ones once used the Skymap to determine the time to change migration patterns, when to settle down for winter, and so on. Because of a steady increase in the number of Wind Riders and clans, and the much greater expanse of their territory, the Skymap is no longer very convenient for most clans to use on a regular basis. It is still the site of gathering for the various clans — a place to meet in peace and trade, arrange marriages, and celebrate. Most clans come to the Skymap every year or two, on one of the solstices or equinoxes.



## A TYPICAL CAMP

The camp of a Wind Rider clan is a collection of hide tents for the nomads to live in and a few woven grass huts and lean-tos to shelter firewood, equipment, and stores. They are laid out in a simple pattern surrounding a central fire pit and meeting circle, and most clans have regular campsites with minor earthwork fortifications.

In the middle of a camp is the main fire pit and meeting circle. Spaced evenly around the edge of the meeting circle are the tents of the wise man or woman of the tribe, the tent of the ground chief, and the tent of the sky chief. Clustered around these three tents are the tents of close family members of the three leaders.

Lesser fire pits and meeting circles dot the camp, each one before the tent of an important clan member, and surrounded by the close family of that person. This makes the Wind Rider camp look something like a collection of bubbles, or linked rings.

The other main section of the camp is the corral. This is usually a simple single-rail fence that surrounds a broad

expanse where the herds can be kept in times of danger. Usually only personal mounts are corralled, with the bulk of the herds left to graze under the watchful eyes of the Wind Riders.

Fortifications for the camps usually consist of simple berms and ditches, with stakes added if the clan feels particularly threatened. Because most combat between clans features the kylorn riders in action, many clans expecting an attack erect tall poles throughout the camp, strung with hooked ropes to entangle the wings of attacking kylorns. Attackers always complain bitterly about this tactic, loudly declaring it to be unfair, but use it themselves when they have warning of an impending raid.

## PERSONALITIES

While the Wind Riders are a diverse people, young Rivannon of the Hunting Eagle Clan is indicative of the Wind Riders adventurers are likely to meet.

### RIVANNON OF THE HUNTING EAGLE CLAN

#### 4th-Level Human Barbarian/4th-Level Ranger

CR 8; Medium humanoid; HD 4d12+4d10+16; hp 78; Init +6; Spd 40 ft.; AC 17 (+2 Dex, +4 chain shirt, +1 *amulet of natural armor*), touch 12, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +8/+3; Grp +11; Atk +12 melee (1d8+3/x3, 2 masterwork wind lances) or +11 ranged (1d6/x3, arrow wand); Full Atk +8/+8/+3 melee (1d8+3/x3, 2 masterwork wind lances) or +11/+6 ranged (1d6/x3, arrow wand); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Combat Style, Favored Enemy (magical beasts), Rage 2/day; SQ Fast Movement, Uncanny Dodge, Wild Empathy; AL CN; SV Fort +10, Ref +4, Will +1; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 12

**Skills:** Balance +6, Climb +10, Handle Animal +8, Jump +10, Listen +6, Perform (sing and dance) +4, Ride +13, Spot +6, Survival +10

**Feats:** Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (arrow wand), Improved Initiative, Mounted Combat, Track

**Languages:** Common

**Animal Companion (Ex):** An eagle named Rising Sun.

**Combat Style (Ex):** As a ranger, Rivannon practices the two-weapon combat style. He is treated as having the Two-Weapon Fighting feat.

**Fast Movement (Ex):** Rivannon's land speed is +10 feet.

**Favored Enemy (Ex):** Against magical beasts, Rivannon receives a +1 bonus to Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks, as well as weapon damage rolls. He must be within 30 feet of the creature to receive the damage bonus on ranged attacks.

**Rage (Ex):** Twice per day, Rivannon can fly into a rage. This gives him +4 Strength, +4 Constitution, and +2 to Will saves. He receives a -2 penalty to AC. The rage can last for up to seven rounds.

**Uncanny Dodge (Ex):** Rivannon retains his Dexterity bonus to AC if caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker.

**Wild Empathy (Ex):** Rivannon can use body language and vocal sounds to alter the attitude of an animal (such as a belorn) as though he was using the Diplomacy skill on a person. To do this, Rivannon makes a ranger level check, adding in his Charisma bonus. He must be within 30 feet of the animal, and they must be able to clearly see each other.

**Equipment:** Masterwork chain shirt, 2 masterwork wind lances, arrow wand, 20 masterwork arrows, 2 *potions of lesser restoration*, 2 *potions of cure serious wounds*, 2 *potions of neutralize poison*, *amulet of natural armor* +1.

## RIVANNON OF THE HUNTING EAGLE CLAN

### Headstrong Raider

"I like your necklace. Fight me for it."

Rivannon is almost the stereotype of a young Wind Rider. He is brash, friendly, arrogant, and fun-loving. His opinion of himself is one of unshakeable optimism and self-confidence: nothing serious can ever go wrong while he's around. Nothing he can't fix, anyway.

His grasp of consequences is somewhat lacking, but he has enough raw talent that, so far, he has been able to come through in the pinch. This, of course, leads him to try more and more outrageous stunts, confident in his ability to wiggle out of any difficulties. So, when he sees something he wants, he challenges for it. When he feels his clan status needs a boost, he puts together a raid.

The elders look at this sort of behavior as self-correcting: either Rivannon will gain wisdom, or he will kill his fool self and save everyone else the trouble. They're hoping he calms down enough to warrant the gift of a kylorn egg. At this point, it may go either way.

## TYPICAL KYLORN RIDER

### Aerial Strike Force

"We are the lightning! From the sky, we strike you down!"

Kylorn riders are the heroes of the clan, and the terror of their enemies. Their ferocious fighting and great mobility makes them effective strike forces and raiders. All Wind Rider clansmen aspire to be kylorn riders, but the low population of kylorns means only the most talented warriors are given a kylorn egg to raise.



## TYPICAL KYLORN RIDER

### 7th-Level Human Barbarian/ 3rd-Level Kylorn Rider

CR 10; Medium humanoid; HD 7d12+3d10+20; hp 82; Init +2; Spd 40 ft.; AC 18 (+2 Dex, +5 +2 *studded leather*, +1 *amulet of natural armor*), touch 12, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +10/+5; Grp +13; Atk +15 melee (1d8+4/x3, +1 *wind lance*) or +13 ranged (1d6/x3, arrow wand); Full Atk +15/+10 melee (1d8+4/x3, +1 *wind lance*) or +13/+8 ranged (1d6/x3, arrow wand); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Leaping Attack, Rage 2/day, Striking Hawk; SQ Fast Movement, Kylorn Bond, Uncanny Dodge; AL CG; SV Fort +10, Ref +7, Will +4; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 8

**Skills:** Balance +8, Handle Animal +10, Jump +15, Listen +6, Perform (song and dance) +3, Ride +15, Spot +6, Survival +8

**Feats:** Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (arrow wand), Mobility, Mounted Combat, Weapon Focus (wind lance)

**Languages:** Common

**Fast Movement (Ex):** Land speed is +10 feet.

**Kylorn Bond (Su):** The kylorn rider knows his or her bird very well, having raised it from the egg. The bird and rider can sense each other up to a distance of one mile away, and can share simple emotions through this bond. In close proximity (within 100 feet), they may communicate more complex ideas, though still at a nonverbal level. These communications are limited to very basic concepts: come, watch, quiet, attack, etc.

**Leaping Attack (Ex):** This daring attack is what makes the kylorn riders so feared on raids. When performing the Leaping Attack, the kylorn swoops in on the target as a charge attack, and the rider leaps off at the last moment to strike the target. With a successful Jump check (DC 15), the rider may make a full attack action on the target. The rider is considered to be charging, but he suffers no falling damage from his attack, provided he succeeded at the previous Jump check.

**Rage (Ex):** Twice per day, this kylorn rider can fly into a rage. This gives him +4 Strength, +4 Constitution, and +2 to Will saves. He receives a -2 penalty to AC. The rage can last for up to seven rounds.

**Striking Hawk (Ex):** Another of the devastating attacks that make the kylorn riders the elite warriors of the Wind Riders is the Striking Hawk. This is a special fly-by attack that allows the rider and the bird to each make a melee attack with a +2 bonus to attack and damage against an enemy target, and continue moving afterwards.

**Uncanny Dodge (Ex):** Barbarians retain their Dexterity bonus to AC if caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker. They may not be flanked.

**Equipment:** +2 *studded leather armor*, +1 *wind lance*, arrow wand, 20 masterwork arrows, 2 *potions of lesser restoration*, 2 *potions of cure serious wounds*, 2 *potions of neutralize poison*, 2 *potions of haste*, *amulet of natural armor* +1



## NEW PRESTIGE CLASS: KYLORN RIDER

Kylorn riders are the most prestigious warriors of the Wind Riders, and the heroes from which the nomads take their name. After proving themselves as warriors on foot and on belorns, a prospective kylorn rider is chosen by the sky chief. When a new kylorn egg is laid, the sky chief delivers it to the candidate to hatch and raise.

The fledgling takes about half a year to mature, and at the end of that time, the kylorn rider begins learning to ride his or her new mount. Mounted aerial combat is the domain of the kylorn riders, and they excel at it. Every breath they take is devoted to mastering fighting from atop their kylorns.

**Hit Die:** d10

### Requirements

To qualify to become a kylorn rider, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

**Base Attack Bonus:** +5

**Balance:** 2 ranks

**Handle Animal:** 3 ranks

**Jump:** 2 ranks

**Ride:** 5 ranks.

**Feats:** Exotic Weapon Proficiency (arrow wand), Mounted Combat, Weapon Focus (wind lance)

**Special:** A prospective kylorn rider must raise and train a kylorn fledgling given to him by the sky chief of the clan.

### Class Skills

The kylorn rider's class skills (and the key ability for each) are Balance (Dex), Handle Animal (Cha), Jump (Str), Listen (Wis), Ride (Dex), Search (Int), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis).

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 4 + Int modifier. At least one skill point at each level must be spent on Ride.

| Class Level | Base Attack | Fort Save | Ref Save | Will Save | Special            |
|-------------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|--------------------|
| 1st         | +1          | +2        | +2       | +0        | Kylorn Bond        |
| 2nd         | +2          | +3        | +3       | +0        | Leaping Attack     |
| 3rd         | +3          | +3        | +3       | +1        | Striking Hawk      |
| 4th         | +4          | +4        | +4       | +1        | Listen to the Wind |
| 5th         | +5          | +4        | +4       | +1        | Kylorn's Call      |

**Kylorn Bond (Su):** The kylorn rider knows his or her bird very well, having raised it from the egg. The bird and rider can sense each other up to a distance of one mile away, and can share simple emotions through this bond. In close proximity (within 100 feet), they may communicate more complex ideas, though still at a nonverbal level. These communications are limited to very basic concepts: come, watch, quiet, attack, etc.

**Leaping Attack (Ex):** This daring attack is what makes the kylorn riders so feared on raids. When performing the Leaping Attack, the kylorn swoops in on the target as a charge attack, and the rider leaps off at the last moment to strike the target. With a successful Jump check (DC 15), the rider may make a full attack action on the target. The rider is considered to be charging, but he suffers no falling damage from his attack, provided he succeeded at the previous Jump check.

**Striking Hawk (Ex):** Another of the devastating attacks that make the kylorn riders the elite warriors of the Wind Riders is the Striking Hawk. This is a special fly-by attack that allows the rider and the bird to each make a melee attack with a +2 bonus to attack and damage against an enemy target, and continue moving afterwards.

**Listen to the Wind (Ex):** After so much time listening to the passage of air on the back of the kylorn, the rider has learned what the sounds of disturbed air mean. By listening to the wind and air, the kylorn rider can target foes by hearing alone. He or she is considered to have the Blindsight ability with a range of 20 feet. This ability is disrupted by sonic attacks and deafness.

**Kylorn's Call (Sp):** The bond between the rider and bird is so strong now that each can call the other to its side instantly. As a full-round action, either partner can send a call to the other. When the call is received, the other has the option to *teleport without error*, once per day, as per the spell cast by a 14th-level sorcerer. If the receiver has already *teleported without error* that day using this ability, she still hears the call and may react accordingly.

## PLAYING A WIND RIDER

The key elements in the personality of a Wind Rider are pride, individualism, and a sense of fun. Wind Riders have a certain assurance of their own superiority, but don't take themselves too seriously. They laugh often, and as often at themselves as at others. Though they can be quick to anger, they are just as likely to casually forget their anger. On the other hand, a Wind Rider can carry a grudge down through generations. Only mortal injuries and the deepest social offenses anger a Wind Rider so badly, however.



As far as alignment is concerned, Wind Riders are more often chaotic than lawful, and more often good than evil, though the normal range of alignments is represented.

With regard to class, barbarians, fighters, and rangers are most common, with bards and rogues coming next. The wise men and women of the tribes are often druids. Some sorcerers reside among the clans, but most clans have no wizards or clerics.

## HERDS

The herds are the wealth of the clans. Wind Riders raise cattle, belorns, and kylorns, and tend all three animals carefully. Cows and belorns provide the bulk of their meat, and belorns and kylorns provide mounts. Cows also produce milk, cheese, and yogurt, and the Wind Riders eat about half the belorn eggs their herds produce. Kylorn eggs are never eaten, and the suggestion of it is appalling to the Wind Riders.

Each Wind Rider owns a share of the herd, and knows which animals belong to him or her. Status in the tribe is tied to how much livestock one owns, so the nomads tend to be far more miserly with their animals than they are with gold or gems. Blood Price is most often paid in cattle or belorns, and in rare and expensive cases, in kylorns. In other transactions, exchange of livestock is usually a last resort, and tradition forbids claiming a part of the herd as a forfeit except in special circumstances, such as oathbreaking or ransoming a valuable clanmember.

## Migration

The grazing and hunting of the herds means the clans have to move periodically. They don't cultivate anything beyond the most fast-growing vegetables, so it's easy to pick up and move when the time comes, leaving an area

where the food is starting to become scarce for one that hasn't been picked clean yet.

Each clan has a fairly set migration route, in an irregular circular course, that they follow every year. This course leads them past four or five earthwork fortifications where they camp for two or three months then move on again. The path always brings them by the Skymap at the time of a solstice or equinox, giving them ample opportunity to trade and socialize with other clans.

The clans are generally sedentary during calving and chicking season, when their herds bear offspring. If they need to move, they use travois for carrying any eggs that have not yet hatched.

Migration routes and campsites are traditional, and anyone intruding on them is in trouble. Nothing angers a clan more than arriving at a favorite campsite to find another clan camped there, or the good pasturage picked clean by someone else's herd. These intrusions are often the cause of fierce raids and vendettas.

## CLANS

There are twenty to thirty clans of Wind Riders these days. No one keeps careful track, generally only knowing the names of clans that they trade with and hear of in songs, and some of the names from songs are fictitious or extinct clans. Still, the wise men and women generally can name off more than a score of clans that they know personally.

Each clan is a loose association of extended families, generally around two or three hundred people, with about six hundred cattle, three hundred belorns, and forty or fifty kylorns. Add to this mix assorted pet birds, dogs, pigs, chickens, hunting cats, and the like, and the clan usually numbers around fifteen hundred living beings. Roughly half the people are adults with some fighting experience, as basic warrior training is important to the Wind Riders. About twenty or so of these adults are kylorn riders, the elite of the Wind Riders.

## Clan Names

Clan names are always drawn from some natural phenomenon, and are usually associated with weather or the sky. Each Wind Rider is taught that the honor of the clan name rests on the individuals in the clan, and that each person has the power and responsibility to uphold and increase the clan honor through his or her own personal achievements.

Some examples of clan names are Blizzard, Bright Star, Clear Sky, Falling Dew, Flood Rain, Hunting Eagle, Storm Runner, Tree Shaker, Warning Cloud, and Zephyr.

## SEVEN CIVILIZATIONS

### Personal Names

Wind Riders are named after a recently-deceased relative, out of honor for that person. The name of a person who died as the result of bad luck or who was cast out of the clan is no longer used by the family. The names of the most recently departed relatives are used to let the child partake of the luck, strength, and wisdom of their ancestor. Male names usually end in consonants, and female names in vowels.

Some examples of male names are Bilog, Derrimil, Halyinnon, Hamenoth, Karisit, Massen, Nuritem, Rivannon, Triamin, Webon.

Some examples of female names are Borena, Delo, Fineri, Jimma, Lossu, Menura, Nalstini, Raviki, Tanholo, Walesa.

When a Wind Rider becomes a wise man or woman, he stops using his names and is instead called by a nickname. This is done to protect the wise one's name, which is considered to have arcane power of its own. Nicknames are not usually permanent, and vary according to circumstance. Nicknames are things like Old Man, First Woman, Wise One, Healer, Skywatcher, or Speaker.

### Leadership

Wind Rider clans have a tripartite leadership. One of the leaders is the ground chief, who is in charge of belorn riders, migration, and concerns of the campsite. Another is the sky chief, who is in charge of kylorn riders, hunting, and matters of war. The third side of the triangle is made up of the wise men and women who advise the two chiefs, act as healers, and see to the more esoteric and spiritual needs of Wind Rider life.

### TRADE

Wind Riders love trade. They love to handle new things, to dicker and bargain, to buy and sell. Many treat it as a kind of combat. They trade almost anything: weapons, tents, jewelry, gold, gems, food, tools, clothing, blankets, and even services. One thing a Wind Rider won't trade is the herd; that is his status and position in the clan, and no Wind Rider would jeopardize his standing for mere goods.

Trading with non-Wind Riders is even more fun for them, because outsiders don't know all the rules of trade in the clans. Wind Riders are comfortable playing on



## SEVEN CIVILIZATIONS

their image as simple and rustic wilders to garner better prices. They play the role of the savage, feign offense and anger, and do whatever they can to intimidate or trick other traders into giving way. If someone sees through this, they laugh and drop the act.

Whenever clans meet, they stop for a day or two to trade. Most trading between clans takes place at the Skymap, but clans or troupes met by chance on the plains are seen as lucky opportunities for trade. Not even vendettas between members stop two clans from trading with each other.

### NEW CREATURE: BELORN

Large Animal

**Hit Dice:** 4d8+8 (30 hp)

**Initiative:** +2

**Speed:** 60 ft.

**AC:** 13 (–1 size, +2 Dex, +2 natural)

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +3/+10

**Attack:** Claw +6 melee (1d6+3) or bite +1 melee (1d8+1)

**Full Attack:** 2 claws +6 melee (1d6+3) and bite +1 melee (1d8+1)

**Space/Reach:** 10 ft./5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Pounce

**Saves:** Fort +7, Ref +6, Will +1

**Abilities:** Str 16, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 2, Wis 10, Cha 10

**Skills:** Jump +7, Listen +4, Spot +4

**Feats:** Alertness, Run

**Climate/Terrain:** Temperate hills and plains

**Organization:** Solitary, pair, or herd (10–200)

**Challenge Rating:** 2

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Neutral

**Advancement Range:** 5–6 HD (Large), 7–8 HD (Huge)

Belorns are large, flightless birds used by the Wind Riders for mounts, meat, and eggs. They look like large, colorful chickens with the heads of raptors and fierce fighting claws on the feet.

**Pounce (Ex):** Belorns may make a charge attack ending in a leap that brings its beak and both of its fighting claws into play, thereby delivering a full attack at the end of its charge.

### NEW CREATURE: KYLORN

Large Animal

**Hit Dice:** 5d8+4 (26 hp)

**Initiative:** +3

**Speed:** 10 ft., fly 80 ft. (average)

**AC:** 15 (–1 size, +3 Dex, +3 natural)

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +3/+11

**Attack:** Claw +7 melee (1d6+4) or bite +2 melee (1d8+2)

**Full Attack:** 2 claws +7 melee (1d6+4) and bite +2 melee (1d8+2)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft./5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Evasion

**Saves:** Fort +5, Ref +7, Will +3

**Abilities:** Str 18, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 4, Wis 14, Cha 10

**Skills:** Jump +8, Listen +6, Spot +14\*

**Feats:** Alertness, Fly-By Attack

**Climate/Terrain:** Temperate hills and plains

**Organization:** Solitary, pair, or flock (3–8)

**Challenge Rating:** 3

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Neutral

**Advancement Range:** 5–8 HD (Huge); 9–12 (Gargantuan)

Kylorns are the flying cousins of the belorns. They look like huge birds of prey with brightly colored feathers.

**Evasion (Ex):** If exposed to an effect that normally allows a Reflex saving throw for half damage, a kylorn takes no damage with a successful saving throw.

**Skills:** A kylorn has a +8 racial bonus on Spot checks. The eyesight of the kylorns is legendary.

## RAIDING

Raiding is the time-honored way of training warriors, expanding herds, and improving the breeding stock. Young warriors eagerly await their first raid, when they start their own herds and garner renown. Older warriors look to raiding as a chance to build their reputation and expand their personal herds and status. The chiefs engage in raiding to increase the status and wealth of the clan, and to appease their warriors.

Raids usually consist of smaller parties of warriors riding out for a few days to another clan's campsite. The party is mainly belorn riders, with one or two kylorn riders as air support. They strike at night, capture part of the herd and count coup on the defending warriors, and then make their way back to their own camp. It's considered bad form to pursue raiders for more than a day after a successful raid.

The main targets for raids are the cattle and belorn of the other clan. In the spring, attempts to capture kylorn eggs or chicks also take place. Sometimes, raids are conducted as part of a vendetta or to capture a bride; these have more chance for injury than simple cattle raids.

### Counting Coup

After the Blood Raid, the Moot met to decide how to prevent a recurrence of the tragedy. The idea of counting coup was their solution to the problem, and has so far been effective.

Instead of seeking the death of an enemy, Wind Riders prefer to disarm them or otherwise vanquish them in a non-lethal manner. The defeated foe is expected to offer a forfeit to the victor, usually performing some service or giving the victor some item. During a raid, herd animals taken become the forfeit to the successful raiders, while the mounts and weapons of the raiding party count as the forfeit to successful defenders.

The idea of counting coup has spread to the rest of Wind Rider life, as well, and has led to an ongoing game of one-upmanship throughout Wind Rider society. A strong tradition of continuing practical jokes, insults, and impromptu challenges has since developed. Mock battles, riddle contests, races, riding contests, wrestling matches, and song and dance contests are all common ways for clan members to count coup against each other today.

## RELIGION

The Wind Riders have a very animistic view of the world, acknowledging many natural spirits of wind, plain, plant, and animal. They know there are powerful spirits in the

world — both good and evil — but Wind Riders have little to do with them, feeling they themselves are beneath the notice of such unearthly gods and demons. Instead, they deal with minor natural spirits as equals, offering trades and bargains in a superstitious manner.

This puts the Wind Riders on good terms with most nature spirits and fey they encounter, but it doesn't give them the ability to compel the service of such creatures. The Wind Riders are fond of leaving out bowls of milk and tiny gifts for the regional spirits, and frequently assign incidents of both good and bad fortune to the willful machinations of spirits.

### The Wise Men and Women

The wise men and women of the clans are the Wind Riders' intermediaries with nature itself. They see to the timing of the migrations, the physical and spiritual health of the herds and the people, and to the well-being of the plains and trees. Each clan has at least one wise man or woman — typically a warrior who chose to study druidism in their later life. The wise folk dwell together in a tent at the center of camp, and tend to their clan from there.



Wise men and women are usually multi-classed druids — accomplished fighters, rangers, or barbarians who were called to spiritual service later in life. A few single-classed druids serve the clans, too; these are usually youngsters with a strong calling early in life, or frail folk who choose the path of service to the clan rather than the warrior's path.

## SONGS AND DANCES

Songs and dances are the cords that bind the clan together. There are story songs, learning songs, funny songs, sad songs, nonsense songs, and all other manner of songs. If something is worth remembering to the Wind Riders, it is made into a song, and most clan members sing almost constantly, whether with others or to themselves.

Many of the songs, especially the story songs and the learning songs, have dances that go with them. These are for both entertainment and training; the dances are always highly energetic and physically demanding. Some, like the hunting song and the war song, actually teach techniques for use in those tasks and have improvisational aspects that lend themselves easily to practical applications in real contests.



Most Wind Riders have a few ranks in the Perform skill, and specialize in singing and dancing.

## WEAPONS AND ARMOR

The technology of the Wind Riders is moderately primitive. They work iron, with great effort, but don't have the resources to make steel. Through trade with other societies, new materials and new products have become available, and the clans are quick to adopt anything new or valuable.

Traditionally, Wind Riders use spears, hide shields, leather or hide armor, and slings, along with two unique weapons: the wind lance and the arrow wand. The wind lance is a special type of spear used by belorn and kylorn riders, with a broad cutting head, while the arrow wand is a flexible stick used to launch arrows.

The Wind Riders have been quick to adapt swords, chain-mail, and other innovations as they become available, but these are exceptional weapons among the clans.

## ADVENTURE SEEDS

Flesh out the following ideas to create adventures for PCs living with the Wind Riders or campaigns centered on them.

### FIRST RAID

Young Wind Riders seeking fortune band together to establish their status in the clan by staging a raid on another clan's camp. The young warriors must plan the raid, pick their target, ready their resources, and sneak off to carry out the attack before more-experienced warriors get wind of the raid and steal the glory.

Complications abound: the journey to the target camp is not safe and their herds are guarded. Do the raiders attack with stealth or rely on their combat prowess? There may even be another group intent on raiding the same herds for very different reasons.

The PCs may be visiting the target encampment, or go along with the raid because they believe the target clan to be a band of evil orcs, but find out when they arrive that they'll be stealing cattle from human families.

### THE PLAINS CROSSING

A merchant caravan stopped for the night in the road-side fort where the PCs are staying hires them to escort the wagons across the Wind Rider plains. Unfortunately, by not hiring the nearby Wind Rider clan, the merchants have infuriated the clan's warriors and the crossing turns into a nightmarish marathon of hit-and-run attacks from raiders on the ground and in the air.

The characters must defend the caravan or may try to work out a settlement with the Wind Riders to allow safe passage. Besting the sky chief or ground chief in a contest allows the party to claim a forfeit of free passage, but that's easier said than done. Will they wrestle? Will they compete with song? What will the PCs forfeit if they lose?

Negotiation might also work, but the only sure way of winning at the bargaining table — paying off the clan chiefs — is one the merchants refuse out of pride.

### SECRET OF THE NIGHT RAIDERS

The Night Raider attacks are coming more and more frequently, and they're not just targeting the clans. Anyone in or around the Wind Rider plains is prey to these mysterious raiders. They must be tracked to their camp and stopped once and for all.

Are they the undead outcasts from the Blood Raid? A clan of criminals and exiles? Elite warriors from an established clan using the legends to mask their actions and make a profit? The only way to find out is to hunt them down.

## NEW WEAPONS

The Wind Riders have two special weapons they use traditionally: the wind lance and the arrow wand.

**Wind Lance:** This is a Medium martial melee weapon. It's a short, springy spear shaft with a broad, leaf-shaped slashing blade mounted on the end. This is the traditional weapon of belorn and kylorn riders, used both for hunting and for battle. When thrown, a wind lance spins in its trajectory like a grinding bit.

**Arrow Wand:** This is a Small exotic ranged weapon. It's a short, flexible stick with a notch on one end that fits behind the head of an arrow. Whipping the wand forward from the shoulder launches the arrow at the target. Without the appropriate exotic weapon proficiency, the attacker can fire only one arrow per round, using both hands. With the feat, an attacker can launch arrows directly from the quiver one-handed and use all his iterative attacks.

| Weapon     | Cost  | Damage | Crit | Range  | Weight | Type     |
|------------|-------|--------|------|--------|--------|----------|
| Wind Lance | 12 gp | 1d8    | x3   | 15 ft. | 5 lb.  | Slashing |
| Arrow Wand | 5 gp  | 1d6    | x3   | 30 ft. | 1 lb.  | Piercing |

# CHAPTER FOUR

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# SILVERGATE

*“You’ll have to leave your sword behind. Silvergate is a peaceful realm, and tools of violence disrupt the energies that make the passage possible.”*

*After all I’d been through, I didn’t like the idea of being unarmed. But if the stories were true, I wouldn’t have to worry about Kelner’s bounty hunters after this. I drew my sword and placed it on the table next to the gold I’d paid for passage.*

*“Let us begin,” the Gatekeeper said. She approached the large steel mirror on the western wall — the one sign of color in the dingy garret. She ran her fingers across the surface of the mirror, whispering a song in a liquid tongue I didn’t recognize. After a moment she struck the center of the mirror with her right palm — but her hand passed through, and the steel rippled like water. She withdrew her right hand and turned to me, keeping her left hand on the edge of the mirror. “Now step through. And good luck to you.”*

*Cautiously, I stepped through the mirror. I expected the sort of disorientation that usually accompanies teleportation, but it was just like stepping through a sheet of cold water. I found myself in a brightly light room decorated with colorful tapestries. Two men and a short, thin woman were facing me, with weapons drawn. I reached for my sword, but my hand found an empty scabbard.*

*The taller of the two men laughed. “Gotcha with the ‘peaceful passage’ tale, eh? We’ll be taking your coin now, and anything else you’ve got in that pack.”*

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## OVERVIEW

Bards tell stories of the prince who walked out of a mirror, and the clever thief who escaped through a looking glass but left his reflection behind. Like many folktales, there is a grain of truth to these stories. The city of Silvergate sits between planes; with a song and a touch of magic, any mirror can serve as a gateway to this hidden nation. Created thousands of years ago as an extraplanar penal colony, Silvergate has become a haven for smugglers, explorers, and fugitives.

The only way to reach Silvergate is through use of a spell known as *mirrorwalk*, a ritual that transforms any mirror into a one-way portal to the hidden city. A guild of bards and sorcerers holds the keys to this kingdom, and anyone can buy passage — if the price is right. Some of

these Gatekeepers remain in constant motion, while others have settled into the shadows of major cities across the world. Are you looking for drugs, poisons, or other goods outlawed in the local land? Need to cross hundreds of miles over the next hour? Or are you just trying to escape the consequences of a caper gone awry? A trip to Silvergate may solve all of your problems; but if you aren’t prepared, the land behind the mirror can be more dangerous than the one you leave behind.

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## PLACEMENT

The nation of Silvergate cannot be found on any map. Silvergate exists beyond and behind the world, and it can be found anywhere there is a Gatekeeper. So where do you find Gatekeepers? Like the members of most guilds, the Gatekeepers are interested in profit. There are two reasons for a Gatekeeper to remain in an area: because she can make gold selling passage to and from Silvergate, or because the community she’s in has something to offer to the hidden community. A Gatekeeper may set up shop in a small mill town because she can get an excellent price on bread, which she transports and sells in Silvergate. The fact that one woman is buying enough bread for a hundred people may be the clue that ultimately leads the party to the other side of the mirror!



One thing that you will need to decide is how hard it is to find a Gatekeeper. The Gatekeepers don’t like to advertise their presence. Unless a Gatekeeper is selling her services, an adventurer might have to use detective work to track her down — look for the woman buying 100 loaves of bread each day. Even when a Gatekeeper is selling passage, she tries to keep a low profile; it takes a successful Knowledge (local) or Gather Information check (DC 20) to track her down.

A final question you will have to answer is how much traffic there is between planes. If you want to have mirrors connecting to other planes, Silvergate can give adventurers a chance to move between dimensions without the use of high-level planar travel spells. It can also be a source of materials or creatures from other planes; adventurers may pay to get out of your world, but weak outsiders may pay to get *into* it, too. Even if you want to limit Silvergate to the material world, it can connect distant lands within your gameworld. Adventurers can take

a shortcut through Silvergate and end up a thousand miles from their starting location. This network of back-doors can also be used by foreign spies or assassins, and it can be used to smuggle outlawed substances or goods into the heart of the party's homeland.

## HISTORY

No one knows the true history of Silvergate. When did the first people arrive in the mirror realm? Is it a natural phenomenon, or was it forged through powerful magic? The predominant theory is that an ancient civilization created Silvergate to serve as an inescapable prison colony — an extradimensional dumping ground for undesirables. This explains the presence of the *cornucopia wells*, which provide an inexhaustible supply of gruel and water to a nation where no crops will grow.

## ORIGIN

The sages believe *mirrorwalk* magic was used to condemn a group of prisoners to a life sentence beyond the planes, but *mirrorwalk* was not unique to the forgotten civilization that founded Silvergate. Over the course of a thousand years, sorcerers and bards from dozens of cultures were trapped in Silvergate. Gatian civilization emerged from this blend of races and traditions, weaving the threads of many nations into a bizarre and colorful tapestry. This process was bloody and violent, filled with mystic battles and deadly feuds. The strong oppressed the weak, who in turn used treachery and magic to overthrow the tyrants. This may have lasted for 300 years or 3,000 years. Silvergate had no paper or soft materials of any sort, so no physical records were kept, and oral history was lost in the constant violence.

## DEVELOPMENT

The *cornucopia wells* are a critical part of survival in Silvergate, and in the past despotic baronies held power by maintaining control these food sources. Any newcomer unfortunate enough to fall into the realm would be stripped of all belongings and enslaved by one of the baronies, unless his magic was strong enough to allow him to seize his own position of power. Occasionally the gruel slaves would find a way to overthrow one of the barons, but this usually resulted in a change of names as opposed to a more enlightened form of government.

This changed with the arrival of the Lord of Mirrors. Four hundred years ago, this enigmatic figure appeared



through a gate. His features were hidden behind a deep hood and a mirrored mask, and to this day no one has seen his true face. Many were swayed by his compelling promises of a new and stable society. But words were the least of his weapons. His merest gesture would cause brigands to fall dead from terror, or consume flesh and bone with mystical flames. Within days the old order was destroyed. The Lord of Mirrors established the current system of city wards and placed each ward under the rule of a family that had embraced his cause. Having established order, the Lord of Mirrors disappeared into the deep pit at the center of the Tarn ward. To this day he has emerged only in times of great strife, leaving the daily enforcement of order to his Mirror Guard.

With survival no longer a constant concern, culture flourished in the mirror realm. Sorcerers and bards honed their natural abilities and strove to improve their understanding of magic, albeit largely to strengthen the position of their families or factions. The height of this mystical renaissance came 267 years ago, when the magi of the Mirror Guard revealed the first *linked mirror* — finally giving the people of Silvergate a passage into the outer worlds. The Lord of Mirrors emerged from his pit to establish the Guild of Gatekeepers, and over the next century the nation became a center for interplanar trade. The population swelled as the renegades, rogues, and merchants of a dozen worlds joined the community. Some of these new citizens settled of their own free will, while others were tricked; conned out of their wealth or robbed at sword-point, these unfortunates were forced to live as beggars or take up lives of indentured servitude in the futile hope of earning enough to buy passage back to the outer worlds. One of the more dramatic events was the Kentar Rebellion, which occurred 167 years ago. Believing that the Lord of Mirrors was dead, Maza Kentar — then doyen of Bloodstone ward — brought in an army of mercenary warriors from the outer worlds. It was the bloodiest battle the land had ever seen, and by the time the Lord of Mirrors emerged from his pit, Kentar had seized control of half of the realm. But none could stand against the raw power of the Lord of Mirrors. The invading army was shattered, and the stories say that Maza and his bodyguards were killed by their own reflections. The Lord of Mirrors would not allow any of the remaining mercenaries to return to the outer world, and he forced the survivors to settle in Bloodstone. The northern wards have never fully recovered from the war, and to this day Bloodstone and the Burn wards are home to the refuse of the outer worlds.

## CURRENT

Today, approximately one-third of the inhabitants of Silvergate are transplants from the outer worlds, who either bought their own passage to Silvergate or whose ancestors arrived within the last two centuries. While the doyens and their ministers are the nominal leaders of the realm, contact with the outer worlds has brought in a host of new ideas and given birth to a number of cabals and factions. The wizards and rogues of the Empty Circle gather spells and magic items from a hundred civilizations. The Glass Jackals prey on unwary travelers.

The most dramatic change in recent history has been the power struggle in Stormhaven ward that occurred six months ago, when the priestess Hyra Kethros claimed the position of doyen in a bloody coup. Many expected the Lord of Mirrors to appear to put a stop to the violence, and there is considerable debate as to whether his absence is a sign that he has finally passed away, or whether it indicates support for Kethros' actions. Can Kethros hold onto the territory she has claimed, or will the supporters of the last doyen depose the cunning priest? Is this just the first step in a campaign against the Lord of Mirrors, or is Kethros an unwitting pawn in the greater plans of the enigmatic ruler?

## LOCATIONS

The only location beyond the mirror is the city-state of Silvergate.



### SILVERGATE

#### Large City, special

Conventional (Council of Doyens); AL N; Population 13,000 adults; 100,000 gp limit; Assets 52,000,000 gp; Mixed — 56% Gatian, 20% human, 6% halfling, 3% gnome, 3% dwarf, 2% elf, 4% mixed orcs, half-orcs, and goblinoids, 6% mixed other races (aasimars, derro, drow, doppelgangers, githzerai, half-dragons, half-elves, half-fiends, svirfneblin, tieflings, and others).

Silvergate is an unusual city, as it is a crossroads between cultures and planes and a center for a wide variety of trade. As a result, treat Silvergate as a metropolis for all demographic purposes. Because of the unusual competence of its citizens and the lack of wilderness in the area, Silvergate has very few commoners, druids, or rangers;

## SEVEN CIVILIZATIONS

these characters are generally only found as travelers moving between realms.

Silvergate itself is a massive, enclosed cavern ten miles long, four miles wide, with a ceiling that rises 500 feet over the city. The walls of the cave are formed from smooth crystal, but instead of reflecting the surroundings, each facet is a window onto a different world.

Different sections of wall and floor seem to be formed from stone, sand, ice, or even fire. The roof of the cavern is split into a dozen different skies: some blue, some red, some filled with eternal stormclouds or never-ending blizzards. Each facet goes through different cycles of night and day, and there is always sun over one of the wards of Silvergate. Despite the storms that can be seen through the glass, Silvergate itself has no wind or weather. The temperature remains a steady 70 degrees.

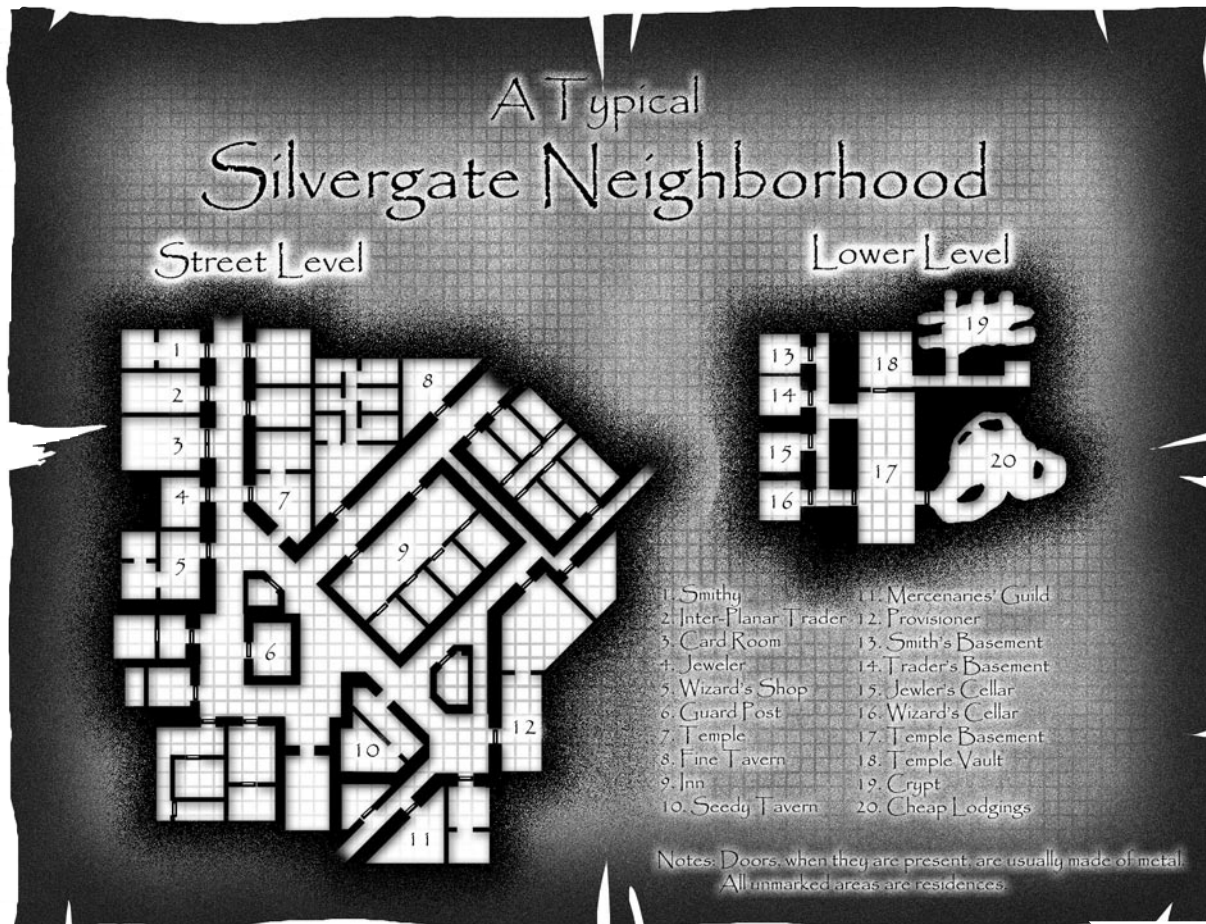


A number of spells have no effect when cast in Silvergate. *Control weather* and *control wind* cannot affect the unnatural environment, and the glass walls and floor of the cavern are immune to *move earth* or *stone to mud*. In addition, the only way to leave Silvergate is through use of a *linked mirror* or *silver gateway*. Any spell that involves an extraplanar connection — including *astral projection*, *ethereal jaunt*, *etherealness*, *plane*

*shift*, and any calling or summoning spell — fails. Spells that merely contact other planes — like *commune* — can be used normally.

Since the region lacks wood or stone, buildings and streets are carved directly into the glass, creating a vast labyrinth of connecting streets. When more space is required, people tunnel down beneath the existing buildings, and over the course of centuries this has created a network of basements and catacombs.

Due to the absence of weather and soil, Silvergate cannot support any sort of agriculture. Instead, food and water are provided by the *cornucopia wells*. Each ward has two sets of three wells: a well filled with fire, a well filled with water, and a well filled with tasteless, runny gruel. The flames never falter and the water and gruel never run out. Flame wells are used for cremations and to dispose of waste, and latrines spread throughout the ward channel sewage into them. There are a number of public baths, and water and gruel channels flow into a number of mess halls and taverns. The gruel is capable of sustaining almost any organic life-form, but it is exceedingly bland. Before the *linked mirrors* were developed, sorcerer-innkeepers would use cantrips to add flavor to pots of gruel. Today, the poor can pay a pittance to get a bowl of gruel with salt or simple spices. The



## SEVEN CIVILIZATIONS

upper classes dine on gruel flavored with more exotic substances, or on foodstuffs imported by the Gatekeepers or the League of the Golden Hand, a coalition of wealthy Frosthold ward families. The poorest of the poor simply take their gruel and water directly from one of the wells.

Silvergate is divided into five wards, each of which contains two sets of *cornucopia wells* and has a notable difference in culture and population. Physically, the wards are easily recognized by the appearance of the ground and walls. These wards are described below.

### Stormhaven

Stormhaven is the heart of the realm and the center for trade with the outer worlds. The smugglers, merchants, and rogues who come to Silvergate from the outer worlds congregate in the Shadow Market at the heart of the ward, and it's said that anything can be found here if you search long enough. While many of the fugitives from the outside worlds end up in Bloodstone or the Burn, Stormhaven is where you'll find any immigrant with enough gold or skills to make an honest living. Stormhaven includes many businesses catering to outlanders — restaurants serving the cuisine of the outer worlds and a host of inns and shops in addition to the vast Shadow Market. A number of trading companies from the outside worlds maintain permanent warehouses in Stormhaven, although all travel between worlds has to go through the Guild of Gatekeepers. As the commerce of Stormhaven is important to the region as a whole, the Mirror Guard maintains a strong presence in the ward and will act to prevent violence on the streets. This stability was shattered during Hyra Kethros' recent coup, and many believe she must have bribed or otherwise gained the support of the Guard. But since the new doyenne has settled into her position, order has been restored to the area.



In addition to commerce, Stormhaven plays another key role in Silvergate. When anyone uses *mirrorwalk* to pass through an unlinked mirror, they arrive in the Blackweir, a large domed chamber that lies directly beneath the Shadow Market. Since the Kentar Rebellion, the Mirror

Guard has become far more cautious about the possibility of outside invasion. The Blackweir is always guarded by a troop of Mirror Guard warriors, and the four passages to the surface are sealed with heavy portcullises.

The surface of Stormhaven has the appearance of rich black soil mixed with veins of pure silver. The ward takes its name from the sky, which is a window onto a never-ending thunderstorm. But the storm is only an image in the glass: the rain never reaches the ground, and no thunder follows the flashes of lightning.

### Bloodstone

Bloodstone lies to the north of Stormhaven and is named for the deep crimson stone reflected in the ground. The northern wards suffered tremendous losses during the Kentar Rebellion, and much of the surviving Gatian population relocated to the southern wards after Kentar's outlander mercenaries were ordered to settle in these areas. While it is safer than the Burn, Bloodstone is still a lawless area shunned by the Mirror Guard; those who can afford to will usually move to Stormhaven or the Tarn. Due to the history of the ward there are a number of ethnically segregated neighborhoods — descendants of Kentar's army and other outlanders who prefer to live with their own kind — and this is a place to add flavor from the existing nations of your world. As the resident Gatians are very ambivalent about religion, Bloodstone also contains most of the shrines and churches of Silvergate.

### The Burn

Bloodstone has close ties to the Burn, the desolate ward in the northernmost end of Silvergate. The glass surface of the Burn has the appearance of molten lava, and many believe that it is a window into the Elemental Plane of Fire. Many people find the burning walls to be disturbing, and it can be difficult to sleep in a room that appears to be on fire. Most of the inhabitants of the Burn have lost all their gold due to treachery or crime and now have nowhere else to go. But there are people who choose to make their homes in this dangerous area. The absence of



### NEW WONDROUS ITEM: CORNUCOPIA WELL

A *cornucopia well* is a large stone bowl-shaped magic item, at least two feet in diameter and one foot in height. Wells are filled with either fire, water, or a tasteless, runny gruel; the flames never falter and the water and gruel never run out.

*Cornucopia wells* are also enchanted with powerful magic that prevents anyone from contaminating or poisoning these reservoirs. The wells are protected as by continuous *purify food and drink* spells. If *detect*

*magic* is used, the wells radiate a strong conjuration and transmutation aura. The ancient magic of the wells cannot be dispelled, and will even resist the effects of an *antimagic field*.

Strong transmutation and evocation or conjuration; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous Item, *purify food and water*, *continual flame* or *create food and drink*; Price 30,000 gp; Weight immobile

the Mirror Guard gives people the freedom to do whatever they want, even if that's killing one another on the streets. Both of the northern wards are home to violent gangs, and other groups come into these wards to settle feuds that would be brought to a halt in Stormhaven.

Player characters would be wise to avoid this region, but it's possible the party will need to find a renegade hiding out in the Burn or recover a relic the gangs took from a traveler. If the PCs fall victim to the schemes of the more-clever gangs, or otherwise run out of money, the Burn is the only place where lodging can be found without coin.

### The Tarn

The Tarn is located to the south of Stormhaven. The glass walls and floors of the Tarn seem to be sculpted out of dark water. The sages of Silvergate believe that this may be a vision of the Elemental Plane of Water, just as the Burn is a window onto the Elemental Plane of Fire. Even though the water appears to be translucent, two people standing on opposite sides of a wall will not see one another; the water appears to extend out to an infinite depth.

The Tarn is the stronghold of the Mirror Guard, and it is the safest ward in Silvergate. The inhabitants are primarily craftsmen, scholars, and students of sorcery and the bardic arts. Most of the *linked mirrors* and *silver gateways* found throughout the realm are crafted in the glassworks of the Tarn. But the people of the Tarn prefer to live a quiet life and to do business in Stormhaven, keeping the outlanders and the chaos that attends them in the northern wards. Strangers will be challenged regularly by the Mirror Guard, and unless they have valid business in the ward they will be directed back to Stormhaven.

One of the major landmarks of the Tarn is the great pit that contains the citadel of the Lord of Mirrors. The captains of the Mirror Guard are the only people who have ever ventured into the pit and returned, and even they rarely enter the yawning gap. There are many who believe that the Lord of Mirrors is long dead, or that he has always been some sort of hoax. But none of these naysayers are willing to venture down the steps of the great pit to prove their theories.

### Frosthold

Frosthold is the final ward, lying to the far south of Silvergate. It appears to have been carved out of solid ice, and outlanders will receive an especially chilly reception from the inhabitants. The people of Frosthold live in considerable luxury, but there are few businesses; the wealth of the ward comes from the efforts of the League of the Golden Hand, an alliance of shrewd traders from several wealthy families. The Golden Hand performs prospecting operations in the outer worlds, using *silver*

*gateways* to bring in luxuries and valuable resources from other realms. The Gatekeepers of the Golden Hand have mirrors linking directly to the depths of rich mines, allowing their workers to harvest ore or gems without having to deal with the people of other worlds. What cannot be used in Frosthold is funneled to businesses in Stormhaven, which are maintained by the younger and less-influential members of the great families.

## PERSONALITIES

Silvergate is filled with colorful personalities. In addition to the Gatians, the mirror realm is home to rogues and scoundrels from dozens of worlds and planes. You may want to choose some of your existing NPCs to reveal a previously unknown tie to Silvergate. The villain who always returns from certain death to strike again may be resting in Stormhaven between schemes; on the party's first trip to Silvergate they may be surprised to see any number of familiar (and not necessarily friendly) faces. Here are a few of the forces lurking in this realm.

### THE LORD OF MIRRORS

LN Male Silver Great Wyrn, HD 40

"The proper time for my return has not arrived ... yet."

The Lord of Mirrors is the founder of modern Silvergate. He single-handedly brought an end to the chaotic rule of the cruel barons and established the system of wards that continues to this day. What few realize is that he created the first *linked mirror* centuries before he released them to the public, and that it was this discovery that gave him the energy and motivation to enforce order upon the mirror realm. Behind his Gatian façade the Lord of Mirrors is a silver dragon, and he has been in Silvergate for over a thousand years. Sorcerous powers flow through the blood of dragonkind, and as a juvenile the Lord of Mirrors developed the ability to *mirrorwalk*. Drawn by curiosity, he passed through a mirror only to be trapped in the extraplanar prison. He made a few initial attempts to bring out the best in people and to form a society based on the principles of good, but these failed miserably and have been long forgotten.

For centuries he hid in the shadows of the realm, watching people kill for gruel. Despair and depression caused him to lose his faith in the ultimate power of good, and his worldview slowly shifted to a darker perspective. Then he devised the principles behind the *linked mirror*. There was only one problem: he needed a stable environment and resources to pursue this work. His dragon powers had grown considerably since his arrival, and his



ability to conquer the realm was never in doubt. But with the changes in his character, he was no longer interested in creating an ideal society; his only concern was stability.

Over the last few centuries, he has intervened only when the fundamental stability of the realm has been placed in jeopardy. He no longer has any real interest in human activities, and spends his days in the depths of his great pit, sleeping or engaging in arcane research. Originally, he thought of leaving Silvergate forever, and he has spent a considerable amount of time exploring other planes. But he now finds other worlds to be overwhelmingly busy and chaotic; he enjoys the peaceful depths of his pit, and while he still ventures forth on extraplanar expeditions, he spends more and more time sleeping in the shadows of the Tarn.

The Lord of Mirrors prefers to remain in Gatian form. He is an immensely powerful being, possessing sorcerous abilities, magic items collected from across the planes, and the knowledge and skill gathered over a 1,400-year lifespan. He is a force to match a minor deity; aside from his physical and supernatural powers, his astonishing charisma allows him to twist beliefs and to turn enemies into devoted allies. But he prefers to leave the safety of the realm in the hands of his half-dragon offspring. In recent history he has acted only a handful of times. The Kentar Rebellion was one of his most public displays of force, but he has performed other secret missions, such as eliminating fiends and dragons that found their way into the hidden realm. Many wonder why he did not stop Hyra Kethros from killing and replacing the doyen of Stormhaven. It may be that he didn't consider it to be a significant concern. It's possible that he has been slumbering for the last few years, or that he is off on an extraplanar jaunt. Or it may be that he approves of Hyra's actions.

The Lord of Mirrors generally appears as a tall, thin humanoid figure wearing a blue-gray robe and a ragged gray cloak with a deep hood. His face is hidden behind his mirrored mask, which completely hides his features and leaves him as impassive as a statue. He is surrounded by an aura of tremendous authority and power; his merest word carries immense emotional force.

## THE GUILD OF GATEKEEPERS

When the *linked mirrors* were first discovered, many mirrorwalkers used their powers to raid other worlds. Concerned about exposure and extraplanar hostility, the Lord of Mirrors established the Guild of Gatekeepers to regulate all contact between Silvergate and the outer worlds. Today there are two levels of guild membership. Official guild Gatekeepers are part of a structured chain

of command and have access to the guild's considerable network of *linked mirrors* and *silver gateways*. All profits from their actions go to the guild, which in turn pays each member a salary. In their spare time, Gatekeepers can use the mirror network for their own purposes, traveling between worlds or engaging in personal trades or speculation (although any transportation of living beings must occur under the aegis of the guild). The guild provides safe and reliable transportation to and from Silvergate. If you are dealing with a Gatekeeper acting as a representative of the guild, you don't have to worry about being turned over to the Glass Jackals gang when you arrive. However, guild-sanctioned transport is fairly expensive: 400 gp per person, along with a tax on large quantities of merchandise. Regular customers — merchants who visit on a weekly basis — can negotiate for lower fees.

In addition to providing transport, Gatekeepers also act as spies in the service of Silvergate. A Gatekeeper stationed in one of the outer worlds is expected to monitor local events and to provide this information to the guild. In this way, the guild can identify mercantile opportunities or recognize when to pull its agents out of a region. Information itself can be a valuable commodity, and Gatekeepers may offer to sell the intelligence gathered by their hidden agents.

Beneath the official Gatekeepers are the mirrorwalkers. These are people with the talent to *mirrorwalk* who do not wish to be bound to the guild. They are required to register with the guild, to keep records of all transactions, and to give the guild 30% of all of their mirror-related earnings in exchange for the right to operate independently. They are not allowed to present themselves as full members of the guild, and many people who travel regularly between Silvergate and other worlds will only deal with sanctioned Gatekeepers. Mirrorwalkers can afford to undercut guild prices, but they may work with organizations like the Glass Jackals — an unwary traveler may be sent into a carefully prepared ambush, where he is stripped of his belongings and left in Silvergate without a copper to his name, and with no way to purchase passage back to his home. Mirrorwalkers do not have access to the *linked mirrors* of the guild, and can only gain access to worlds using whatever mirrors they personally possess. Many mirrorwalkers work for other Silvergate organizations — the League of the Golden Hand, the Empty Circle, or private families, for example. Others are independent merchants who acquire goods from other worlds and sell them in Stormhaven. Silvergate still lacks any sort of natural resources, and food, spices, textiles, and similar mundane goods can fetch a considerable profit in the Shadow Market.



The Guild of Gatekeepers is controlled by Dalyn Kantara (N male Gatian Brd13). Kantara is a shrewd bargainer and has a tremendous insight into human (and Gatian) nature. His

diplomatic skills have played a critical role in his ability to manage the mirrorwalkers and to establish trading relationships with the outer worlds.

## THE EMPTY CIRCLE

The Guild of Gatekeepers was founded to put an end to chaotic planar pillaging. But this tradition of thievery did not come to a complete halt. Instead, the thieves became more subtle, working to ensure that their actions could not be traced back to the world between mirrors. Where the Guild of Gatekeepers seeks intelligence, Empty Circle is interested in magic. Its members explore the different worlds touched by the mirrors, seeking spells and magic items to steal and secret in their vault — a heavily warded stronghold hidden in Frosthold. While their treasures are hidden far from the center of Silvergate, the members of the Empty Circle spend most of their time in Stormhaven. The Empty Circle is certainly willing to trade for a desired piece of mystical lore or a rare artifact, but they will rarely pay for anything that they can steal.



Most members of the Circle are rogues or wizards, with a handful of bards and sorcerers. The Jatala family has always been the primary force behind the Empty Circle, and the current leaders of the Circle are both members of this ancient family. Halas Jatala (NE male Gatian Div11) plans the activities of the Circle and analyzes the magic items and spells acquired by its members, while his younger sister Mira (NE female Gatian Rog11, Silverblood feat) is in charge of acquisition and field operations.

The Empty Circle is made up of collectors, and makes little use of the powerful objects that they gather. Its members simply enjoy meeting in their hidden hall in Frosthold and basking in the assembled treasures of a dozen different worlds. These riches range from minor artifacts and powerful magic items to crumbling scrolls and odd spell components — items that are useless to all but the most esoteric rituals.

There are a few ways that the Circle could interact with adventurers. A member of the Circle could employ the party to help her acquire a particular item from their world. Or she could set the party up for a fall in order to steal an artifact in their possession. Alternately, the party may need to obtain a relic, scroll, or spell stolen by the Circle over a century ago. Can the adventurers bargain with the Circle, or will they need to break into the vault and steal the object of their desire? The vault itself is even more dangerous than the leaders of the Circle, as it contains both wards established by generations of wizards and traps created using magic items recovered from across the planes.

## THE GLASS JACKALS

The gangs of Bloodstone and the Burn prey on one another as frequently as on outlanders. The Glass Jackals are a more-subtle group — an alliance of thieves and con artists who derive great pleasure from tormenting outlanders. The Jackals act out of a twisted sense of humor as much as a desire for personal profit. The sociopathic members of the cabal love to watch people who have been stranded in Silvergate without gold: Will they find a way to gain a place in society or to return home, or will they will disappear into the hovels of the Burn, hiding in shadows and living on water and unflavored gruel? Some members of the Jackals prefer more-elaborate jokes; Jackal mirrorwalkers have been known to strand people in unfamiliar worlds or thousands of miles from home.



The Jackals are few in number, but each member is reasonably skilled; the typical Jackal is a 3rd-level rogue, bard, or fighter. The current leader of the Jackals — to the degree that the chaotic band has a leader — is Nilsen (CN male human Rog5/Ftr2/Brd2).

Ten years ago Nilsen was actually a victim of the Glass Jackals. He survived for years in Stormhaven and the Burn, ultimately uncovering the Jackals and seizing a place of power within the gang. Mentally unhinged by his experiences, he now derives pleasure in doing to others what was done to him.

The most common ploy of the Glass Jackals is to work with mirrorwalkers to target outlanders the moment they step foot in Silvergate. But they will also look for opportunities to bring down outlanders who are already in Silvergate. There is no set pattern to their actions, and Jackals may engage in simple mugging, theft, or elaborate con games allowing the victim to bring about his own downfall. In a typical game session, the primary role of the Glass Jackals is to make life difficult for the adventurers. What will the party do if they are stranded in Silvergate without their gold or weapons? However, if the party survives a Jackal scheme, they may earn the respect of the pranksters. In this case, the Jackals could serve as a useful source of local information, or a cheap source of mirrorwalking. But can the PCs ever truly trust these tricksters?

## THE MIRROR GUARD

The Mirror Guard maintains order in Frosthold, the Tarn, and Stormhaven. Each ward has its own division of guardsmen, and some are more dedicated to their task than others. The Mirror Guards of the Tarn are devoted to the law and are virtually incorruptible, while many Stormhaven guardsmen can be convinced to look the

other way for gold or outlander luxuries. The primary purpose of the Guard is to keep the peace. Much of the economy of Silvergate is based on its role as an interplanar black market, and the Guard has no desire to interfere with trade; gambling, prostitution, and the sales of goods that are outlawed in many cultures are all allowed in Stormhaven. But violence is always bad for business, and guard patrols will quickly put a stop to any fighting on the streets. Theft is also forbidden, although the degree to which this edict is enforced is largely based on the status of the victim. Stealing from a respected Gatian or an outlander merchant who brings a great deal of business into Stormhaven is a serious offense. But the mugging of a first-time visitor — a scruffy adventurer who seems unlikely to have much to offer to the economy — will receive minimal attention. A final crime is vagrancy. In the eyes of the guard, if a person can't afford to pay for his lodging he belongs in the Burn, and guardsmen will beat beggars who seek to ply their trade in Stormhaven or the southern wards. The only time the Guard will enter Bloodstone or the Burn is in pursuit of a villain who committed a crime in one of the southern wards; anyone who enters the northern wards does so at his own risk.

The most common punishment for crimes is exile. Someone convicted of a minor offense may be returned to his place of origin, or in the case of a Gatian offender to a reasonably comfortable realm. Serious offenses will cause the victim to be stranded in hostile environments or far from his homeland (or plane). The criminal is usually rendered unconscious for the period of transportation, so he awakes to find himself in unfamiliar surroundings with little idea of how he arrived or where the *silver gateway* might have been. Truly heinous crimes — the murder of prominent citizens or multiple guardsmen — will result in execution.



The Mirror Guard is a small but highly trained force, and most guards are 2nd- or 3rd-level fighters. They wear breastplates and full helmets polished to a mirror finish. The guard also maintains a force of sorcerers to handle magical disturbances. These magi are based in the Tarn, but can be summoned to act in any ward.

While the Mirror Guard respects the power of the doyens, the members of the guard answer only to their commanders, and the commanders answer only to the Lord of Mirrors. The three ward commanders and the commander of the sorcerer squad are all silver half-dragons — children of the Lord of Mirrors — and they are linked to their master through permanent *telepathic bonds*. These four are Dain Tokara (LN male silver half-dragon/Gatian Ftr13/Sor1), the commander of the Tarn; Alin Medar (LN female silver half-dragon/Gatian Ftr8/Brd3), the commander of Frosthold; Dolan Tokara (LN male silver half-dragon/Gatian Ftr8/Brd4), the commander of Stormhaven; and Sasha Madorin (LN female silver half-dragon/Gatian

Sor14), the leader of the Silver Magi sorcerer squad. The half-dragons usually conceal their true nature through magical means, taking Gatian form.

## PLAYING A GATIAN

The dominant racial group in Silvergate is a humanoid species known as “Gatians.” The Gatians are presumably the descendants of the race that created Silvergate to serve as an extraplanar prison. But unknown ages have passed since the prison was created, and in that time members of every major humanoid race have found their way into Silvergate. Gatians are a curious blend of all of these species.



Gatians have the ability to successfully breed with any Small or Medium humanoid species, and over the centuries have emerged as a strange amalgam of the demihuman races.

## PERSONALITY

Gatians are extremely pragmatic. Gatian culture has its roots in a prison mentality, where life is a constant struggle for survival. While present-day Silvergate is far more civilized, Gatians still tend to place their own interests before anything else. Gatians are constantly dealing with strangers — people not just from different nations, but from different worlds or different planes — and as a result they have learned both to conceal their own feelings and to read the emotions of others, searching for any hint of danger. Coming from a tiny, isolated nation, Gatians have a thirst for new experiences and activities. They are packrats who love to collect souvenirs: songs, stories, spells, or physical trinkets. But at the same time, they suffer from a sort of cultural agoraphobia. Having grown up in a nation that’s only ten miles long and four miles wide, Gatians are often overwhelmed by the sheer size of the outer worlds. They find wilderness areas to be especially disturbing, as there is no natural vegetation in Silvergate. Gatians like crowds and they like dealing with people, who they can read and understand. Wild animals and the untamed regions they inhabit are frightening and disturbing, as they don’t know how to relate to these things.

## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

From a distance, Gatians resemble humans. But viewed up close, they have a strange blend of humanoid features. A Gatian may have the large green eyes of an elf combined with the stocky build and beard of a dwarf,

stretched over a human frame. Skin tone, hair color, and build all vary dramatically from family to family. While there is no single trait that can be used to identify a Gatian, this blended appearance is quite distinctive and after a few encounters Gatians are fairly easy to identify.



A Gatian’s ability scores are often a good guide to his physical appearance. A Gatian with high Strength or Constitution scores may have strong signs of orcish or dwarven blood, while a Gatian with a lower Strength but high Dexterity could have elven or halfling features. All Gatians are Medium creatures, but they vary tremendously within that range based on their resemblance to other demihuman species. A Gatian with halfling and gnome blood will not be as short as these creatures, but will be far shorter than the Gatian who seems to have a touch of orc in her genes.

Given the mix of blood that runs through the veins of a Gatian, it is very hard to predict Gatian lifespan. A Gatian is considered to be an adult at age twenty. Each additional age category is determined by adding 25+1d20 years, with a bonus of 10 years before reaching middle age and a maximum age variation of +5d20. Age categories should be determined when the character is first created.

*Example:* Jaelisa is a Gatian bard. She is an adult at age 20. To determine her age levels, she rolls 1d20 and adds it to the base of 25, getting a result of 36. She will reach middle age at 66 (taking into account the 10-year bonus), old age at 102, and venerable age at 138. She rolls 5d20 to determine her maximum age, ending up with 66. Adding this to her venerable age, she sees that 204 years is as long as she will be able to live.

## RELATIONS

Gatians get along well with members of every humanoid species. Living in Silvergate, they’ve dealt with almost everything, from humans to half-dragons to fiends. However, the easy charm and social grace of a Gatian is typically a cover for pragmatism and self-interest. Gatians are always looking for ways to gain an advantage or an edge in life, and they prefer verbal manipulation to physical conflict.



## ALIGNMENT

Gatians are generally neutral, taking all things in moderation. They usually put their own interests ahead of concepts like law or good, but not to the extent of being wildly chaotic or truly evil.



## GATIAN RACIAL TRAITS

- +2 Cha, –2 Con. Gatians have a natural charm and an innate talent for manipulating others, but their mixed blood often results in fragile health.
- +2 racial bonus to Bluff, Gather Information, and Sense Motive. The people of Silvergate deal with strangers on a constant basis, and Gatians are taught from an early age to conceal their true emotions while reading the thoughts and feelings of others.
- Speak Language is always considered to be a class skill for Gatians.
- –2 racial penalty to Handle Animal, Survival, and Wild Empathy. Gatians have no experience with the natural world and are extremely uncomfortable when dealing with non-humanoid creatures.
- Mixed Blood: For all effects related to race, a Gatian is considered to be a human, elf, gnome, halfling, dwarf, and orc. A Gatian is vulnerable to curses that only affect elves, and can use magic items that can only be used by orcs, for example.
- Low-Light Vision. A Gatian can see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, torchlight, and similar conditions of poor illumination. She retains the ability to distinguish color and detail under these circumstances.
- Languages: Common, Gatian. Bonus Languages: Any (except secret languages, such as Druidic).
- Favored Class: Bard. A multiclass Gatian's bard class does not count when determining whether he takes an experience point penalty. Gatians are adept at social interaction, and have access to the songs and stories of a hundred nations. In addition, Silvergate is a mystical realm, and this power flows through the blood of its children. Sorcerers are also common in Silvergate, though they are not as prevalent as bards.



## NEW FEAT: SILVERBLOOD (GENERAL)

The power to move through mirrors is an ability that any sorcerer or bard can develop. Of course, anyone who uses this power ends up in Silvergate. Over the centuries, the blood of sorcerers has mixed through the population of Silvergate, and a number of Gatian families have developed the innate power to activate the magic of mirrors without the need for sorcerous ability or bardic knowledge.

**Prerequisites:** Gatian, must be selected at 1st level.

**Benefit:** You have the ability to activate and use silver gateways and mirror vaults just as if you could cast the *mirrorwalk* spell. Once you reach 8th level, you may cast the *mirrorwalk* spell once per day, as if you were a sorcerer of your character level.



## NEW SPELL: MIRRORWALK

Conjuration (Teleportation)

**Level:** Brd 3, Sor 4

**Casting Time:** 1 round

**Components:** V, S

**Range:** Touch

**Target:** One mirror

**Duration:** Concentration, up to 1 round/level

**Saving Throw:** None

**Spell Resistance:** No

This spell is the key to Silvergate. It is a form of blood magic that cannot be taught or trapped in the pages of a book; either the power lies within you, or it does not. To perform this ritual, you must have access to a mirror with a surface area of at least 2 feet by 2 feet, and a maximum surface area of 8 feet by 8 feet. When you

complete the spell, the mirror becomes a temporary gateway to the Blackweir in Silvergate. Anything that can fit through the opening can travel into Silvergate. This gate is one-way; people in the Blackweir can see the opening, but cannot pass through it. The gate remains open as long as you continue to remain in contact with the mirror, up to a maximum of 1 round/level. If you pass through the gate or remove your hand, it immediately closes and the mirror becomes solid again.

The spell can also be used to activate a *linked mirror* in Silvergate, allowing you to travel from Silvergate to another plane. This is also a one-way connection, and the link remains open for as long as you remain in contact with the mirror.

Incorporeal creatures and vampires cannot pass through *mirrorwalk* gateways.

## RELIGION

Gatians are generally cynical and pragmatic about religion. Most Gatians consider deities to be no different than powerful fiends. They recognize prayer as a path to mystical power, but prefer to learn to manipulate the universe through the study of wizardry or sorcery as opposed to pledging themselves to mysterious beings.

## LANGUAGE

All Gatians speak Common, and they have a natural gift for languages that makes it easy to pick up new tongues. They also speak a language called Gatian. This is a blend of many other languages, from Abyssal to Undercommon. People who don't understand Gatian will find they catch a word here or there that makes sense, but it is such a jumble of syntax and form that it is no easier to translate than any other language.

### Names

There is little logic to Gatian names. Like the Gatians themselves, their names are a blend of all of the cultures and races that have been absorbed into Gatian society. Sometimes this results in a direct mix — a man with an Orcish personal name and a Dwarven clan name — but more often the naming traditions of two races are combined. A Gatian woman might be named Bagaryllis Kentar, combining the Haffling name Amaryllis with the Orcish Baggi.

## ADVENTURERS

Life in Silvergate can be physically and mentally challenging. Outlanders can be unpredictable and violent, and Gatian merchants and families are always playing political and economic games with one another. As a result, Gatians tend to be unusually talented, with most possessing at least one level from a core class. However, most Gatians have a paranoid fear of the outer worlds and prefer to remain in Silvergate. Those who choose to wander the worlds as true adventurers are usually driven by pure curiosity and the desire to see and experience new things, though greed is also a strong part of the Gatian character. Gatian adventurers may have left their society behind, or they may be quietly pursuing the interests of the League of the Golden Hand, the Empty Circle, or their own family.

### Typical Classes

Gatians are distinguished by a strong natural gift for magic and a talent for manipulating people. As a result, bards are extremely common, followed by sorcerers and rogues. Those who do not possess innate magical talents may choose to develop mystical abilities by following the path of the wizard, and the skills of the fighter are always useful. Clerics are uncommon due to Gatian cynicism where religion is concerned; a Gatian cleric is likely to view his “religion” as an exercise similar to wizardry, bartering with a deity for power. Druids, rangers, and paladins are virtually unknown. Gatians lack the faith required of the paladin, and having been born and raised in a ten-mile cavern of glass, they have no bond to the natural world.

## NEW WONDROUS ITEM: LINKED MIRROR

When *mirrorwalk* is used on a mundane mirror, it opens a temporary portal to the Blackweir in Silvergate. Once the spell expires, the gateway vanishes and there is no way for the traveler to return. A *linked mirror* is a mirror that exists on two worlds. The source mirror must be created in Silvergate. At the conclusion of the ritual, it randomly linked to a mirror of similar size in another plane. The creator has no control over the location of the destination mirror. From this point on *mirrorwalk* can be used to move in either direction, traveling from the source mirror to the destination mirror, or vice versa. Either mirror can be moved, so a destination mirror in an odd or useless location can be taken to a more suitable place. However, if either mirror is taken to or from Silvergate

using *mirrorwalk*, the link is destroyed and both mirrors become mundane items.

The destination mirror retains its original appearance, although it acquires a faint conjuration aura. The source mirror serves as a window, showing the scene that is reflected in the destination mirror. Sound does not travel through the mirrors. If either mirror is destroyed, the link is lost.

A *linked mirror* must meet the conditions of *mirrorwalk*, having a minimum surface area of 2 feet by 2 feet and a maximum surface area of 8 feet by 8 feet.

Faint conjuration; CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, *mirrorwalk*, can only be created in Silvergate; Price 2,000 gp; Weight varies based on surface area.

## Typical Skills and Feats

Charisma-based skills are a key element of any Gatian character, along with mercantile skills and a knack for Sense Motive. Common feats include Alertness, Negotiator, Persuasive, and Silverblood. Gatian spellcasters typically specialize in enchantment spells, and may possess Spell Focus or Greater Spell Focus with that school.

## Typical Equipment

Through the Shadow Market, Gatians have access to virtually any equipment imaginable. Unusual alchemical substances, rare poisons, exotic weapons — when you deal with merchants from a dozen worlds, it's all available. What often stands out about Gatian characters is the unusual nature of their equipment. A typical Gatian outfit is a blend of styles from many cultures, with clothing, armor, and weaponry selected from across the planes. A Gatian trying to disguise his background can certainly create a unified wardrobe, but most are more comfortable with an eclectic mix of styles.

## NEW WONDROUS ITEM: MIRROR VAULT

A *mirror vault* is similar to a *bag of holding*, but with a distinctly Gatian twist. The *vault* is a mirror, typically formed from polished steel. Anyone who can cast *mirrorwalk* or who possess the Silverblood feat can reach through the mirror to gain access to the extradimensional space on the other side; this requires one use of the spell. A *mirror vault* can't hold as much material as a *bag of holding*, but the average thief can't pull things out of your mirror. It has the usual limitations of a *bag of holding*: if the mirror is broken the items within it are lost, and if a *bag of holding* or *portable hole* is placed within the mirror (or vice versa) the *vault* is destroyed and any creatures within 10 feet are drawn into the Astral Plane. Placing an object in a *mirror vault* is a move action, but retrieving a specific object from the *vault* is a full-round action.

There are four variations of the *mirror vault*, ranging from a hand mirror to a large wall mirror. You can't place an object in the *vault* if it's larger than the mirror.

A *mirror vault* is worthless to anyone who cannot access the space within the mirror; the market price indicates the amount that the object should fetch in Silvergate or from a Gatian buyer. A *mirror vault* cannot be used as a gateway to Silvergate; anyone who uses *mirrorwalk* on the *vault* will end up in the extradimensional space on the other side. While a character must possess mystical powers to reach into the *vault*, anyone can emerge from within the mirror; it cannot be used as an inescapable prison.

Moderate conjuration; CL 9th; Craft Wondrous Item, *mirrorwalk*, *secret chest*; Price (see table); Weight (see table).

|                | Mirror Weight | Mirror Dimensions | Contents Weight Limit | Contents Volume Limit | Price    |                 | Mirror Weight | Mirror Dimensions | Contents Weight Limit | Contents Volume Limit | Price    |
|----------------|---------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------|
| <b>Type I</b>  | 1 lb.         | 5"x7"x1/2"        | 75 lbs                | 5 cu. ft.             | 2,000 gp | <b>Type III</b> | 12 lb.        | 16"x24"x1/2"      | 600 lbs               | 60 cu. ft.            | 6,000 gp |
| <b>Type II</b> | 4 lb.         | 8"x12"x1/2"       | 200 lbs               | 20 cu. ft.            | 4,000 gp | <b>Type IV</b>  | 20 lb.        | 20"x40"x1/2"      | 1,200 lbs             | 180 cu. ft.           | 8,000 gp |

## NEW WONDROUS ITEM: SILVER GATEWAY

A *silver gateway* is similar to a *linked mirror*, allowing transportation between a source mirror in Silvergate and a destination mirror on another plane. There are two critical differences. The first is that the creator must create both mirrors, placing one in the target plane before completing the other. This allows the creator to select the destination of the link — although he has to be able to get to the desired location in order to place the destination mirror in the first place. The second key difference is that people can travel through the *silver gateway* without actually casting *mirrorwalk*. Activating the *gateway* is a spell trigger action; to open the gate, a character must either be able to cast *mirrorwalk* or possess the Silverblood feat, and must expend one use of it.

The gateway remains open as long as the character remains in contact with the mirror.

Like a *linked mirror*, the destination mirror shows a normal reflection, while the source mirror shows the scene reflected by its twin. A *silver gateway* is destroyed if either mirror is transported to or from Silvergate through use of *mirrorwalk*. When activated, the *gateway* has all of the usual properties of the *mirrorwalk* spell, and the *gateway* cannot be used by incorporeal creatures or vampires.

Moderate conjuration; CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, *mirrorwalk*, can only be created in Silvergate; Price 30,000 gp; Weight varies by surface area (see the *Mirror Vault* table for weight and dimensions).

## ADVENTURE SEEDS

Silvergate can serve many roles in a game. In addition to acting as a source of adventure in its own right, it can facilitate other stories. It can provide a quick method of transportation across vast distances or even planes — for the heroes or for their enemies. It can serve as a hide-out for the nefarious villain after he escapes justice at the hands of the PCs — can they track him down? It can provide a vector for unusual creatures to enter your game world. Or it can be a way to add color to otherwise mundane environments: a small village is revealed as a source for deadly poisons and exotic magic items, all of which are being brought in from the Shadow Market. Can the party discover the secret source of this unusual wealth or forbidden goods?

## DUNGEONS AND JACKALS

There are a number of ways for the party to initially learn about the existence of the mirror portals. Perhaps they see an enemy go into a house and never return. They may follow the economic trail, noticing rich goods that come from an unusual source or an individual purchasing ridiculous amounts of food or luxury items that she does not appear to use. Or they may simply hear stories on the grapevine and decide to look into them. A patron of the party may even ask the adventurers to look into the rumors on his behalf. In any case, the adventurers find a Gatekeeper who offers to send them to Silvergate for a reasonable sum, but who won't transport anyone who is heavily armed. Due to her natural and magical skills at deception, the Gatekeeper seems to be entirely sincere when she claims that tools of violence disrupt the peaceful magic. But the truth is that she is an

advance agent for the Glass Jackals, and as they step through the mirror the adventurers are ambushed and subdued. Abandoned in the Burn with no weapons and no gold, the party must find allies in the pocket universe and discover a way to get back home. Meanwhile, they must deal with the threats posed by petty gangs like the Dark Reflections, the Wyrmbloods, and the Children of the Mirror ... not to mention any old enemies who might be lurking in the hidden realm!

## BROKEN DREAMS

The Empty Circle has acquired an unusual artifact: a *dreamtrapper*. When the party is passing through Silvergate, a friendly young man approaches them and does his best to touch each of them.



Anyone he touches must make a Will saving throw (DC 20) or have his dreams captured by the *dreamtrapper*; make these saving throws after the man has left, so it's not clear that anything suspicious is going on at the time.

At night, the victims suffer terrible nightmares, but have a brief vision of the man who stole their dreams. Can they track him down? And if so, can they find a way to recover their dreams from the vaults of the Empty Circle? This adventure works best if the party already knows Silvergate, but it could begin in the outer world; the party will have to track the dream thief to the local Gatekeeper, discovering Silvergate in the process of chasing their dreams.



Because of the inability to get restful sleep, the party will be on a timetable: victims cannot recover arcane spells and will suffer damage every night.

## NEW MINOR ARTIFACT: DREAMTRAPPER

There are two components to this artifact. The first is a black leather gauntlet that will expand or contract to fit the hand of any Small or Medium creature. A mazelike pattern is embroidered around the wrist in silver thread. If the wearer of the gauntlet makes a successful touch attack against another creature, the victim must make a Will saving throw (DC 19 + the wearer's Charisma modifier). If she fails, her dreams are drawn out of her; every time she tries to sleep, she will suffer the effects of the spell *nightmare*. The second component is a black leather belt pouch covered with labyrinthine patterns of silver thread. Whenever a vic-

tim loses her dreams, a 2-inch crystal sphere appears in the pouch. Studying this sphere reveals the dreams that the victim should be having. The power of the gauntlet is a mind-affecting, evil effect.

The simplest way to break the effect of the *dreamtrapper* is to find and crush the sphere containing the trapped dreams. The only other way to help a victim is by using *limited wish*, *miracle*, or *wish*.

Strong illusion and enchantment; CL 19; Weight 1/2 lb. (belt pouch)

# THE WILDLING TRIBES

From the journal of Illevus Sanrit, traveler and explorer:

*Day 17 — The tracks we have been following for the past few days have led us into a narrow redoubt. It's obvious we've been led into a trap. The tracks just stop in the end of the canyon, and the brush piles at the canyon mouth are burning. Marjas has been cursing my curiosity non-stop since the flames went up, and I can't find it in me to blame her.*

*Day 18 — We held off three attacks of wolves in the night, with only minor injuries. There were some bipedal forms hanging back in the shadows, but they didn't come close enough to make out details. Some of the men are worried because there are no wolf corpses on the ground. We've patched our wounds, and wait to see what happens next.*

*Day 18, Sunset — A visitor has come from the surrounding hills. He says his name is Kills Swift of the Wolf Tribe, and he has come to claim the men wounded in last night's attack. He says they've been marked by Wolf, and must now join his tribe. He seemed angry and confused when we refused his request, but left without incident. Marjas says she has a plan to get us out of here after nightfall.*

*Day 19 — Marjas's plan worked perfectly. We beat our way past the wolves using flaming torches and crude spears cut from saplings. She says the key was to work in pairs to keep the wolves from attacking from behind, and she was right. We have marched through the night and late into the day to get us clear of the wolves, but Marjas says we should be safe now.*

*Day 20 — Three of the injured soldiers disappeared last night. None of the sentries saw them go. Marjas is furious, and the other two wounded soldiers are terrified. I pointed out that the missing soldiers took their packs and weapons, suggesting they left of their own accord, and this seems to have mollified the others somewhat.*

*Day 21 — We were approached by another visitor. This one was a large orc who said her name was Sings to Sky of the Bear Tribe. She also told us to surrender the wounded men to the Wolf Tribe, again saying that Wolf had marked them. When we refused, she shook her head sadly and went away. The two wounded men are now almost out of their minds with fear, and Marjas is worried they might do something stupid to escape. It's time to return to the trading fort to rest and resupply.*

*Day 26 — We returned to the trading fort without incident. The guards there tell us the people we met are probably members of one of the Wildling Tribes, barbarians*

*who have domesticated many wild animals to hunt with them. We're resting for a week before heading out again.*

*Day 28 — Now I understand what they meant. The mark of Wolf. Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.*

*Our two injured soldiers changed tonight, under the light of the moon, into fierce wolf-men. They slew three other guards in minutes. We finally had to kill them with silver arrows.*

*Now, more than ever, I want to head back into the wilds and track down these Wildlings. Tribes of lycanthropes! Shape-changing beasts with a functioning society! Staggering!*

*The only problem now is recruiting guards. The cowards seem reluctant to sign on with me.*

## OVERVIEW

The Wildling Tribes are a loose confederation of barbarian tribes that have one thing in common: lycanthropy. Each tribe is based on a category of lycanthropy, but maintains some trade and communication channels with the others. Local peoples who know about lycanthropy are wary and distrustful of the Wildlings, so the tribes, in turn, tend to be wary and distrustful of outsiders.

Many of the tribes' were-creatures were not members of the tribe from birth, but joined after they were infected. This leads to a wide racial diversity in the tribes, as every race that can suffer from lycanthropy is represented. Not all members of the tribes are were-creatures, however. Some come from the families of those who join the tribes after being infected with the shape-changing sickness: wives, husbands, and children unwilling to give up a loved one are welcomed into the tribes, without the need to become infected themselves.

## PLACEMENT

The Wildling Tribes need a large expanse of unspoiled wilderness to inhabit. They fit best into a temperate or boreal forest area, wild and unsettled, with a great deal of space to roam and hunt. The tribes' lands should be a good distance from any established population center; close proximity to a population of potential victims

would eventually lead to the destruction of either the tribes or the townsfolk.

If you already have an area like this in your world that you've filled with barbarian tribes, the Wildlings can fit in alongside them as a feared collection of misunderstood tribes. Consider turning the existing tribes into the Wildlings over time, keeping their lycanthropy a secret that outsiders know nothing about. Perhaps the barbarian tribes are mistaken for druids or sorcerers, if anyone even knows about their shape-shifting powers.

## HISTORY

Each tribe has its own history, consisting of stories passed down orally from the first days of the tribe. These stories describe family trees, important heroes, weddings, deaths, births, and other events important to the tribe as a whole. Years don't mean much in Wildling histories; they keep track of the past by referring to "my great-grandfather's time," for example, or "when Dreams True was chieftain."

The different outlooks and concerns of the various tribes mean stories often don't agree on historical facts. Still, a few prominent tales are accepted by all the tribes as true.

## ORIGIN

Each tribe claims its founder started the cultural union that would become all of the Wildling Tribes. The Bear Tribe says Bear was lonely and gathered his children to keep him company. The Wolf Tribe says Wolf built a proper pack so he could hunt. The Rat Tribe claims Rat just kept running into his children everywhere he went and so finally brought them to live with him. All the other Wildling Tribes have similar stories, each telling how the founders came up with the idea of the tribes, and how all the others followed suit.

With no documented histories and no surviving evidence, the truth may never be known, but the few outside scholars familiar with the tales lean towards the Bear or Wolf stories, which fit with the temperaments of those two tribes better than the other stories.

## DEVELOPMENT

The different tribes have rich oral histories covering the time from their founding to the present. Most of these have little to do with other tribes, and the stories frequently contradict each other. Here are some events that feature prominently in almost-identical tales.



### The Wolf Wars and the Tiger Accord

All the tribes talk about the danger of the Wolf Tribe's excesses and the way the Tiger Tribe brought them into line. The Wolf Tribe ran wild, slaughtering game and leaving it to rot. While the Rat Tribe was happy to benefit from this, the other tribes were less pleased, and attacked the Wolf Tribe. Attacks became wars, and the wars finally got the attention of the isolationist Tiger Tribe — the deadliest tribe — who ordered hostilities to cease, lest the Tiger Tribe slaughter all participants in the war.

Many tribes claim to be responsible for the intervention of the Tiger Tribe. Though the Wolf Tribe claims they did nothing wrong, they were quick to change the behavior that offended their neighbors. To this day, hard feelings remain unresolved between the Wolf Tribe and the Tiger Tribe.

### The Rights of Marking

Many stories speak of children from one tribe being infected with lycanthropy by a member of another tribe. These stories usually revolve around tragic accidents, cruel attacks, and horrible acts of revenge, for all the tribes feel that stealing children from their tribe of heritage is unforgivable. Early on, the tribes came to an arrangement forbidding one tribe from claiming members of another tribe without permission. Permission must be given by both the member to be marked and by the chieftains of both tribes, and is usually given only if the subject has a temperament better suited to the new tribe.

Of course, outsiders aren't protected by this arrangement.

### The Goblin Wars

Throughout the history of the Wildling Tribes, bands of fierce humanoids have attempted to claim the territory where the Wildlings live. These incursions have produced important and impressive stories of battle in every tribe. Though goblins, hobgoblins, and bugbears keep attacking, their attacks only swell the numbers of the Wildlings as goblinoid casualties join the Wildlings after being infected with lycanthropy in battle.

### The Ravaging of Milligash

Some two hundred years ago, the Boar Tribe destroyed the mining town of Milligash. Different stories give different reasons for this act, but most cite variations on vengeance. Some say the attack followed an insult against the Boar chieftain made by the town's mayor; others claim the townsfolk participated in the wholesale slaughter of Boar villages to claim the land.

Whatever the cause, all the warriors of the Boar Tribe banded together and attacked the village on a night of the

full moon. They killed every living creature in the town, refusing to claim any for Boar, and burned the buildings to the ground. To this day, all the Wildling Tribes shun the scorched valley where Milligash once stood.

### The Reprisal Expedition

Milligash didn't exist in a vacuum, of course. The kingdom that founded the mining town began to wonder what happened to its outpost, and sent an army to investigate. This led to a long, bloody battle between the kingdom and the Wildlings — one the Wildlings couldn't win. The civilized forces learned about the tribes' lycanthropic curse, and traveled with a number of magical cures, thus depriving the Wildlings of the new recruits they counted on when devising battle strategies.

The invading army hunted the tribes nearly to extinction before the Bear Tribe stepped forward to parley with the king's men.

### Bear's Accommodation

Representatives of the Bear Tribe met with the invaders under a flag of truce. The tribal diplomats asked a single question: what would it take for the invaders to go away and leave the Wildling Tribes in peace?

After many days of exploratory discussions, trying to understand each other's societies, an accommodation was finally reached. The Wildlings agreed to allow some settlement of their territory, but only if the settlers first asked the permission of the tribe whose territory they were entering. These settlements would be limited to less than a thousand people, and would have to admit the Wildlings for trade. In return, the Wildlings agreed to refrain from infecting the settlers, and to continue defending the territory from goblin incursions.

## CURRENT

The tribes now exist in a dynamic equilibrium. The goblin raids haven't completely stopped, and the presence of uninfected outsiders is creating lasting changes in the culture and lifestyle of the Wildlings. Even with formal accords in place between the tribes themselves and the recent settlers, it is a time of change.

### Marking Expeditions

After the losses suffered in the Milligash reprisals, the Wildling Tribes must work to build up their numbers again. To that end, they mount expeditions to hunt and infect travelers with lycanthropy, so they can be claimed by the tribe.

What started as an emergency measure to strengthen the tribes has become tradition. In times of war or danger, the Wildlings go hunting for those they can infect and legally claim. They are careful not to break the terms of Bear's Accommodation, or, at least, not to get caught breaking it. So far, they've been successful.

### Lost Children

The Wildlings are also searching for what they call Lost Children: lycanthropes infected outside of Wildling territory. The tribes would like to bring them all to the Wildling lands. The tribes share some vague idea of becoming the keepers of a promised land for all infected were-creatures — a place where lycanthropes can live without fear of the uninfected.

Wildlings, for the most part, aren't very subtle, however, and don't like traveling far from their lands. Thus, the search is almost meaningless; something for the young idealists of the Bear Tribe or the power-hungry warlords of the Wolf Tribe to spend time and energy on. Most of the other tribes don't pay it much attention. The Wildlings just don't have the organizational strength and social skills necessary to subtly scour the civilized spaces beyond their lands.

### The Totemloss Crusade

The settlements in Wildling territory have brought with them a new danger the tribesmen never counted on. Priests and paladins from civilized nations, hearing about the vicious tribes of lycanthropes, have come to save the poor, cursed creatures. Crusaders and missionaries have been trickling into the territory for years, bent on curing every Wildling, whether they want to be cured or not.

The thought of being forcibly severed from their Totem — the deity they embody through their lycanthropy — is terrifying to the Wildlings. They see these crusaders as an oppressive force out to destroy their way of life. Wildlings go out of their way to drive crusaders away. Even the Bear Tribe has been known to use extreme measures to prevent the separation of its membership from the Totem.

### The Merchant Forts

There are kingdoms on more than one side of the Wildling lands, and trade through the territory can be quite profitable. Unfortunately, it's not safe. Various merchant concerns have been working together to improve the profitability and safety of the endeavor, and have together funded the construction of several merchant forts in the region. These fortified caravanserais are spread in a chain through the Wildling lands, offering safe haven for merchants on the perilous route through the wilderness of the tribes. Each fort has a

small permanent garrison of guards and custodians to keep it safe when no caravans are in residence. Between the caravan guards, the house guards, and the fortified walls, the forts are hard nuts to crack.

The Wildlings are not happy about this mercantile intrusion, but haven't been able to muster the necessary strength to dissuade the merchant operations. Recently, tribal members have even been succumbing to the temptation of these forts, sneaking in to trade with the merchants. Since the tribes did not grant permission for the construction of any of these forts, Wildlings sometimes catch and claim a person or two for their Totem while scouting them out.

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## LOCATIONS

The Wildlings believe they carry the power of the Totems in their blood, which makes every place they go sacred. This means there are no cherished locations for the tribes, outside of the villages in which they dwell.

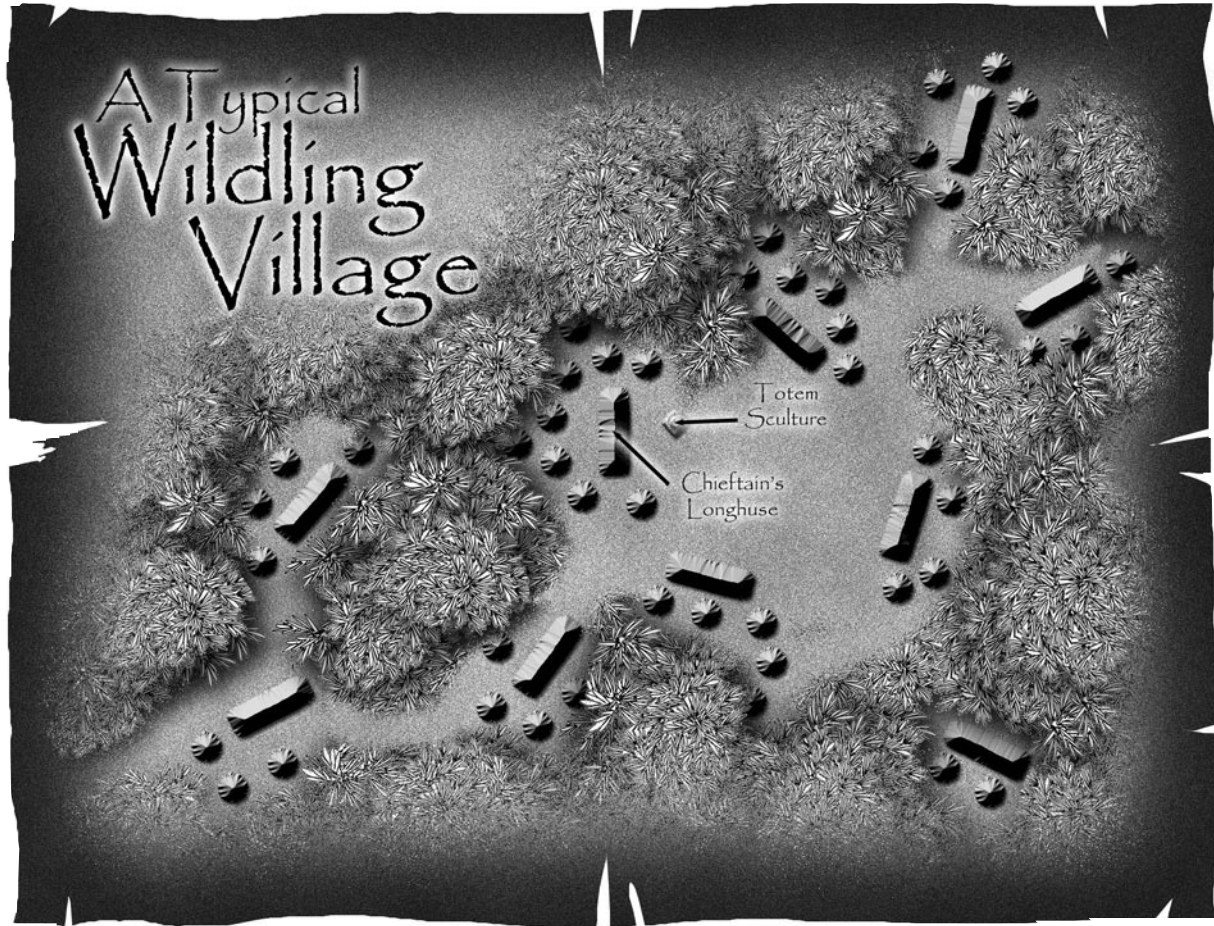
### A TYPICAL VILLAGE

An average Wildling village consists of between five hundred and a thousand people, a few pigs and chickens, and the occasional horse. Some subsistence-level slash-and-burn agriculture is maintained, which produces herbs, grain, and vegetables, but the tribes mainly survive as hunters and gatherers.

It's tough to know when you've entered a Wildling village. The buildings are often low, half-buried in the ground, and widely placed among the trees. Wandering trails connect the individual houses and lead to farm plots and streams that provide fresh water. The villages have no fortifications, but individual houses can be closed up tight enough to be defensible.

Village buildings are timber and sod longhouses where tribesmen live and feast. Smaller buildings exist for storage and crafting, but extended families of Wildlings live together in the longhouses. There is little to no privacy in a longhouse, which is essentially a single, long room furnished with tables and walls lined with shut-beds. Families work and live in the longhouse common rooms, where a fire is always burning, children are scampering underfoot, a pot simmers, and mock combats are played out.

Outside the chieftain's longhouse is the spiritual center of the village: a large stone sculpture of the Totem. This is where the main gatherings of the tribe are held, where new members are taught the stories of the tribe, and where the chieftain conducts official tribal business.



## PERSONALITIES

The assimilatory nature of the Wildling Tribes makes it difficult to generalize the membership of any tribe. The nature of lycanthropy, however, fills in the difference. Here are some of the most respected Wildlings in the land.

### KILLS SWIFTLY OF THE WOLF TRIBE

#### Bloody Fang of Wolf

"I hold your life in my jaws. Show you are worthy, and I will blood you to join me as my brother. Falter, and I will tear out your throat."

Kills Swiftly is the pride of his tribe: a fierce, cunning warrior and werewolf. He received his Totem mark at the age of eight, following a difficult challenge that pitted him against six other prospective werewolves, each of whom were at least twice his age. He stalked and slew them one by one over a period of nine days, returning victorious to receive his Totem mark from the priest.

Since that time, Kills Swiftly has formed a real power base in his village, marking and claiming over a dozen outsiders and forming his own pack. Now twenty-five years old, he is maneuvering into a position to put forward a serious bid for leadership of the village.

Hunting with his pack is Kills Swiftly's greatest joy. He often leaves the village with his companions for weeks at a time, returning with one or two new pack members, missing one or two old pack members, and laden down with the spoils of his expeditions. Nothing pleases him more than stalking a well-defended merchant caravan, picking off the guards at his leisure, and marking a few of the best fighters.

Other tribes justly fear Kills Swiftly. His predations give all the Wildlings a bad name, and rumors circulate that he has taken to killing hunting parties that belong to other tribes. So far, he has not gone so far as to mark any of them.

Kills Swiftly is a lean, muscular man with brown hair, a stubbly beard, and grey eyes. His face and neck show a number of scars, and he wears a necklace of bear and tiger teeth and claws around his neck.

## KILLS SWIFTLY, OF THE WOLF TRIBE

### 10th-Level Human Werewolf Ranger

CR 12; Medium humanoid (shapechanger); HD 10d10+2d8+40; hp 104; Init +4 (+10); Spd 30 ft. (50 ft.); AC 20 (+4 Dex, +4 +1 studded leather, +2 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 16 (17 (+5 Dex, +2 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 12); Base Atk +11/+6; Grp +13 (+14); Atk +14 melee (1d8+3, +1 longsword) (+17 melee (1d6+3, bite)); Full Atk +12/+12/+9/+4 melee (1d8+3, +1 longsword and 1d6+3, +1 short sword) (+17/+12 melee (1d6+3, bite)); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Combat Style, Curse of Lycanthropy, Favored Enemy (shapechangers, humans, magical beasts), Spells, Wild Empathy; SQ Alternate Form, Animal Companion, DR 10/silver, Evasion, Low-Light Vision, Lycanthropic Empathy, Scent, Spells, Swift Tracker, Wild Empathy, Woodland Stride; AL CE; SV Fort +11, Ref +7, Will +6; Str 14 (16), Dex 18 (22), Con 14 (18), Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 12

(Statistics in parentheses are for wolf form.)

**Skills:** Animal Empathy +12, Control Shape +15, Hide +23 (+16), Listen +16 (+20), Move Silently +13, Spot +21 (+20), Search +17 (+21), Survival +12

**Feats:** (Blind-Fight), Dodge, Endurance, Expertise, (Improved Initiative), Improved Trip, Mobility, Spring Attack, Track, (Weapon Finesse (bite))

**Languages:** Common, Elven, Orc

**Alternate Form (Su):** Kills Swiftly can shift into animal or hybrid form as though using the *polymorph* spell, though his gear does not change, he does not regain hit points, and he can only transform into a wolf or a wolf-man hybrid. Kills Swiftly does not assume the ability scores of a wolf when he changes; instead, he applies modifiers to his own ability scores. Changing to or from animal or hybrid form is a standard action.

**Animal Companion (Ex):** A wolf named Tracks by Moonlight.

**Combat Style (Ex):** Kills Swiftly, as a ranger with the two-weapon fighting combat style, enjoys the benefits of the Two-Weapon Fighting and Improved Two-Weapon Fighting feats without actually selecting those feats.

**Curse of Lycanthropy (Su):** Any humanoid or giant hit by Kills Swiftly's bite attack in animal form must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 15) or contract lycanthropy. If the victim's size category is not within one size category of Kills Swiftly, the victim cannot contract lycanthropy from him.

**Damage Reduction (Ex):** Kills Swiftly ignores 10 points of damage from every normal attack, unless the weapon is made from alchemical silver.

**Evasion (Ex):** When avoiding any attack that allows a Reflex save for half damage, Kills Swiftly instead takes no damage on a successful save. He can use this ability only when wearing light armor or no armor.

**Favored Enemy (Ex):** Against shapechangers, Kills Swiftly receives a +3 bonus to Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks, as well as weapon damage rolls. He must be within 30 feet of the creature to receive the damage bonus on ranged attacks. He gains a +2 bonus to these checks against humans, and a +1 bonus against magical beasts.

**Low-Light Vision (Ex):** A lycanthrope in any form can see twice as far as a human can in conditions of poor, wavering, or weak lighting.

**Lycanthropic Empathy (Ex):** Kills Swiftly can communicate and empathize with normal or dire wolves. This gives him a +4 racial bonus to checks when influencing the animal's attitude and allows the communication of simple concepts and commands.

**Scent (Ex):** Kills Swiftly has the Scent ability in any form. He may use the Scent ability to Track by smell, detecting olfactory clues as easily as a human detects sights. Kills Swiftly can smell creatures up to 30 feet away (60 feet away upwind and 15 feet away downwind).

**Spells (Sp):** (2/1) Kills Swiftly typically prepares the following spells. He casts spells as a 10th-level ranger. The saving throw DC to resist these spells is 11 + spell level.

1st Level — *pass without trace, resist elements*

2nd Level — *protection from elements*

**Swift Tracker (Ex):** Kills Swiftly can move at full speed while tracking without suffering the usual -5 penalty. He takes a -10 penalty (instead of -20) when moving at up to twice his speed while tracking.

**Wild Empathy (Ex):** A successful class level plus Charisma check allows Kills Swiftly to improve the attitude of an animal or magical beast (-4 penalty) within 30 feet, as per a Diplomacy check. Domestic animals usually have a starting attitude of indifferent, and wild animals an attitude of unfriendly.

**Woodland Stride (Ex):** Kills Swiftly can move through normal, non-magical undergrowth at his normal speed without suffering damage or other impairments.

**Equipment:** +1 studded leather armor, +1 longsword, +1 short sword, eyes of the eagle, cloak of elvenkind, potion of endurance, gloves of Dexterity +2.

## SINGS TO SKY OF THE BEAR TRIBE

### Keeper of the Wildling Peace

"We have rules to keep the peace. I am here to keep the rules."

Sings to Sky is an orc woman who was afflicted with lycanthropy in a far-off land. Cast out of her tribe by the other orcs, she made the long trek to the lands of the Wildlings, and found a home with the Bear Tribe. She has dedicated her life to serving Bear, the maker of rules and builder of peace.

She is still uncomfortable among other races, and spends much of her time wandering on her own. The Wolf and Rat Tribes see her as a dangerous obstacle — one who shows up when least expected to make sure all agreements between the tribes are being honored. The Boar and Tiger Tribes see her as a meddling busybody, but with good intentions. To the rest of the Bear Tribe, she is considered an exemplar of Bear's values, though perhaps a bit fanatical.

Her temper is still something of a challenge for her, but she's getting better at controlling it. She is especially frustrated by stubborn stupidity, which often puts her at odds with members of the Boar Tribe. What start out as simple interventions to correct some minor point of behavior devolve into shouting matches and sometimes outright fighting. She chides herself for these lapses, but they continue to occur.

Even in her normal orc form, Sings to Sky looks like a bear. She wears a cloak made out of bear hide, complete with a hood made from a bear's head. Her gait and gruff voice complete the image.

## TYPICAL WILDLING TRIBESMAN

### Dour Savage Xenophobe

"You are not of the tribes. You have no Totem. You are not welcome here."

The Wildlings are tightly-knit within their tribal communities, and even within the tribes as a whole. However, having been raised on generations of stories about how outsiders — those with no Totems — try to hunt them down and slay them, they are less than welcoming to outsiders. They are extremely distrustful of anyone but other tribesmen, and usually react to them with discourtesy, antagonism, and aggression.

The tribes are generally social amongst themselves, but the harsh reality of their lives means their humor is dark and their fun is rough. Most gatherings involve drinking, shouting, laughing, wrestling, insults, one or two serious fights, and a great deal of noise. Through the midst of these scamper children and pets of all description.

Because of the diverse backgrounds of many who join the tribes later in life, there is a great diversity of races and parent cultures represented in the tribal memberships. The tribes don't reflect much difference of opinion or behavior, however (at least, not as much as they think); behavior is more or less divinely dictated by the Totems. This is reinforced by the tales of persecution that new arrivals bring, making xenophobia a lasting trait among the Wildlings.



## TYPICAL WILDLING TRIBESMAN

### 5th-Level Human Barbarian

CR 5; Medium humanoid; HD 5d12+5; hp 38; Init +2; Spd 40 ft.; AC 18 (+2 Dex, +6 *+1 breastplate*), touch 12, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +5; Grp +8; Atk +10 melee (1d12+4, masterwork greataxe) or +8 ranged (1d8+3, composite longbow with masterwork arrows); Full Atk +10 melee (1d12+4, masterwork greataxe) or +7 ranged (1d8+3, composite longbow with masterwork arrows); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Rage 2/day; SQ Uncanny Dodge; AL varies by Totem; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +2; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 8

**Skills:** Climb +11, Intimidate +7, Jump +11, Listen +9, Survival +9

**Feats:** Dodge, Track, Weapon Focus (greataxe)

**Languages:** Common

**Rage (Ex):** Twice per day, a Wildling tribesman can fly into a rage. This gives him +4 Strength, +4 Constitution, and +2 to Will saves. He receives a –2 penalty to AC. The rage can last for up to six rounds.

**Uncanny Dodge (Ex):** The Wildling retains his Dexterity bonus to AC if caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker. He cannot be flanked.

**Equipment:** *+1 breastplate*, masterwork greataxe, composite longbow (+3 Str bonus), 20 masterwork arrows, 3 *potions of cure moderate wounds*, *potion of neutralize poison*, 2 *potions of lesser restoration*



## SINGS TO SKY OF THE BEAR TRIBE

**12th-Level Orc Werebear Cleric of the Bear Totem**

CR 16; Medium humanoid (shapechanger); HD 18d8+108; hp 189; Init -1 (+0); Spd 20 ft. (40 ft.); AC 17 (-1 Dex, +6 +1 *breast plate*, +2 natural), touch 9; flat-footed 17; (14 (-1 size, +0 Dex, +5 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 14); Base Atk +13/+8/+3; Grp +16 (+24); Full Atk +17 melee (1d10+4 +1 *greatclub*) (+24 melee (1d8+11, 2 claws)); Full Atk +17/+12/+7 melee (1d10+4 +1 *greatclub*) (+24/+24 melee (1d8+11, 2 claws) and +22 melee (2d6+5, bite)); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Curse of Lycanthropy, Improved Grab, Lycanthropic Empathy, Spells, Turn Undead; SQ Alternate Form, Domain Powers, DR 5/silver, Low-Light Vision, Scent, Spells, Spontaneous Casting; AL LG; SV Fort +13, Ref +4, Will +14; Str 17 (33), Dex 8 (10), Con 14 (22), Int 8, Wis 16, Cha 10

(Statistics in parentheses are for bear form.)

**Skills:** Control Shape +6, Diplomacy +9, Heal +6, Knowledge (religion) +2, Profession (fisher) +6, (Swim +15)

**Feats:** (Blind-Fight), Brew Potion, Cleave, Endurance, Great Cleave, (Multi-Attack), Power Attack, Run, Track

**Languages:** Common, Orc

**Alternate Form (Su):** Sings to Sky can shift into animal form as though using the *polymorph* spell; though her gear does not change, she does not heal, and she can only assume the form of a bear or a hybrid bear-woman. Changing to or from animal or hybrid form is a standard action.

**Curse of Lycanthropy (Su):** Any humanoid hit by Sings to Sky's bite attack in animal form must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 15) or contract lycanthropy.

**Damage Reduction (Ex):** Sings to Sky ignores 5 points of damage from every normal attack, unless the weapon is made from alchemical silver.

**Domain Powers (Sp):** Sings to Sky has access to the domains of Healing and Protection. She casts healing spells at +1 caster level. She can also generate a *protective ward* to grant someone she touches a resistance bonus equal to her level on his next saving throw. This is a standard action, and is an abjuration effect with a duration of one hour, usable once per day.

**Improved Grab (Ex):** To use this ability, Sings to Sky must hit with a claw attack. She can then make a grapple check as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

**Low-Light Vision (Ex):** A lycanthrope in any form can see twice as far as a human can in conditions of poor, wavering, or weak lighting.

**Lycanthropic Empathy (Ex):** Sings to Sky can communicate and empathize with normal or dire bears. This gives her a +4 racial bonus to checks when influencing the animal's attitude and allows the communication of simple concepts and commands.

**Scent (Ex):** Sings to Sky has the Scent ability in any form, and may track subjects with an untrained Survival check. She can smell creatures up to 30 feet away (60 feet away upwind and 15 feet away downwind), and detect olfactory clues as easily as a human sees.

**Spells (Sp):** (6/6+1/5+1/5+1/3+1/3+1/2+1) Sings to Sky casts spells as a 12th-level cleric. The saving throw DC to resist these spells is 13 + spell level. She typically prepares the following spells. She has the Protection and Healing domains; spells with an asterisk are domain spells.

0 Level — *detect magic*, *detect poison*, *light*, *mending*, *read magic*, *resistance*

1st Level — *command*, *comprehend languages*, *detect evil*, *obscuring mist*, *protection from evil*, *sanctuary\**, *shield of faith*

2nd Level — *bull's strength*, *endurance*, *enthrall*, *hold person*, *resist elements*, *shield other\**

3rd Level — *daylight*, *dispel magic*, *prayer*, *protection from elements\**, *speak with plants*, *wind wall*

4th Level — *dismissal*, *lesser planar ally*, *restoration*, *spell immunity\**

5th Level — *break enchantment*, *greater command*, *spell resistance\**, *true seeing*

6th Level — *find the path*, *heal\**, *wind walk*

**Spontaneous Casting (Sp):** Sings to Sky can convert any prepared spell to a *cure* spell of equal or lesser level.

**Turn Undead (Su):** Sings to Sky can attempt to turn undead 4 times per day.

**Equipment:** +1 *greatclub*, +1 *breastplate*, *potion of fly*, *potion of heroism*, *scroll of raise dead*, *scroll of ethereal jaunt*, *scroll of wind walk*, *scroll of resurrection*, *cloak of resistance +1*, *ring of protection +1*, *wand of hold person*, *pearl of Wisdom +2*, *wand of searing light*, *amulet of natural armor +1*

## PLAYING A WILDLING

Generally speaking, Wildlings are insular, distrustful, and xenophobic. The treatment of lycanthropes as monsters by the majority of cultures and societies gave the first Wildlings little reason to trust outsiders, and that attitude has been passed down and vindicated repeatedly through the years. The most open and forthcoming Wildlings still tend to be offensively suspicious of outsiders.



Wildlings have alignments based on their lycanthrope type. Thus Tiger Tribe Wildlings are neutral and Rat Tribe Wildlings are lawful evil. Those tribesmen who are not lycanthropes are generally within one step of the alignment of the lycanthrope type, though there are exceptions.

Most Wildlings are barbarians, rangers, or druids, though those claimed by the tribes come from a wide variety of classes and sometimes pass knowledge down to the children of the tribe.

## NAMES

Names are given at different times to Wildlings, and are chosen by their parents based on some memorable event or accomplishment in the child's life. Those who join the tribe as adults are given a new name, based on some exceptional event or deed. Names are always phrases that commemorate the naming event and describe an action.

Examples of Wildling names are: Breaks Bones, Dances in Rain, Dreams True, Eats Tree, Kills Swiftly, Runs Down Foes, Sees the Mountain, Sings to Sky, Touches Sun, Walks Far.

## TRIBES

There are as many tribes of Wildlings as there are types of lycanthropes in your game. Each tribe is devoted to a single Totem, which itself represents a type of lycanthropy. While relations between the tribes are less than perfect, the tribes at least have a social framework for contact with each other. There's no such framework for outsiders.

Each tribe has multiple villages, scattered through the Wildling lands. Not all tribal villages are grouped together, so there's a great deal of wariness between neighboring villages. Territories are therefore difficult to define. Because of the Tiger's Accord, there is no open warfare between the various tribes, but numerous "accidents" befall enemy tribesmen when they stray too far from home.

Each village governs itself, owing no obedience to the tribe at large, though villages of the same tribe usually co-operate and defend each other. The most powerful lycanthrope in the village is the chieftain, though real power often rests in the hands of the Totem priests. Tribal politics comes second in the life of a Wildling. The Totem always comes first.

## RELIGION

Wildlings worship their Totems as gods, and the Totems respond appropriately. Each village has a priest or two, who may or may not be a lycanthrope, and who keeps the peace and intervenes with the Totem for the rest of the tribe. They are accorded a different kind of respect than the lycanthropes are, for the priests have a different kind of bond with the Totem than the shape-changers do. Priests who are also lycanthropes are considered especially blessed.

### The Totems

Each Totem has an associated body of legends and myths. The source of these stories is lost to history, but many speak of the Totem as if it were a member of the tribe; the Totemic religions revere a living thing, the Totem, and not some long-dead savior. In many older legends, the Totem and the tribe are essentially interchangeable. It can be difficult to tell if a given story is referring to the Totem itself or to a tribe member. In the eyes of the priests, this is unimportant; both are one.

The most important aspect of the Totem stories is the way they illuminate the values, behaviors, and guidelines the Totem expects the tribe to follow. Thus, the tales show Bear as honorable, just, slow to anger, and ready to die to protect the tribe. Rat is shown to be resourceful, clever, sneaky, and opportunistic. Boar is stubborn, strong, and fierce. Wolf is brave, powerful, unpredictable, and argumentative. Tiger is private, quiet, and deadly.

The chieftains see to the safety and prosperity of the tribe, but the priests are responsible for keeping the tribe close to the heart of the Totem. They decide who is behaving well or poorly in the eyes of the Totem, advise on who is worthy of the Totem mark, and rule on considerations that have more to do with custom than law.

### The Totem Mark

There are two types of Wildlings: those with the Totem blood and those without. Those with the blood are lycanthropes, the elite of the tribes, bearing the favor of the Totem. Those without are still valued members, as they are the families of lycanthropes.

Lycanthropy is called the Totem mark, and is seen as a special blessing from the Totem. Because the Totem mark is sacred, it's considered hubris to choose who shall receive it. Infecting people encountered by chance lets the Totem choose its own followers, but marking your own family or friends usurps the Totem's decision.

This doesn't mean the children of the Wildlings only become lycanthropes by accident. The priests of the Totems have the authority to set a series of quests and trials that let the prospective lycanthrope prove his or her worthiness. If the challenger successfully completes all the tasks, the priest allows one of the tribal lycanthropes to pass the infection on.

The type of Totem determines the type of challenge set. Each tribe has its own traditions and modes of challenge. Wolf Tribe challenges are usually a series of hunts and battles to prove strength and cunning. Tiger Tribe challenges involve single combat against a variety of

## NEW DEITIES: THE WILDLING TOTEMS

**Alignment:** Varies by Totem

**Domains:** Animal, Healing, or by Totem

**Typical Worshipers:** The Wildling Tribes

**Symbol:** A skin of the Totem animal, with head and claws intact

Each tribe holds all the Totems to be sacred, but each reveres only its own. There are many legends surrounding the interaction of the Totems, and these constitute the body of the Totemic religion. The tales lay out the expected behavior of the various tribes, the powers and behaviors of the Totems, and the values the Totem holds dear.

Each Totem grants access to the Animal and Healing domains, and to the domain related to its nature, as listed below. Clerics of the Totems can choose two domains from these.

- Bear grants access to the Protection domain.
- Boar grants access to the Strength domain.
- Rat grants access to the Trickery domain.
- Tiger grants access to the Death domain.
- Wolf grants access to the War domain.

Other Totems of other tribes may grant access to other domains.

Favored weapons also vary by Totem. Bear's favored weapon is the greatclub, Boar's is the longspear, Rat's is the short sword, Tiger's is the greataxe, and Wolf's is the longsword.



fierce foes. Rat Tribe challenges focus on stealth, while Boar Tribe challenges are concerned with endurance. Bear Tribe challenges may be diplomatic or exploratory quests.

The tribes gather together all those bearing the mark of their Totem, both to strengthen the tribe and to help those infected. Feasting and celebration always follow the arrival of a new tribesman bearing the Totem mark. Blood, after all, makes one family.

## ART

The art of the Wildling tribes is surprisingly eclectic — the result of the many disparate races and nationalities that have joined together to form the tribes. Styles of workmanship and decoration vary from tribe to tribe and village to village, depending on the various people in the villages. One thing common to all Wildling art is the reverential depiction of the Totem. Every aspect of Wildling art depicts and celebrates the form of the Totem. Wolf Tribesmen have images of wolves woven into the knot-work of their embroidery, Bear Tribesmen display bear heads on the finials of their torcs, Rat Tribesmen wear rat-shaped masks and helmets when they go raiding, and so forth. If not for the wide variety of styles and workmanship celebrated by the tribes, the motifs would rapidly become tiresome.

## ADVENTURING

There is a strong heroic tradition among the Wildlings. Individual accomplishment is something to be sought and rewarded. Thus, many Wildlings going off to seek their fortunes away from the support and protection of their tribes. Some of these adventurers go out to find the Lost Children of their Totem and bring them home. Some go to wage battles against other tribes or intruding civilization. Some go to far-off lands to find out if the world is really such an unwelcoming place to their kind.

Many of these adventurers return to their tribes older, wealthier, and wiser — ready to take up the burdens of leadership. Their experience makes them valued and respected members of their tribes. It also makes them feared.

## ADVENTURE SEEDS

Use or modify these ideas to bring the Wildling Tribes into your campaign.

## PILGRIMAGE

The PCs, as young Wildling tribesmen, are restless. They've been getting on the elders' nerves, riling their relatives, and making a nuisance of themselves. Fed up with it, the village priest has decided to get rid of them for a few days: he's sending them on a sacred quest.

The task is, on the surface, simple: bring back a new hide for the priest to make into a ceremonial robe. This means the party must hunt a bear, boar, dire rat, dire wolf, or tiger, kill it, and bring back an intact skin. They must also display the correct reverence for the creature when they hunt it, and perform a ritual of thanks to the Totem when they kill it.

A group of young, armed, rambunctious upstarts wandering around the wild lands claimed by tribes of xenophobic lycanthropes is a sure-fire recipe for adventure. And that's before they even find the creature they're supposed to kill!

## WOLFPACK

What happens when Kills Swiftly marks a friend of the party? How far do the characters go to find out what happened and reclaim their comrade? Hunting a pack of werewolves led by a skilled and ruthless alpha is hard enough. Doing it through the werewolves' home territory should be enough to test anyone's friendship. And what happens if the lost comrade doesn't want to leave his new tribe? Can adventurers, experienced at killing monsters, let one live? Will they accept the practices of the Wildlings, or will they become mortal enemies?

## RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

Illevus Sanrit hasn't given up his desire to learn more about the Wildlings that attacked him. He's had a great deal of trouble finding someone to escort him in the field, however. So now he glosses over the details; he's found that talking to adventurers about a friendly visit to tribes of were-creatures makes the wrong impression.

The PCs may well accept work escorting the scholar around the wild areas, eager for the easy money, light work, and chance to scout new territory. They may also have heard rumors about the strange powers and secret rites of the Wildlings, and could be scholars — or crusaders — themselves.

Their interest might flag when they realize Illevus is far more interested in getting his answers than in keeping his escorts safe, though. The lure of new information, and the fame it can garner, leads Illevus to take chances and ignore common sense. That can be deadly in the Wildling lands.

## THE MONDIAN EMPIRE

*The Gleaners came into town just before midnight. No one except the Imperial Garrison Commander knew they were there until noon the next day, when they came into the town square and set up the Golden Eye banner of their calling. By nightfall, the entire Province knew of their presence, and the next morning saw a crowd gathered in the square, waiting quietly for the Gleaners to begin their work. It had been five years since the last Gleaning, and that meant a fair crop of children were ready to be tested.*

*Tarabetha waited her turn, next to her mother, and tried not to worry. Her mother and father both told her what to expect, to help calm her, but the stories of puzzles, tests, and challenges only made her more nervous. She had practiced her letters and numbers under the watchful eye of her parents and had done her best to memorize the names of all the emperors, right back to Mondas I, though she still got confused in the middle around all the Garons. That was where she was going to slip up, she knew.*

*The hopes of the family were resting on her. The farm was doing well, but Tarabetha had a lot of brothers and sisters, and the land could only be split so many ways before it became worthless. A career in the Imperial Service for the eldest daughter would take a great deal of pressure off her parents, who would no longer have to worry about dowry or legacy, and could put the Emperor's Coin to good use. And service to the empire could certainly make Tarabetha wealthy, if she was good enough.*

*The Gleaners arrived, and began splitting the children into groups. The one wearing the pen insignia led one group away to test their reading and ciphering, while one with the sword insignia passed out staves to her group. The older man with the insignia of the book gathered his group into a circle and began quizzing them on history and religion, and the woman with the hawk insignia led her group through stretches in preparation for a cross-country run. Tarabetha was shuffled over to the scribe's group when the fifth Gleaner, the one wearing the Golden Eye as his only crest, stopped her and looked deep into her eyes.*



*“Well, my poppet,” he said, “It looks like we’ve found ourselves a treasure. You’ve the Gift in you, sure as sunrise, and it looks to be strong once it’s been trained up. You’ll still have to run through the other tests, but just to find your strengths. You’ll be coming with us, no matter how you do on those.”*

*He stuck a Gleaning Pin through her tunic, and waved her on to the testing. As Tarabetha hurried to join the others, the Gleaner spoke quietly to her mother for a few minutes, then passed her a platinum Imperial.*

*And so Tarabetha joined the Mindguard.*

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## OVERVIEW

The Mondian Empire is a dynamic, active empire, past the initial period of expansion, but still vibrant and strong. The armies of the empire dominated the surrounding area through a combination of force of arms and effective use of psionics. The real secret of the empire’s success is the meritocracy of the armies and the bureaucracy; most of the noble houses have adopted the philosophy, too, so as to maintain their own power and effectiveness within the imperial court.

The pinnacle of Imperial Service is the elite Mindguard, a loose collection of highly-trained psionic operatives that act as troubleshooters and special operatives. They are the heroes of the populace — role models for the entire country. Because most of the Mindguard comes from the lower classes, they represent the essence of the meritocracy for the bulk of the population.

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## PLACEMENT

The Mondian Empire needs to cover a diverse geographical area. The central part of the empire is extensively settled and tamed, but the outer provinces are wilder, frontier areas. The area doesn’t need to be all that large, but should cover at least the same amount of land as another good-sized kingdom in your world, and should encompass a number of smaller, formerly autonomous areas.

The nations bordering on the empire should either be strong, long-established states that are too powerful to be easily conquered, or wild, untamed lands full of barbarian tribes or monsters that are too much trouble to subdue. This gives the empire static borders, an excuse to focus on itself, and a chance to build strength and prosperity for its population.

Alternatively, you might put the empire on an island of its own in some unexplored region of the game world, or surround it with a treacherous and all-but-impassable mountain range. The inward attention of the empire makes it easy for you to insert it into your campaign, even though the PCs haven’t seen or heard of delegates and travelers from the empire before.

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## HISTORY

Dates in the Mondian Empire are measured from the founding of the empire, the Year of the Sceptre (YS). This dating method is used in all imperial records and communications, though many of the outer provinces use their own traditional calendars for unofficial purposes, and the various temples and churches keep to their religious calendars for internal matters.

The empire has endured for nearly a thousand years, through the reigns of thirty-two emperors and empresses. Having reached the limits of easy expansion, the vibrant energy that had been directed outward has turned inward, producing a dynamic culture where even the poorest person is able to rise as high as his or her abilities warrant.

## ORIGIN

The woman who would become Empress Mondas I started as the chamberlain of a minor baron in a kingdom now forgotten. She was talented in matters of government and administration, and skilled at fostering loyalty in others. She was, in fact, a powerful telepath who used her abilities to manage the complicated negotiations of her position and strengthen the baron’s diplomatic skills. In time, he became jealous of her capabilities and tried to have her killed.

The loyal captain of the guard warned her of the plan, and helped her escape along with a company of faithful men and women of varying talents. Outraged that her service should be repaid so, Mondas and her band rallied the countryside to overthrow the baron and seat her on the baronial throne. They were successful.

The remaining nobility of the kingdom was less than eager to have a rebellion put a commoner on the throne, however, and moved to retake the barony. Mondas was ready; she’d assembled a strong army quickly by promoting talent. That, coupled with a powerful artifact which enhanced her already-formidable telepathy, brought her victory.

Not content to sit and wait for the next attack, Mondas led her forces in a fast and precise campaign that took control of the kingdom in less than two years. When she finally took the highest throne in the land, she renamed the kingdom in honor of herself: Mondia.

Over the next three decades, neighboring kingdoms were added to the original Kingdom of Mondia, either through conquest or assimilation. The practice of promoting talent regardless of social standing was attractive to the large population of commoners; it offered them hope and the opportunity for themselves and their children to achieve wealth and power through service to the empress, as she was now called. Playing on this attraction, and using her armies and enhanced telepathy with deft precision, Mondas formed an empire for herself and her people.

When Mondas died, her son, Damas I, took the throne and the scepter of rule. Under the guidance of his father, who was once captain of the baronial guard, he continued to expand and consolidate the empire his mother had built. With a strong foundation and the continued efforts of later emperors, the Mondian Empire flourished. It remains strong today after almost a millennium.

## DEVELOPMENT

The complex history of the empire is well-documented. Here is a brief overview of its development, from the earliest days of Mondas I to the present.

### 1 YS (–832 Years): Mondas I Crowned Queen

Mondas I is crowned queen of the newly-renamed Kingdom of Mondia. She decrees that the worth of a person shall be found in his or her deeds, and that all shall achieve the greatness for which they are worthy.

### 4 YS (–829 Years): The Rule of Measure Enacted

By imperial decree, the formalized guidelines and structures of the Mondian meritocracy are put into action. Called the Rule of Measure, this decree sets out testing processes for determining the abilities and aptitudes of citizens, and provides structured avenues of advancement for those who are found to possess the proper qualities.

### 12 YS (–821 Years): Traem Conquered

The neighboring kingdom of Traem, which has been a constant threat to Mondia, is finally conquered after nearly ten years of constant war. The new subject state is renamed Traemond, and placed under military governorship. This is the first client state of the Mondian Empire.

### 15 YS to 37 YS (–818 to –796 Years): Consolidation of the Inner Provinces

These twenty-two years are occupied with constant battle and conquest, as the Mondian Empire brings the kingdoms of Werra and Nydia under the imperial banner. Traemond, Werramond, and Nydiamond form a defensive ring around Mondia, and become known as the Inner Provinces as new territories are added to the empire.

### 33 YS (–799 Years): Death of Mondas I

Mondas I dies of a wasting illness. Her son, Damas I, ascends the imperial throne.

### 57 YS (–775 Years): Founding of the Mindguard

An aging Damas I, fearing assassins and rebels, founds the elite order of the Mindguard, a cadre of psions and psychic warriors, to act as his personal bodyguard. In

## NEW MAJOR ARTIFACT: THE IMPERIAL SCEPTER

Some claim Mondas crafted the *Imperial Scepter* herself, while others claim it was a gift from the gods, showing their approval of the new social order. Most respected historians suspect the scepter lay forgotten and ignored in some vault or treasury, its power unrevealed until it was picked up by a telepath.

The scepter is a two-foot shaft of faceted amethyst, an inch in diameter. Each end is capped with a three-inch golden sphere etched with complex spirals and curlicues. In the hands of most people, it is little more

than a sumptuous piece of regalia, but it has a profound augmenting effect on telepaths.

If held in the hand of anyone with a psionic telepathy power, the scepter's true nature awakens. It provides a +4 enhancement bonus to Charisma, and increases the save DC of all telepathy powers of the wielder by +8. It also grants one wielder per day an additional 20 power points.

years to come, the original complement of twenty will swell to over a thousand as the Mindguard takes on a broader role as imperial troubleshooters.

### **119 YS to 173 YS (–713 to –659 Years): The First Border Campaigns**

Having fully assimilated the Inner Provinces, the Mondian Empire turns its attention outward to the bordering nations. Over the next fifty-four years, the empire sends excursion forces out in all directions, probing its neighbors for weakness and annexing poorly-defended territory. When the empire has increased in size by nearly fifty percent, it ceases its provocation, and turns its attention inward to consolidate and strengthen its holdings. This sets the pattern for the next six hundred years: a period of tentative expansion followed by a period of consolidation and self-examination.

### **244 YS (–588 Years): Creation of the Gleaners**

To address complaints about unfair application of the Rule of Measure and the problems of increased population and territory, Empress Mondas III forms the Order of Gleaners. These specially-trained teachers and testers are given the mandate to travel the empire, testing all children according to the Rule of Measure, and securing the service of the worthy for the empire. This leads to the establishment of the Emperor's Coin, a payment to the families for children taken away to be trained.

### **259 YS to 300 YS (–573 to –532 Years): Second Border Campaigns**

Another phase of expansionism, followed by consolidation and regrouping. These campaigns are noteworthy as the first time full units of Mindguards, gathered through aggressive Gleaning, were fielded in combat. The Sword of Stars company, a unit consisting entirely of psychic warriors, is established during this time, and remains the most famous unit in the imperial military to this day.

### **318 YS (–514 Years): Act of Succession**

As he nears his death, the aging Emperor Garon II decides his children are unfit for the throne. He decrees his successor should be the most worthy of the Mindguard, as decided by a special series of tests and trials. Garon II then officially adopts the winner of these contests, a telepath named Mardelin, who changes his name to Garon III upon assuming the imperial throne. The Act of Succession is thus established as a legitimate avenue of succession. Since its inception, it will be enacted only twice more in the history of the empire.

### **372 YS (–460 Years): Mindblind Rebellion**

A number of families, tracing their ancestry back to the aristocracy of conquered states, gathers together in conspiracy to overthrow the imperial government. Their main grievance is the perceived favoritism given to those with a talent for psionics. Touting their movement as the only way to free “normal” folk from the tyranny of the empire and its Mindguard spies, the rebellion manages to attract a surprising level of support, primarily from families who feel slighted by the loss of historical power. The rebellion is short and not very bloody, ending with the exile of the rebels and any other citizens wishing to leave with them. The exiles establish a kingdom called Adelaseth, named for Adelas, the leader of the rebellion.

### **597 YS (–235 Years): The Repatriation**

More than two centuries after the Mindblind Rebellion, the king of Adelaseth, faced with a foundering economy, poor harvests, and general unrest stemming from poor standards of living, petitions to have his nation readmitted to the Mondian Empire. Emperor Garon VI grants the petition, with the provision that new leadership be brought into the suffering kingdom. Adelaseth becomes the newest province of the Mondian Empire.

### **605 YS to 674 YS (–227 to –158 Years): Third Border Campaigns**

Another round of expansion, fueled by large Gleanings from the newly-repatriated Adelaseth, occurs during this period. These campaigns face greater problems, however. Modest gains are made slowly, and the campaign runs out of steam before reaching its planned conclusion.

### **821 YS (–11 Years): Death of Tamal II**

After a reign of twenty years, Emperor Tamal II dies in a hunting accident. He is succeeded by his niece, Rinav III.

## CURRENT

This is what the Mondian Empire looks like today.

### **Empress Rinav III**

When Rinav III took the throne and the *Imperial Scepter*, she made it clear she planned to change the way things were done. She stepped up the frequency of the Gleaning and increased the Emperor's Coin for children

selected for training. This has led to a great swelling of the ranks of Imperial Service, including the Mindguard.

Such increases in Imperial Service generally precede a new round of border campaigns, but the empress has been using her larger forces to promote a program of public works instead. Roads and schools have been rebuilt and improved, and it's not uncommon to see companies of imperial soldiers helping farmers clear land, fight fires, or build aqueducts and dams.

These actions have done much to increase the empress' popularity with the common folk of the empire, though the previously elite military units are not as sanguine with menial duty. She has quieted the grumbles of the military with lectures on the responsibility of the rulers to the ruled, and parables about "nurturing the root of the tree that provides the fruit." The tensions between the empress and her military have not reached dangerous levels, but may before long.

### Gleaning

Gleaners are roaming the empire in record numbers these days, visiting even the smallest villages in their quest to find the most gifted citizens and claim them for imperial service. Rinav III has increased the price paid to the families for children taken by the Gleaners, which has increased the number of families seeking out Gleaners to test their children. This, coupled with public awareness campaigns showing the opportunities for advancement available in the Imperial Service, has led to record numbers of children entering the service of the empress.

This has also led to a reduction of available labor in rural areas, as Gleaners take more children from farm families. There is now a stable demand for farm laborers and seasonal workers, which provides a new avenue of employment. It also creates a demand that cannot be fully supplied during planting and harvest seasons; this is where the expanded imperial units come into play by helping out where needed, keeping a high profile in the community, and showcasing the benefits of Gleaning.

### The Mindguard

Over the centuries, the Mindguard Order has filled many different functions. Under Rinav III, it's grown in membership and taken on the role of imperial troubleshooters, in addition to their more traditional tasks as bodyguards. It's not uncommon to see small units of Mindguards going about the empire on various missions.

The visible Mindguard accounts for only about half the order's membership, however. Many of the Mindguard

operate in secret, ferreting out information for the empress, dealing with threats of rebellion, and gathering intelligence both within and without the empire. Most people assume these secretive Mindguards exist, but have not personally (or knowingly) encountered any. Because of the benevolent public face of the Mindguard and the empress, the population at large doesn't much worry about this de facto secret police force, but the potential for tyrannical exploitation certainly exists.

### The Border Provinces

Though the current borders of the empire were established one hundred and seventy years ago, the border provinces are still considered newcomers, just coming to terms with membership in the empire. A few resistant holdovers still attempt to drum up enough enthusiasm among the populace to regain independence, but the prosperity and opportunity the common folk enjoy makes such revolutionary action more or less ineffectual.

Still, there are isolated reports of Gleaners being ambushed, of imperial projects being sabotaged, and of other minor acts of insurrection. This has required a fairly substantial military presence in the border provinces, as well as a larger-than-normal secret Mindguard presence among the citizenry.

### The Sword of Stars

It's the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Sword of Stars company, an elite unit of psychic warriors formed during the second border campaigns. This unit earned distinction in those campaigns and grew to become the ideal to which all other Mondian imperial units aspire. By imperial decree, its numbers are kept to 200, so competition among psychic warriors is fierce whenever an opening appears in the ranks.

The Sword of Stars serves mainly in ceremonial functions now: parading in the capital, guarding imperial buildings, and escorting important diplomats and envoys. The training regimen is still strict and taxing, and off-duty members engage in mock combats and assaults to keep in fighting shape. Still, some of the appeal and glory has faded from the unit, and old-timers talk about how far things have fallen.

For their 300th anniversary, the Sword of Stars company is preparing a number of special parades and demonstrations. The capital is awash in bunting and streamers in the unit's colors — blue and silver — and unit members are always seen in dress uniform as they go about their business. The celebration promises to be bigger even than Rinav III's ten-year jubilee last summer.

## Temple Conclaves

The temple conclaves are a relatively new phenomenon, growing out of an old imperial tradition. The empire as an entity is carefully secular, refusing to espouse any faith as the official imperial religion, while allowing all the religions of the client states to practice as usual so long as they don't interfere in imperial politics. This has allowed a wide range of religions to spread throughout the empire, all of them equally taxed.

In recent years, the temples have been talking to each other, forming loose alliances and looking for a way to make some changes in the empire. They've started lobbying the imperial bureaucracy to change the laws about taxation and temple involvement in politics, walking a thin line between activism and illegal political interference. Like-minded faiths have banded together to form larger, more-vocal special interest groups.

So far, Rinav III has allowed the temples some leeway as they seek to reform imperial law and practice, but she keeps a close eye on all the alliances and competing factions. She is careful never to show favoritism, always adopting the best suggestions of the temples, no matter which faction they come from. One thing she is adamant about is the taxation issue; this is a significant sore point with the churches.

## LOCATIONS

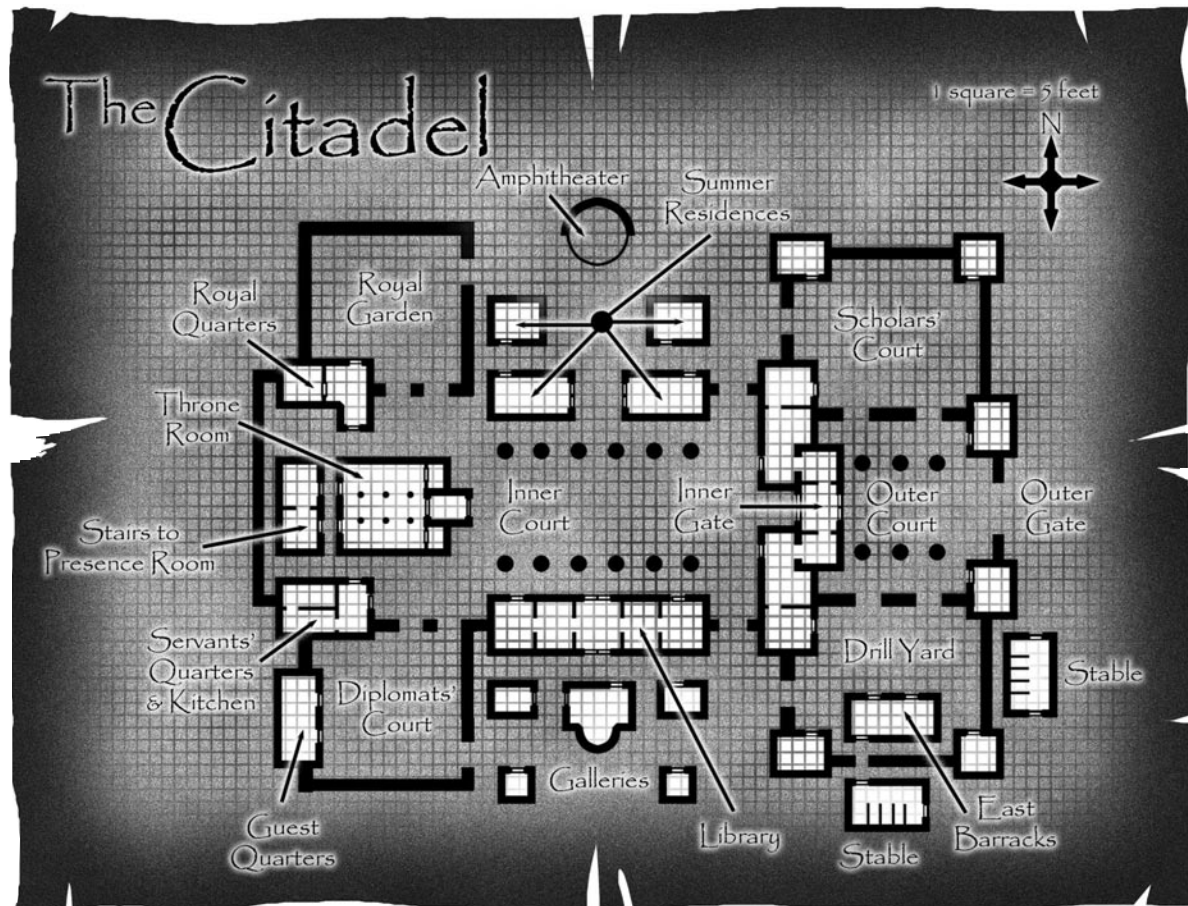
Though the empire is large and varied, the following locations are indicative of its character.

### The Capital

The center of the Mondian Empire is the capital of the kingdom of Mondia. This is the city where Mondas I was first crowned queen, and has remained the capital city since. With the increasing scope and wealth of the empire, the city has expanded to meet the needs of an enlarging bureaucracy.

The walls around the capital are truly a marvel of defensive engineering. The outer walls stand nearly 200 feet tall, with 400-foot towers dotting the length of the curtain. A 500-foot killing ground slopes up 100 feet from the outer wall to the inner wall, which is just as formidable. The killing ground itself is riddled with trenches and rows of sharpened stakes. Six gates pierce the walls, each enclosed in a massive gatehouse standing as tall as the towers, with layered gates, doors, and guard posts, liberally dotted with murder holes.

Overall, the architecture of the capital tends toward the monolithic and ostentatious, as it's designed to demon-



strate the power and prosperity of the empire. Massive statues of idealized men and women line the street and peer from the ledges of buildings, guiding the populace to aspire and excel. One's first view of the capital is definitely awe-inspiring.

The Imperial Palace is the heart of the city; it's a veritable mountain of turrets and towers, housing the imperial government and bureaucracy. Spread out around the palace are the headquarters of the Mindguard and the Gleaners, plus the barracks of the Sword of Stars company. These three compounds are intermixed with broad plazas, parks, fountains, and avenues open to the public and used by the imperial forces for exercises and drills.

The next ring of the city houses minor bureaucratic offices, libraries, academies, schools, temples, and a few wealthy manor houses. These are surrounded by lesser manors, high-end shops, minor temples, and a few private schools and training academies. The rest of the city is given over to residences, smaller shops, warehouses, and larger industries.

Offensive industries, such as tanneries, dye houses, and paper mills, sit outside the walls of the city.

### The Citadel

If the capital is the political heart of the empire, the Citadel is certainly the spiritual heart. It is the rebuilt and remodeled baronial castle where Mondas I once worked as a chamberlain and the first fortress to house the forces that built the Mondian Empire. Due to its history as the staging ground for the rebellion that would found Mondia, the Citadel is viewed with almost mystic reverence by the imperial citizens.

The Citadel is in an out-of-the-way province of Mondia, off the beaten path. Only those in Imperial Service are welcome to visit it, and it is the destination of many a pilgrimage by new or retiring imperial officials. The town around the Citadel caters to these visitors, providing rooms and food for those without a high enough rank to rate accommodation in the Citadel itself.

The fortress bears little resemblance to the baronial manor it once was. The simple motte-and-bailey castle has been replaced by ornate stonework plazas and columned masonry buildings, all watched over by giant statues of famous emperors, empresses and heroes of the empire. It's no longer easily defensible, but constant patrols of military and Mindguard forces keep things fairly safe.

Inside the Citadel are summer homes for the highest-ranking officials of the empire, extensive libraries and collections of art, training areas and armories, treasuries and guest chambers. The heart of the place is a room deep



underground, called the Presence Chamber, where the Mindguard meets for their secret rituals and initiations.

The Presence Chamber is a round, domed chamber with a floor covered by elaborate mosaics of semi-precious stones arranged into a map of the empire. The ceiling is also a mosaic, depicting the constellations as chains of diamonds. The only seat in the room is a rough-hewn stone chair that is occupied only by the emperor or empress when he or she presides over Mindguard rituals.

### The Inner Provinces

The Inner Provinces are traditionally considered to be Mondia, Traemond, Nydiamond, and Werramond. These have been part of the Mondian Empire the longest, and are considered to be the most cosmopolitan, refined part of the empire. Being close to the center of the empire imparts a subtle sense of superiority to the inhabitants.

The Inner Provinces are also the heart of political intrigue in the empire. With so much gathered power, the Inner Provinces are rife with the inevitable scheming and jockeying that occurs in the corridors of the mighty in every nation. The nature of the meritocracy gives Mondian intrigue an air of Darwinian competition, as each party tries to prove they are deserving of more power and responsibility.

Anyone is welcome to join in these power games, but inexperienced players are quickly sacrificed to advance others' positions. The counterpart tactic of displaying one's worth is to reveal your opponent's flaws; displaying another's weakness is often substituted for showing off one's own strength. One faction in the imperial bureaucracy even keeps count of the number of people each official has ruined, and awards a degree of honor to the high-scorers.

The placid, refined atmosphere of the Inner Provinces masks a dangerous, predatory environment of intrigue and politics.

### The Border Provinces

The outlying areas of the empire are traditionally known as the Border Provinces. They have a reputation for rusticity that is not entirely deserved, though the reputation attracts the kinds of people that make the reputation true.

Most of the main population centers are under imperial military governorship, and will remain so until the nation has proved able to uphold imperial regulations and values on its own. This creates a rather rough-and-tumble approach to law enforcement and life in general. Many aspiring heroes seek out the Border Provinces in order to make their fortunes in a less-tightly controlled territory.

There is a thriving smuggling trade in the Border Provinces, as well. The proximity to non-imperial nations and markets means there's money to be made moving goods and people back and forth without official scrutiny. Of course, where there's smuggling, there are customs officials trying to put an end to it — or get a cut of the profits.

The mix of up-and-coming heroes and casual criminals that gravitates to the Border Provinces creates an exciting and dangerous social dynamic for adventurers and travelers to explore.

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## PERSONALITIES

### EMPRESS RINAV III

#### Reforming Empress

"We have the ability to improve life for everyone in the empire. It is only proper that we do so."

Empress Rinav III took the throne eleven years ago, and has since expended a great deal of effort and resources improving the lives of the empire's average citizens. She is a sincere, dedicated leader, who has given up much to better her nation.

Her reforms are not universally popular: her critics claim she is penalizing the resourceful, successful, productive citizens of the empire to benefit those less valuable to the nation. This, they claim, is counter to the Rule of Measure. Coupled with the less-than-glamorous duties she's been assigning to the imperial legions, this has led the wealthy and powerful to criticize her reign.

Rinav doesn't care about that, though. She points to her increasing popularity among the common folk as proof that she is doing the right thing. Time will tell if she is right.

### TYPICAL MINDGUARD PSION

#### Faithful Servant of the Empire

"Great achievement brings great responsibility. Great responsibility brings great reward."

The hero of the common imperial citizens, a Mindguard represents the best and brightest of the empire. Each is a favored servant of the empress, the first choice for dangerous missions, and the embodiment of the Rule of Measure. Everyone wants to be a Mindguard.

 **EMPRESS RINAV III**
**12th-Level Human Psion (Telepath)**

CR 12; Medium humanoid; HD 12d4+12; hp 47; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 (+2 Dex, +3 *amulet of natural armor*), touch 12, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +6; Grp +6; Atk +6 melee (1d8, shortspear) or +8 ranged (1d8, shortspear); Full Atk +6/+1 melee (1d8, shortspear) or +8/+3 ranged (1d8, shortspear); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Psionics; AL NG; SV Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +13; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 20, Wis 17, Cha 20

**Skills:** Bluff +20, Concentration +16, Diplomacy +20, Gather Information +20, Knowledge (history) +20, Knowledge (psionics) +20, Psicraft +20, Sense Motive +18

**Feats:** Enlarge Power, Greater Power Penetration, Greater Psionic Endowment, Inquisitor, Iron Will, Narrow Mind, Power Penetration, Psionic Endowment, Psionic Meditation

**Languages:** Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven

**Psionics (Sp):** (126 power points) All powers manifest as per a 12th-level psion. Saving throw DCs, where applicable, are equal to 15 + the power's level.

1st Level — *catfall, conceal thoughts, distract, empathy, mindlink, missive, psionic charm, psionic daze, sense link, telepathic projection*

2nd Level — *brain lock, elfsight, psionic suggestion, read thoughts*

3rd Level — *crisis of breath, false sensory input, hostile empathic transfer*

4th Level — *psionic dominate, psionic modify memory, thieving mindlink*

5th Level — *metaconcert, mind probe*

6th Level — *mind switch*

**Equipment:** *Body adjustment tattoo, sending power stone, crystal mask of mindarmor, amulet of natural armor +3, ring of stabilization, Imperial Scepter.*

 **TYPICAL MINDGUARD PSION**
**6th-Level Human Psion (Telepath)/  
3rd-Level Mindguard**

CR 9; Medium humanoid; HD 6d4+3d6+33; hp 66; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 (+2 Dex, +4 chain shirt), touch 12, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +4; Grp +4; Atk +5 melee (1d8+1, longsword) or +6 ranged (1d8, light crossbow); Full Atk +5 melee (1d8+1, longsword) or +6 ranged (1d8, light crossbow); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Psionics; SQ Mastery, Power Resistance 18, Prowess; AL LG; SV Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +12; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 17, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 10

**Skills:** Autohypnosis +6, Concentration +12, Gather Information +9, Knowledge (psionics) +10, Psicraft +10, Sense Motive +8

**Feats:** Combat Manifestation, Great Fortitude, Iron Will, Martial Weapon Proficiency (longsword), Mind Over Body, Power Penetration, Psionic Body

**Languages:** Common, Elven

**Mastery:** A Mastered power can be used with an expenditure of one less power point than normal, and all rolls made with that power receive a +2 competence bonus. Power point costs cannot be reduced below 1 power point. Powers marked with an asterisk, below, are mastered.

**Power Resistance (Ex):** Power Resistance is the psionic equivalent of Spell Resistance; it is the Difficulty Class an opposing psionic character must overcome with a manifester level check to affect this character with certain psionic powers. This character has Power Resistance 18.

**Prowess (Ex):** A 3rd-level Mindguard gains a +2 bonus on all manifester level checks to overcome another creature's Power Resistance.

**Psionics (Sp):** (76 power points). All powers are manifested as per a 9th-level psion. Saving throw DCs, where applicable, are equal to 11 + the power's level. Powers marked with an asterisk are mastered.

1st Level — *defensive precognition, hammer, inertial armor, mindlink, offensive prescience, psionic charm*

2nd Level — *aversion, brain lock, energy adaptation, feat leech, read thoughts, sustenance*

3rd Level — *crisis of breath, dispel psionics\**

4th Level — *correspond, psionic dominate*

5th Level — *catapsi, metaconcert, mind probe*

**Equipment:** Chain shirt, longsword, light crossbow, 10 bolts, *body adjustment tattoo, cloak of resistance +1, crystal mask of mindarmor.*



## NEW PRESTIGE CLASS: MINDGUARD

The Mindguard is the ultimate achievement for a Mondian citizen. Only the best are accepted to training for the Mindguard units, and they must already have shown some accomplishment with psionics in order to get in. Once he is accepted into the Mindguard, a character takes his place in the shared dreams of the populace.

Mindguard training emphasizes the effective use of psionic powers, especially with attack and defense modes. Characters are taught to make the most of their strengths and to temper their weaknesses, all while undergoing an intense physical training regimen. Mindguards don't rely solely on their psychic power; they hold their own in mundane combat, too.

**Hit Die:** d6

### Requirements

To qualify to become a Mindguard, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

**Base Attack Bonus:** +3

**Psicraft:** 6 ranks

**Feats:** Power Penetration, one of Great Fortitude, Iron Will, or Lightning Reflexes.

**Weapon Proficiency:** Proficient in at least one martial weapon.

**Psionics:** The ability to manifest at least one 2nd-level power.

**Special:** Prospective Mindguards must pass a battery of tests and challenges designed to weed out those who are less than capable. These include numerous mock combats and intellectual challenges.

### Class Skills

The Mindguard's class skills are Autohypnosis (Wis), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (psionics) (Int), Profession (Wis), Psicraft (Int), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** Mindguards are proficient with all simple weapons and with light and medium armor.

**Prowess:** A Mindguard receives extensive training in psionic combat. At 1st level, she receives a +1 bonus to all manifest level checks to overcome a creature's Power Resistance. This bonus increases to +2 at 3rd level, +3 at 5th level, +4 at 7th level, and finally to +5 at 9th level. She also receives a Power Resistance rating of her own at each of these levels, equal to 15 + her Mindguard level.

**+1 Level of Existing Class:** Mindguards continue with their normal psionic training as they progress in this prestige class. At each level, the Mindguard gains power points per day and discovers powers as if she had gained a level in a psionic class she already possesses. Likewise, her maximum power level rises as if she were gaining levels in her previous psionic class. The Mindguard gains no other additional benefits from her previous psionic classes.

**Mastery:** Beginning at second level, and every second level thereafter, the Mindguard gains mastery over one power he or she has already discovered. The selected power can be used with an expenditure of one less power point than normal, and all rolls made with that power receive a +2 competence bonus. This bonus stacks with itself, and the Mindguard can choose to master the same power more than once, gaining increased benefits with it. Power point costs cannot be reduced below 1 power point.

| Class Level | Base Attack | Fort Save | Ref Save | Will Save | Special | Psionics                   |
|-------------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|---------|----------------------------|
| 1st         | +0          | +0        | +2       | +2        | Prowess | +1 Level of Existing Class |
| 2nd         | +1          | +0        | +3       | +3        | Mastery | +1 Level of Existing Class |
| 3rd         | +1          | +1        | +3       | +3        | Prowess | +1 Level of Existing Class |
| 4th         | +2          | +1        | +4       | +4        | Mastery | +1 Level of Existing Class |
| 5th         | +2          | +1        | +4       | +4        | Prowess | +1 Level of Existing Class |
| 6th         | +3          | +2        | +5       | +5        | Mastery | +1 Level of Existing Class |
| 7th         | +3          | +2        | +5       | +5        | Prowess | +1 Level of Existing Class |
| 8th         | +4          | +2        | +6       | +6        | Mastery | +1 Level of Existing Class |
| 9th         | +4          | +3        | +6       | +6        | Prowess | +1 Level of Existing Class |
| 10th        | +5          | +3        | +7       | +7        | Mastery | +1 Level of Existing Class |

# PLAYING A MONDIAN IMPERIAL

Despite the number of different nations and territories that make up Mondian lands, the experience of life is roughly the same across the empire. That commonality of experience is what forms the cultural bonds and basis of the empire, giving it a distinct cultural identity.



Characters from the Inner Provinces tend to be of lawful alignment, and of non-martial class: wizards, sorcerers, clerics, rogues, and bards are typical. Characters from the Border Provinces tend to be of chaotic alignment, and more martial tendency: fighters, rangers, and paladins are more common. Psions and psychic warriors come from anywhere, and almost all are trained after Gleaning to have a lawful outlook. Rural areas produce druids and rangers, urban areas produce rogues and wizards. The other classes show up more evenly distributed. Monks are something of a special case, as the discipline they embody is highly valued by the empire, and many characters in Imperial Service pick up a level or two along with their normal training.

## CHILDHOOD

Childhood in the empire is viewed as a time of preparation. Parents have been taught that the potential of their children is established in childhood, and that they have a responsibility to help their offspring prepare for Gleaning and potential Imperial Service. Training children is considered to be the gift owed to them by their family.

All members of the family who live nearby take part in training children. They each teach the children whatever they themselves are best at. Wealthy or urban families often make use of schools and academies to help prepare their children for Gleaning. Games between children are generally competitive, emphasizing speed, skill, and cleverness. Riddles and fables with lessons also make up a large part of the childhood experience in the empire.

This is not to imply that children in the Mondian Empire don't have any fun. The idea of fun, in the minds of the Mondians, is tied inextricably with achievement; winning a race is fun, answering a riddle is fun, reading a new story is fun, building a playhouse is fun. Praise comes with accomplishment, and self-esteem grows.

Of course, the problem is that not all children can achieve. Some are less skilled or strong, and they suffer defeat after defeat, failure after failure. In a society built upon the ideal of accomplishment, these less-skilled individuals often turn bitter and sullen, their envy breeding a deep dissatisfaction with their lives.

Childhood is considered to be over once a child has been tested by Gleaners, whether or not the child is selected for Imperial Service. In out-of-the-way settlements where the Gleaners are more rare, parents usually hold a small party for their children around the age of twelve to fourteen, declaring them adults.

## NAMES

Names in the empire follow a fairly strict pattern. Children have four-syllable names given to them by their parents shortly after birth. These names are often just pleasing collections of syllables with no meaning behind them, though the adult name of an accomplished person is often incorporated into a child's name in the hopes he will share in the abilities of the adult. There's no distinction made between names for males and females.

When a child becomes an adult, she chooses two consecutive syllables of her name to use thereafter. Thus, Terabetha may become Tera, Rabeth, or Betha, depending on her preferences. Close friends and intimate associates generally use three syllables as a term of endearment.

It's considered rude or presumptuous for anyone but a family member to use an adult's childhood name, and even family members normally use the three-syllable version. Publicly addressing someone by his or her childhood name is a serious insult.

## GLEANING

Gleaning is the pivotal point of childhood — the moment when one is considered to pass from being a child to being an adult. It serves as a combination of recruitment and aptitude testing; even those not selected for Imperial Service have their strengths and skills assessed and their futures determined. Gleaning sets the course for the rest of a person's life, directly or indirectly.

Gleaners travel in groups of five or six, each specially trained to test a certain category of abilities. Tests require children to recite facts and answer questions, solve riddles and puzzles, participate in physical contests like races or mock combats with staves and practice swords, demonstrate reading and arithmetic skills, and attempt any other tasks a Gleaner deems necessary. One mem-

ber of the Gleaning party is a psion skilled in spotting children with psionic potential, who are always selected for Imperial Service.

When Rinav III took the throne, the Emperor's Coin — the fee paid to parents of children selected for Imperial Service — was increased and a scale based on the child's aptitude at the time of the Gleaning was implemented. The empress minted a new series of coins specifically for use as the Emperor's Coin: the Imperials. Children taken for military or clerk service net their parents a silver Imperial, while those with magical potential or powers of personal faith earn a gold Imperial, and those with psionic potential fetch a platinum Imperial.

Children who aren't selected for Imperial Service are given a report of their strengths and aptitudes to guide them through the rest of their lives.

### IMPERIAL SERVICE

Imperial Service covers a wide variety of tasks, from military to administrative, at all levels of the imperial government. Clerks, soldiers, wizards, sorcerers, priests, artisans, messengers, scribes, politicians, and psions all fit into neat little roles in the imperial architecture — roles prepared and refined throughout the history of the empire.

Most of those in Imperial Service are selected at Gleaning, but an avenue exists for people to join the service later in life. Anyone, at any time, may come to the capital and challenge for position in any branch of Imperial Service. These challenges vary with the position sought: military service requires a demonstration of weapon skill, for example, while scrivener service requires extensive written testing. Latecomers to Imperial Service often stand apart from those who were Gleaned, simply because of the difference of life experience, but sometimes achieve high rank through strong personal motivations.

A term of Imperial Service lasts for ten years, at the end of which a serviceperson may choose to muster out with a pension based on length of service, or sign on for another five-year term of service. To rejoin Imperial Service after mustering out requires a new challenge for position.

### MONEY

Four denominations of coin see standard usage in the empire, with three special coins seeing additional usage. The common coins are copper bits, silver tithes, gold wheels, and platinum crowns. Each coin is worth ten of the coin of next-lower value, so crowns are worth ten wheels, one hundred tithes, or one thousand bits.

Normal coins are stamped on one side with a profile of the emperor or empress reigning at the time of minting, and on the other with the seal of the imperial treasury.

In addition to the normal coins, there are the Imperials, which are paid to families of Gleaned children. Silver Imperials are worth 35 gold wheels — roughly the amount a laborer would earn in a year. Gold Imperials are worth 175 gold wheels, and platinum Imperials are worth 875 gold wheels. These coins are minted on rectangular cards of steel, coated with the proper metal, and marked with the wax seal of the empire. They are redeemable only at imperial banks, garrisons, and chartered trading houses, and only with the seal intact.

### RELIGION

The imperial government is careful to avoid favoring any religion. The official doctrine of the empire is that faith should be first in oneself and one's abilities, and only then in any divine entity. While not atheistic (the existence of the divine is too clear for that), the empire is strictly and militantly secular.

That said, a wide variety of faiths and temples flourish in the empire, all enjoying equal protection as long as they don't violate imperial law. The empire welcomes — and taxes — all religions within its borders. The choice of faith is left to the individual.

Priests in Imperial Service walk a fine line, using their divinely granted powers to help the empire while adhering to strict regulations concerning proselytizing and forbidding favoritism towards particular temples. Still, the abilities of priests are valuable enough that some allowances are made to maintain their service.

### MAGIC

Magic is a respected and valued resource in the empire. Those with the discipline or innate talent to master it are afforded respect second only to that of high imperial officers or masters of psionics. Magical academies are prevalent in all large population centers, and there is constant experimentation with the development of new spells and techniques.

One aspect of magic isn't viewed as rosily, though, because of the emphasis on personal achievement, there is something of a stigma attached to using magical items, unless one has made them oneself. It's viewed as cheating, in a way, and that means that most people aren't willing to use them — or at least to admit using them — as it's tantamount to admitting that one is not good enough on one's own.

## PSIONICS

Psionics are the pinnacle of personal achievement in the Mondian Empire — the direct imposition of personal will on the world, without divine intermediary or mystical techniques. Mastering this ability is the ultimate expression of personal achievement, and psions and psychic warriors are the heroes of the common folk of the empire.

Among these exemplars, the Mindguard stand head and shoulders above even other psionic practitioners. They have devoted their lives and training to perfecting their control of their psionic powers, and placing these powers at the service of the empire. Stories and songs praising the accomplishments of the Mindguard are common fare in taverns and inns, and children play at being Mindguards, vanquishing the foes of the empire.

There is some resentment about this from those without the gift or discipline for psionics. Those with psionics get the best of everything, and those without must make do with the rest, say the agitators. It's this type of resentment that led to the Mindblind Rebellion, and it still simmers under the surface of the empire.

## ART

Most visual art in the empire deals with the idealized human form. Giant statues feature prominently in the architecture of every major governmental building, and paintings and mosaics of people engaged in competition are everywhere.

The literary arts run towards hero stories and tales of important historical figures. Songs and poems of great accomplishments are also popular, and even simple love stories are transformed into great challenges and competitions.

Clothing and jewelry run to the simple, clean aesthetic, emphasizing the human form rather than enhancing it or detracting from it.

## LAW

Imperial law is arcane in the extreme, having had nearly a millennium to grow convoluted. In the beginning, it was based on a simple premise: what you can make, build, or create is yours to do with as you wish. This is

still the underlying principle, but it has been refined and hedged round with special cases and exceptions.

The greatest crimes in the eyes of the empire are murder, child abuse, and maiming, all of which deprive victims of their chance to achieve their true potential. These crimes carry the death penalty, though there are exceptions made for self-defense and extenuating circumstances. Other punishments include fines, lashes, forced labor, and exile. The Mondian Empire maintains no prisons, so exiled citizens may be the first encounter outsiders have with the Mondian population.

## RACES

The majority of the empire's population is human, and by a larger-than-normal margin. Other races are viewed as having unfair advantages, such as longer lives, and so must achieve more to receive the same respect. There is no overt prejudice against other races, just a sort of well-meaning condescension. Individuals of all races are welcomed into the empire, as long as they are willing to pull their own weight, as defined by the empire.

## ADVENTURERS

Adventuring is popular in the empire. Not only is the adventuring life a good way to test oneself and develop one's skills, it also serves as a second occupation for those who have left Imperial Service. If a child is not taken by the Gleaners but still wishes to undertake Imperial Service, he or she may embark on an adventuring career in preparation for future challenges for position. This is considered a good way to gain experience and skill, and to measure one's own capabilities.

Many Mondians, mustering out after a term of Imperial Service, find their skills suited to the adventuring life — and little else.



Characters leaving Imperial Service typically have at least one level in a PC class related to their branch of service: those taken as children by the Gleaners may finish their first term as 2nd-level characters; those who join Imperial Service later in life usually have at least one character level when they join, and several more when they muster out.

## ADVENTURE SEEDS EMPIRE'S HEART

Use these ideas to bring your PCs into the Mondian Empire or to bring the empire into your campaign.

### SEEKING GLORY

Looking to build their reputations and fortunes, the PCs — a group of low-level adventurers — head to the Border Provinces, determined to track down one of the prevalent smuggling rings. Locals have seen this sort of thing before, and lead the characters on a merry chase, for one of several reasons:

- The local economy of the town where the characters wash up is totally dependent on smuggling, and the townsfolk don't want to lose the revenue it brings in.
- There are several competing smuggling operations in town, and each is trying to steer the investigation towards its competitors, to thin the field.
- No one really knows who's doing the smuggling, but everyone has their own suspicions, feuds, vendettas, and alliances to protect.
- There is no smuggling, but the earnest young adventurers are the best entertainment the locals have had in months. It gets boring out in the sticks.

Foreigners aren't allowed to visit the Citadel under any circumstances. Military and Mindguard detachments patrol the approaches, and security within the Citadel itself is very tight. This is partly to protect the treasure houses and museums, but more to guard the honor and pride of the empire by keeping the Citadel secure from profane eyes.

Of course, that tells foreigners there must be something valuable hidden away in the Citadel. Nothing attracts foreign adventurers like a top-secret treasure trove they're forbidden to visit. Might as well put a big sign on it saying, "Thieves Welcome."

Getting in is a challenge. Strangers are watched carefully anywhere near the Citadel. Those showing up in the villages around the Citadel are immediately detained and questioned. Those caught on Citadel property may be killed without question. Traps, spies, magical protections, alarms, and ever-present Mindguard patrols all conspire to defeat intruders.

Are the PCs good-aligned thieves on a vital mission the Mondians wouldn't approve of, or are they black-hearted scum looking to humiliate the meritocracy? Or perhaps the PCs are on the trail of a villain the Mondians can't fathom: a turncoat Mindguard with a plan to rob the Citadel himself. Can they stop this villain without getting killed themselves?

# CHAPTER SEVEN

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# KEL TAERA

*I remember the world as it was, when I was a creature of flesh and blood. I remember citadels of glass and silver, streets filled with magic and music. The world of today is but a drab shadow, dust and bones of the empire we once knew. Today our kingdom is not even remembered in song or story. But we remain. Heroes, kings, and wizards, the last lords of the forgotten kingdom. We have been apart for too long, trapped in our own minds and left to forget our glorious history and our own great deeds. Now it is time for us to come together once more — and to make our world anew.*

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## OVERVIEW

The human kingdom of Kel Taera revered its heroes, both the wise and the warriors. The wizards of the realm found a way to preserve the spirits of its greatest citizens in indestructible gemstones. For generations these ancient souls were the guides and guardians of the kingdom. Then the mystical treachery of a hostile nation bound these souls in slumber and the kingdom fell to fire and plague. Over the course of thousands of years, Kel Taera has been forgotten. But the *spirit orbs* remain, and in recent years the ancient curse has finally faded. The heroes of Kel Taera have awoken into a new and unfamiliar world, and they intend to reestablish their forgotten kingdom.

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## PLACEMENT

Kel Taera does not need a place on a map — it needs a moment in history. It should predate any known civilization; it is so old that even the long-lived elves have forgotten the myths of its existence. Kel Taera should have covered a vast area at the height of its power, as this will allow you to spread the orbs across the world. However, if this does not fit with your world, the orbs may have been scattered by barbarians and raiders preying on the corpse of Kel Taera.

While Kel Taera itself no longer exists, you should determine where the orbs are gathering. The Adventure Seeds section at the end of this chapter examines this in more detail.

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## HISTORY

Legends live on long after flesh and bone. Songs and stories can out-last stone walls and mighty monuments. But time destroys all things, and eventually even the greatest deeds fall into shadow. So it was with the kingdom of Kel Taera. Once it spanned an entire continent. Today its citadels and citizens are co-mingled dust, and even the name of the kingdom is known only to the most dedicated students of history.

## ORIGIN

Many centuries before their downfall, the Taeran magi developed a technique for preserving the minds and souls of their greatest heroes: they trapped their honored spirits in indestructible crystalline prisons. Flesh is weak, life-restoring spells cannot preserve the body beyond its natural lifespan — and the Taerans did not want to see



## SEVEN CIVILIZATIONS

their heroes trapped in aging and decrepit flesh. The *spirit orbs* could be embedded in the bodies of living creatures, and the citizens of Kel Taera were more than willing to sacrifice their bodies to serve as vessels for the heroes of the past. For generations, Kel Taera was ruled by these benevolent immortals, who moved from host to host whenever flesh fell prey to the ravages of time or disease. The few scholars who have uncovered images of Kel Taera have come to the mistaken conclusion that it was a society that valued youth above all things, as images often show children leading armies or sitting in judgment — in fact, those children were vessels for the ancient spirits that the society truly revered.

### DEVELOPMENT

The civilization of Kel Taera lasted for well over a thousand years. Over time, the empire spread to dominate a large section of the world. Blinded by a sense of cultural superiority, the Taerans truly believed that they were giving a great gift to those that they conquered. But there were those who did not want the gift of Taeran rule. The turning point in the history of the kingdom came when Kel Taera moved to annex the nation of Ixia. This small theocracy was no match for the armies of Kel Taera, but its priests were determined to make the Taerans pay for victory. The priests of Ixia gathered in a great conclave

and sacrificed their own lives to call a terrible curse down on the Taeran heroes. This dark magic trapped the spirits of the ancient heroes within the *spirit orbs*, making them unable to interact with the outside world. Without the guidance and power of its heroes, Kel Taera fell into chaos. Provinces rose up in revolt, and plague, famine, and war dragged the kingdom into the dust.

Within centuries, Kel Taera had passed out of history. But the *spirit orbs* remained. Some were hidden in warded vaults. Others fell into the hands of barbarians or foreigners who had no idea of their true nature. Over the millennia, the orbs drifted across the world, with the slumbering spirits of the ancient heroes still trapped inside.

### CURRENT

With the passage of time, even deities can die. The god of ancient Ixia is long forgotten, and the power of his curse finally guttered and died. After slumbering for thousands of years, the *spirit orbs* awoke. Most were helpless, trapped in vaults or treasure hoards. But a few were able to touch the minds of mortals with their telepathic powers, luring hosts with promises of glory or mystical might. Now, newly encased in flesh, the heroes of the forgotten kingdom are gathering. In the near term, their most important goal is finding the remaining orbs and providing them with hosts. But in the future the heroes intend to rebuild Kel Taera, bringing the glory of the ancient empire back into the modern world.

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### LOCATIONS

The orb-bearers are not tied to any specific location. As the orbs come together they will begin to establish strongholds and turn the local population to their cause. It is up to you to decide where the orbs take root and how quickly their influence spreads. How to decide this is discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.





## PERSONALITIES

There are approximately 120 *spirit orbs* in existence. Each one contains the essence of a legendary hero, and each one has a unique personality and a history filled with remarkable exploits. A few of the heroes of Kel Taera are described below, along with shorthand statistics for their current hosts.

### KES LAEROSH

**LG Male Dwarf Clr16, Ego 30**

"These few peasants will be the foundation of our revived nation!"

Laerosh was one of the first souls to be placed in a *spirit orb*. Laerosh was one of the founders of Kel Taera, and he was renowned both for battling fiends and vampire kings, and for resolving disputes and bringing peace to feuding clans. He served as a hierophant as well as a king, and he cares about the spiritual and physical well-being of his subjects. He firmly believes the common people do not know what is best for their bodies and souls; as a representative of the gods, it is his duty to provide Taeran order and stability to the modern world. His host is a dwarven miner who found a cache of *spirit orbs* in a hidden vault.

### MAE NIA

**LG Human Female Sor6, Ego 22**

"I can show you a world of adventure and excitement!"

Nia was King Laerosh's chief battle mage in the war of foundation. Like most Taerans, Nia is obsessed with the imposition of order upon chaos, and magic is her tool. Nia was dealing with a rebellion in one of the border nations when the Ixian curse struck Kel Taera. When she awoke, her orb was in the hands of a cunning merchant prince. This trade lord refused to bond with the orb, and planned to sell Nia's vessel to a wealthy collector. But the merchant's young daughter was fascinated by the orb. She stole the artifact and fled, using the power of the orb to escape pursuit. Mae Nia is not yet in full control of her host, but the girl is thrilled by her life as a magical fugitive and Nia rarely has to engage in Ego conflict to get the girl to do what she wants.

### TIL DARJA

**CG Female Elf Brd14, Ego 30**

"I'll sing you a song of power and glory ..."

Darja is a cunning bard. Her chaotic impulses often trouble the other orbs, but she is an excellent firebrand and insurgent. Darja is driven by her boundless curiosity and her love of adventure, and she is always seeking greater challenges for her wits and skills. In her first life she debated with dragons and performed for gods; today she is stirring up dissension among ancient elven families.

### TOR ALAER

**LG Male Bugbear Pal 12, Ego 30**

"Let me tell you what I do to lawbreakers ..."

Alaer served as a champion of virtue — a crusader and inquisitor who brought the moral values of Taeran society to the benighted territories conquered by the empire. He believes that conquest and the rigid enforcement of order is the only way to bring true justice to the world, and takes a dim view of modern society. His host is the former chieftain of a bugbear tribe, although Alaer destroyed the goblinoids as soon as he gained full control over his body.



## PLAYING AN ORB-BEARER

Ancient Kel Taera was a human civilization. But its citizens are long dead, and all that remains of Kel Taera are the souls within the *spirit orbs*. This section will look at the values and traditions of Kel Taera. These should color the ways that the trapped spirits interact with their hosts, and how a Taeran spirit will behave once it has gained full control of its host body.

A player character can become an orb-bearer after finding a *spirit orb* and choosing to bond with it. He might even be captured and forced to bond with the orb. In this case, the GM should play the part of the orb until the two spirits merge; at this point, the character should probably become an NPC, although you could decide to leave him under the control of the player. Alternately, you could run a series based around an entire party of orb-bearers, either fully integrated spirits or volunteers who believe in the Taeran cause.

## PERSONALITY

At a glance, Kel Taeran society would appear to be a utopia. As a culture, the Taerans are dedicated to defending the weak, acting with mercy and compassion, and to fighting evil wherever it may appear. They seek to replace chaos and fear with peace and security, and to provide for the needs of the poor and hungry. However, these noble intentions are blended with a Manichean ruthlessness. Taerans are utterly convinced that the ends justify the means. Famine and plague are countered with sword and flame, granting victims the mercy of a swift end as opposed to a lingering death. Villages sheltering rebels are completely exterminated in order to ensure the safety and security of the kingdom. Every Taeran action can be defended as serving the greater good — but on the personal scale, the ruthless justice of Kel Taera can be terrifying.

As individuals, it is important to remember that the inhabitants of the *spirit orbs* are heroes. They are legendary warriors, wizards of extraordinary power, founders of dynasties, and conquerors of nations. Each spirit should have a distinctive and forceful personality and a host of tales to tell. A spirit may be willing to treat its host as an equal, but it will never acknowledge a non-Taeran as a superior or master.

All of the spirits are interested in locating others of their kind and restoring Taeran order to the benighted modern world. Beyond this, the goals of a particular orb will vary based on its class and the history you develop for

the spirit. A bard may wish to find out as much as possible about the modern world, visiting exotic locations, trying new foods, and learning new songs. A wizard will want to study the spells of the new age. A barbarian or fighter may urge his host to seek glory on the field of battle, becoming angry if the host shows cowardice. If the orb and its bearer cannot come to terms, the orb will withhold its powers, and as its hold grows it will seek to dominate its host.

## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The people of Kel Taera are long dead, but the *spirit orbs* can bond with any humanoid creature. In the past, the *orbs* were always bound to human hosts of the same gender as the hero, but in the present day race and gender vary tremendously from bearer to bearer.

## RELATIONS

The orbs recognize that modern civilizations have no relation to the world that they knew. They will judge all races and cultures through observation. However, they are blinded by cultural pride and consider all modern nations to be inferior to Kel Taera. While the orbs will focus their might against truly evil beasts and nations, the orbs are convinced that Taeran rule is the only force that can provide stability and prosperity to the world.

## ALIGNMENT

The souls within the *spirit orbs* are the heroes of Kel Taera, and the vast majority are lawful good. Most Taerans firmly believe in the need for order and the rule of law, and they will always act in the interests of the greater good — as they see it. Neutral good spirits are considerably less ruthless than their comrades, but they will rarely challenge the crusading zeal of the lawful heroes. Orbs of other alignments are extremely rare.

## RELIGION

The Taerans believe that by establishing order in the mortal world they are actually bringing the world closer to the heavens, and that in time the mortal world will ascend to the realm of the gods. The primary deity of the pantheon is known as the Arbiter, and most cleric and paladin orbs follow this god. Of course, the Taeran deities have languished without worshippers for thousands of years, and their power has dwindled. It is possible that the Arbiter is the last of the Taeran gods.

Alternately the other deities may be slumbering in the shadows, waiting for the orb-bearers to spread Taeran beliefs and bring new prayers and sacrifices. If this is the case, the return of these ancient gods could herald an extraplanar conflict with the deities of the modern age.

## LANGUAGE

The language of Kel Taera was once spoken throughout the kingdom, but it has been forgotten for thousands of years. A *spirit orb* can understand any language known by its host.

### Male Names

The *ae* combination is very common in Taeran names, and male names typically end in *-r*, *-osh*, or *-an*. Examples include Alaer, Chort, Daelemir, Graegor, Laerosh, Murzan, Selaer, Vaelosh.

### Female Names

Taeran female names are typically two or three syllables, ending in *-a* or *-ja*. Examples include Darja, Calaela, Elia, Iraena, Laerina, Nia, Rezja, and Shaerina.

### Family Names

The Taerans place the family name before the name of the individual. Family names are one syllable in length. Examples include Dal, Jin, Kes, Mae, Sen, Til, and Tor.

## ADVENTURERS

Every orb holds the spirit of a powerful and capable adventurer. While many of the heroes served as kings, generals, and ministers, they all possess skills and abilities rivaling those of the greatest heroes of modern legend, and after thousands of years trapped in mystical slumber

most are keen to explore the new world and shake out the cobwebs. Hosts with strong diplomatic skills may be set to work establishing the foundation of New Taera, but other orb-bearers will be sent to gather intelligence and to search for orbs that have yet to be found.

### Typical Classes

Most classes are represented among the Taeran orbs, although there are a few exceptions. There are no Taeran rogues; stealthy and cunning heroes are either rangers or bards. Kel Taera had no monastic or druidic traditions. While there are Taeran barbarians, they are extremely rare; these are warriors whose might was such that the Taeran clerics and sages called them back from beyond the grave to fight for the forgotten kingdom.

### Typical Skills and Feats

As an orb-bearer gains levels and acquires skills, he is actually regaining the memories of the hero within the orb. Many of the Taeran heroes served as civil administrators, and skills will reflect this; ranks in Diplomacy, Perform (oratory), Profession (varies), and Sense Motive are relatively common. As the Taerans are extremely out of touch with the modern world, Knowledge (geography), Knowledge (local), Knowledge (nobility & royalty), and Knowledge (religion) are always considered to be cross-class skills. After a significant amount of time has passed this restriction can be removed.

### Typical Equipment

Initially, the orbs will be forced to rely on the weapons and equipment available to their hosts. Over time, the Taerans may attempt to locate relics of Kel Taera. Considering the power of the *spirit orbs*, it is likely that the arsenals of Kel Taera included a number of other minor and major artifacts, and recovering these relics could be a critical step in establishing a new Taeran kingdom.

## NEW DEITY: THE ARBITER

**Alignment:** Lawful Good

**Domains:** Good, Law, Sun, War

**Typical Worshipers:** Warriors and administrators of Kel Taera.

**Symbol:** An eye superimposed over a stylized golden sun.

The Arbiter embodies the Taeran ideals of order and security. The sun is his eye, spreading the light of justice across the world and striking down evil-doers and unclean spirits with sacred flame. His actions may seem harsh and merciless, but the faithful know that the Arbiter simply does what must be done to preserve order and civilization. His favored weapon is the flail (light or heavy).



## NEW MAJOR ARTIFACT: SPIRIT ORB

*Spirit orbs* are sentient artifacts that contain the essence of a hero of the forgotten kingdom of Kel Taera. To attain full sentience and use of its powers, an orb must bond with an intelligent humanoid. Initially, the orb acts as an advisor to its host and provides its bearer with minor magical abilities. As time passes, the bearer develops the skills of the ancient hero — but these come at the cost of his own skills and personality, which are devoured and ultimately destroyed.

There are a number of elements involved in using *spirit orbs*: the basic properties of a *spirit orb*; the process of bonding with an orb; the immediate and long-term effects of serving as the host of a *spirit orb*; ways to remove an unwanted orb; and the powers of the various different types of orbs.

### Basic Properties

A *spirit orb* is a perfectly spherical gemstone, slightly over 1 inch across. Most appear to be made of polished ruby. If the gemstone is examined closely, a mystic sigil can be seen in the depths of the stone: the *arcane mark* of the hero whose spirit is embedded in the stone. The orb radiates a strong aura of conjuration. A *spirit orb* has the following properties, even when not bonded to a host:

- Immune to physical and magical damage, and transmutation effects.
- Spell Resistance 30.
- Possesses all the immunities of a construct.
- For purposes of other magical effects, it receives a base saving throw modifier of +20 in all categories.
- An unbound orb can see and hear events that occur within 60 feet of its current position, and it possesses a mystical sense with the properties of Blindsight.
- It can telepathically communicate with any creature that has a language, but only if the creature is touching the orb. It automatically understands the language of the creature touching it.
- It can sense the location of any other *spirit orb* within one mile, and it can telepathically communicate with any orb within a mile.
- It cannot use any of the skills or magical powers that it possesses.

When a *spirit orb* is not attached to a host, its powers are very limited. An orb contains all of the memories of the hero, but the absence of a physical mind severely limits the orb's abilities to focus and act. If there is a way to destroy a *spirit orb*, this knowledge was lost along with the ritual for creating the orbs.

## NEW MAJOR ARTEFACT: SPIRIT ORB (CONT)

### Bonding with a *Spirit Orb*

Any humanoid or monstrous humanoid can bond with a *spirit orb*. This requires the gem to be pressed against the future host's forehead for a full minute. The host does not have to be a voluntary participant in this process; as long as he cannot break the contact, the orb can be bound to him against his will. At the end of the process, the orb is embedded in the host's forehead, bound to brain and bone.

### Serving as an Orb-Bearer

When a *spirit orb* bonds to a host, the soul of the hero begins to merge with that of the host. The orb maintains the basic properties it had while unbonded, and provides its host with a number of benefits. However, a *spirit orb* is a sentient magic item and it controls the use of these abilities on behalf of its host. The powers of an orb depend on the original class of the hero; the different types of orbs are described at the end of this section.

All spirit orbs provide their hosts with the following:

- Immediate bonuses to skills and ability scores, and special powers as the per individual orb descriptions.
- Blindsight with a range of 60 feet.
- +3 inherent bonus to Will saving throws.
- Immunity to *detect thoughts*, *discern lies*, and any attempt to magically determine alignment.

The greater powers of the orbs are based on the nature of the spirit contained within. Each spirit orb holds the soul of a 22nd-level character, and the class of this character determines the powers and benefits that it provides to its host. The individual orb entries that follow provide information for each class of orb that can be found; due to the nature of Kel Taeran society, there are no druid, monk, or rogue orbs. The entries include the ability scores and skills of the orb itself, benefits that the host gains immediately upon bonding to the orb, and the powers of the orb, along with the minimum Ego score that the orb must possess before it gains access to the power.

The orbs all have extremely strong personalities, and the Game Moderator should take a moment to develop a story for any orb that the party acquires. The spirit in a fighter orb shouldn't simply be some guardsman or soldier. It will be a king, a general, or a champion who slew giants with his bare hands! Remember that the orbs are intelligent and strong-willed creatures. With the exception of the bonding bonuses, all of the powers of an orb are under the control of the orb itself, and can be activated or removed as a standard action. If the orb disapproves of its host's action, it will immediately remove all of its gifts. It cannot harm its host, but sooner or later its Ego will grow to the point where it can assume control of the host.

As time passes, the hero's spirit slowly replaces that of the host. When an orb-bearer gains a new character level, he *must* advance in the class of the orb. In addition, he loses a level of his old class (or one of his classes, if he is a multiclassed character) and gains a second level in the class of the orb; alter hit dice, skills, saves, and all other class features accordingly. When determining if a multiclass character suffers an XP penalty, ignore any levels in the class of the orb.

*Example:* Darhyn is a 7th-level fighter. He becomes the host of a *wizard spirit orb*. When he advances to 8th level he must advance as a wizard. In addition, one of his existing fighter levels is removed and replaced by a wizard level, leaving him a 6th-level fighter/2nd-level wizard. When he advances to 9th level, the process is repeated; he becomes a 5th-level fighter/4th-level wizard.

Each time the character gains a level while bearing a *spirit orb*, the Ego score of the orb increases by 2, to a maximum value of 30. Once an orb has an Ego score of 20 or higher, or once the host's levels in the orb's class exceed levels in his original class(es), the orb may initiate an Ego contest at will. If the host's original class levels were in the same class as the orb, use the Ego score of the orb as the determining factor. This is why the people of Kel Taera bound the orbs to the bodies of children; in addition to providing the orb with the longest possible lifespan, an orb could assimilate the inexperienced mind of a child more quickly than that of an adult.

## NEW MAJOR ARTEFACT: SPIRIT ORB (CONT)

Once the Ego score of the orb reaches 30, the spirit of the host is completely obliterated. Even if the orb is removed, the host cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*; his soul has dissolved in the process of bonding. From this point on, the orb is no longer considered to have a separate intelligence, and cannot act independently of the character. If the Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma scores of the orb are higher than those of the host, they replace the host's original scores. The combined character still receives the bonding bonuses of the orb and can still use any of its magical powers, but he must use a standard action to do so. He must continue to advance in the class of the orb until he possesses 22 levels in this class; until this time he receives a +10% bonus on all XP that he earns.

### Removing a Spirit Orb

The people of Kel Taera willingly gave their bodies to the heroes of the past. The people of the present day may not be quite so obliging. Once a character learns the true nature of an orb he may want to have it removed. This is easier said than done. If a *spirit orb* is physically removed its host dies. The only way to safely remove an embedded orb is through the use of magic:

- *Wish* or *miracle* can remove a *spirit orb*. This is the safest way to remove an orb, and the former host receives a +4 bonus on his saving throws to prevent negative levels and ability damage.

- An orb can be removed by the successful use of *break enchantment* (DC 30) followed immediately by *regenerate*.
- The final and most gruesome path is to remove the orb physically — killing the host in the process — and to use *raise dead*, *resurrection*, or a similar effect to restore the life to the former host.

Even when magic is used, the removal of an orb is a traumatic experience that can have terrible consequences for both mind and body. Assuming the host isn't killed in the process of removing the orb, he suffers 4d6 points of damage. In addition, he must make a Will saving throw (DC 26) for each character level he has gained since the orb was embedded. Every time he fails a saving throw, he gains one permanent negative level and takes 1 point of permanent damage to all of his ability scores. The penalties of negative levels and reduced ability scores are applied to subsequent saving throws, so a single failure can have a catastrophic effect. The former host must check for negative levels and ability damage even if he was killed when the orb was removed.

There is no magic — not even a *wish* — that can save a host once the Ego score of the orb has reached 30. Even if the orb is removed, the host's spirit has been completely obliterated.

## BARBARIAN ORB

**Ability Scores:** Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 14, Ego 12

**Orb Skills:** Listen +X, where X equals the Ego score of the orb.

**Bonding Bonuses:** +4 inherent bonus to Strength; +2 inherent bonus to Constitution; +4 inherent bonus to Intimidate and Survival.

**Powers:** The orb imparts Rage Boosts, which enhance the Rage ability of a barbarian character. Rage is

increased to Greater Rage. Greater Rage is increased to Tireless Rage. Tireless Rage is increased to Mighty Rage. After Mighty Rage, each Rage Boost provides the bearer with 1 additional use of Rage per day.

Ego 15 — 1st Rage Boost; DR 1/—

Ego 20 — 2nd Rage Boost

Ego 25 — DR 2/—

Ego 30 — 3rd Rage Boost

## SEVEN CIVILIZATIONS

### BARD ORB

**Ability Scores:** Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 20, Ego 12

**Orb Skills:** Listen +X, Sense Motive +X, and Spot +X, where X equals the Ego score of the orb.

**Bonding Bonuses:** +4 inherent bonus to Charisma; +2 inherent bonus to Intelligence; +4 inherent bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy, Perform (any), and Sense Motive.

**Powers:** The bearer of the orb receives a +2 bonus to the saving throw DC of all bardic magic and music effects.

In addition, the orb contains one bard spell of each level from 0 to 6th. The orb's spell list is selected by

the GM. The orb can cast each spell on its list once per day as a 22nd-level bard. If the orb-bearer is a bard, he may use the spells contained within the orb as if they were on his spell list. However, the maximum spell level that is available to either orb or bearer is equal to the orb's Ego score divided by 5, rounded up.

When the Ego score of the orb reaches 30 and it merges with the host, it can no longer cast these spells independently. However, the host gains one additional spell slot at each spell level, which can only be used to cast the spells contained in the orb.

### CLERIC ORB

**Ability Scores:** Int 12, Wis 20, Cha 16, Ego 12

**Orb Skills:** Knowledge (the planes) +X and Spellcraft +X, where X equals the Ego score of the orb.

**Bonding Bonuses:** +4 inherent bonus to Wisdom; +2 inherent bonus to Charisma; +4 inherent bonus to Diplomacy and Heal checks.

**Powers:**

Immediate — +2 to saving throw DCs of all cleric spells.

Ego 15 — +3 to all checks to Turn Undead

Ego 20 — Empower any *cure* spell

Ego 25 — Turn Undead 4 additional times per day

Ego 30 — Maximize any *cure* spell

Empower and Maximize work just like the feats of the same name, but do not increase the spell slot of the spell. A single spell can be either Empowered or Maximized by the orb, but not both. The orb-bearer can use her own metamagic feats to Maximize an Empowered spell, or vice versa, however.

### FIGHTER ORB

**Ability Scores:** Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 16, Ego 12

**Bonding Bonuses:** +4 inherent bonus to Strength; +2 inherent bonus to either Constitution or Charisma (GM's choice); +4 inherent bonus to Intimidate and Ride checks.

**Powers:**

Immediate — +2 enhancement bonus to Initiative.

Ego 15 — +2 insight bonus to AC;

Ego 20 — host may make 1 additional attack of opportunity each round;

Ego 25 — +4 insight bonus to damage rolls when striking an opponent's weapon;

Ego 30 — Whirlwind Strike 3/day.

Whirlwind Strike is identical to the feat of the same name. If the orb-bearer already possesses Whirlwind Strike, he can make a Whirlwind Strike with a +4 insight bonus to attack and damage 3 times/day.

### PALADIN ORB

**Ability Scores:** Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 18, Ego 12

**Bonding Bonuses:** +2 inherent bonus to Strength; +2 inherent bonus to Constitution; +2 inherent bonus to Charisma; +4 inherent bonus to Diplomacy and Ride checks.

**Powers:** The orb uses its spell-like abilities as per a 22nd-level paladin.

Immediate — *protection from evil* at will (host only)

Ego 15 — +4 bonus to attack and damage rolls when using Smite Evil

Ego 20 — *shield other* at will

Ego 25 — Smite Evil 2 additional times/day

Ego 30 — *holy sword* 1/day



## RANGER ORB

**Ability Scores:** Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 14, Ego 12

**Orb Skills:** Knowledge (nature) +X, Spot +X, and Survival +X, where X equals the Ego score of the orb.

**Bonding Bonuses:** +4 inherent bonus to Dexterity; +2 inherent bonus to Strength; +4 inherent bonus to Handle Animal, Hide, Move Silently, and Survival.

**Powers:** The orb uses its spell-like abilities as per a 22nd-level ranger.

Immediate — *Speak with animals* at will

Ego 15 — *longstrider* 3/day

Ego 20 — +2 to all favored enemy bonuses

Ego 25 — *barkskin* 3/day

Ego 30 — *commune with nature* 1/day



## SORCERER ORB

**Ability Scores:** Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 20, Ego 12

**Orb Skills:** Knowledge (Arcana) +X and Spellcraft +X, where X equals the Ego score of the orb.

**Bonding Bonuses:** +4 inherent bonus to Charisma; +2 inherent bonus to Wisdom; +4 inherent bonus to Knowledge (arcana) and Spellcraft checks.

**Powers:** The orb enhances the power of sorcerer spells cast by the bearer. All sorcerer spells cast by the bearer benefit from the Eschew Materials feat. In addition, the orb may add metamagic feats to any spell the bearer casts, without increasing the spell slot used by the spell. For every 7 points of Ego (rounded down) possessed by

the orb, it may add a metamagic feat that would normally increase the spell slot used by 1.

For example, at Ego 14, the orb could add Silent Spell and Still Spell, Empower a spell, or Heighten a spell by 2 levels. At Ego 21 a spell could be Maximized or Heightened by 3 levels.

The caster may add his own metamagic feats to a spell, but these increase the spell slot normally and cannot duplicate a feat that is being used by the orb.

Finally, the orb contains one spell of each level from 0 to 9th (selected by the GM). The orb cannot cast these spells on its own, but a sorcerer may use these spells as if they were on her spell list.



## WIZARD ORB

**Ability Scores:** Int 20, Wis 16, Cha 12, Ego 12

**Orb Skills:** Knowledge (arcana) +X, Knowledge (the planes) +X, and Spellcraft +X, where X equals the Ego score of the orb.

**Bonding Bonuses:** +4 inherent bonus to Intelligence; +2 inherent bonus to Wisdom; +4 inherent bonus to Knowledge (arcana), Knowledge (the planes), and Spellcraft checks.

**Powers:** +2 to saving throw DCs of all wizard spells. The orb contains 2 spells from each level between 0 and 9th (selected by the GM). If the bearer of the orb is a wizard, she can prepare these spells without the use of a spellbook, as per the Spell Mastery feat.

Finally, the orb can cast the spells it contains as a 22nd-level wizard. It can use each spell once per day,

but may not have access to its full selection of spells. The maximum spell level available to the orb is equal to the orb's Ego score + the host's wizard level divided by 5, rounded down. So an orb with an Ego score of 12 bound to a 3rd-level wizard can use 0 to 3rd-level spells.

When the Ego score of the orb reaches 30 and it merges with the host, it can no longer cast these spells independently. However, the host gains one additional spell slot at each spell level, which can only be used to prepare spells that were contained in the orb.

**Note:** When creating a wizard orb, the GM should decide if the spirit is a specialist wizard. This should be reflected by the spells contained in the orb, and the host must follow the same path.

## ADVENTURE SEEDS

The question you need to answer when introducing the forgotten kingdom into your game is the amount of power the Taerans have by the time the party first encounters them. The orb-bearers ultimately intend to conquer the known world and reshape it in the image of Kel Taera. The orb-bearers are few in number, but they are guided by the spirits of brilliant tacticians, mighty wizards, and cunning diplomats, and their powers grow with each passing day. There are only 120 *spirit orbs* in existence, and only a fraction of those have been located. But if they can all be found and fully empowered, the orb-bearers will pose a serious threat. Over one hundred 22nd-level characters working in concert can easily defeat legions of normal warriors and change the face of the world.

While the orbs are bent on conquest, this does not need to have a major effect on your game world. The orbs are immortal and extremely patient. It will take quite some time for the orb-bearers to find the lost orbs, and even longer to regain their full powers; it may be centuries before the orb-bearers are ready to take action. But they will at least act on a small scale, establishing a stronghold that will serve as the capital of New Taera. There are a number of different ways that you could handle this:

- An orb-bearer with strong diplomatic abilities may organize and lead a rebellion against an existing tyrant. This uprising would start with a single community and spread across the entire country. This would provide the orb-bearers with popular support and a population of loyal followers. Over time, the orb-bearers would attempt to instill the people of the nation with the values and beliefs of the Taerans, creating a miniature version of the forgotten kingdom to serve as the backbone of their future battle plan.
- Alternately, an orb could easily gain control of an existing ruler. A power-hungry tyrant or barbarian warlord could use a spirit orb to increase his combat abilities, little realizing that he is mortgaging his soul. This could result in a dramatic change of tone in one of your existing nations, as the barbarian warlord suddenly begins organizing his warriors into disciplined legions.

If you followed either of these ideas, outsiders would see a change in the tone of one of your existing nations — first politically, but followed by the introduction of a new religion, new customs, and an unusual style of architecture. While this may seem sinister to outsiders, the nation itself will prosper and the people should be happy with the situation. You will have to decide whether the orb-bearers reveal their true nature to their subjects — pre-

sending themselves as harbingers who have returned to bring back the ancient golden age — or whether they hide behind mortal figureheads.

In addition to this large-scale use of the orbs and the ideas presented below, you could also choose to introduce a *spirit orb* into your game without giving the Taerans a place in the world. What happens if one of the party members bonds with the orb? How long will it take them all to realize the dangers that accompany the powers of the artifact, and can they find a way to remove the orb before it's too late?

## VAULT OF MEMORIES

This adventure seed introduces the party to the Taeran orbs. As the adventurers are traveling through a mountain pass, they come upon a dwarven mining community. The villagers are friendly but are clearly hiding something, and characters may catch a glimpse of a guarded mine shaft or a dwarf with a *spirit orb* embedded in her forehead. They also see injured dwarves being brought up from the mine, and may spot a few unusual relics — trinkets from Kel Taera. The dwarves refuse to talk about any of this. Finally, the party catches a glimpse of a more sinister figure: a bugbear lurking in the mouth of the mine, giving orders to the dwarves.



## SEVEN CIVILIZATIONS

The truth of this story is that the dwarves are part of a community that discovered a cache of *spirit orbs* and embraced the values of Kel Taera and the destiny of the orbs. The mine shaft leads down to another Taeran vault, but the Ixians spread traps and guardians throughout the vault and it is taking a long time to reach the orb chamber. The bugbear is another orb-bearer (possibly the paladin Tor Alaer). Ideally, the players assume they are in a bad B-movie, where the dwarves have been taken over by the sinister orbs, though, in fact, the dwarves have chosen to work with the orbs to bring back the glory of the distant past. Regardless of whether the party assumes the worst about the orb-bearers or whether they find out what is really going on, they may enter the Taeran vault and obtain a few ancient treasures ... including a *spirit orb* of their own.

### CHILDREN OF THE ORB

The souls of the forgotten heroes have been trapped without hosts for thousands of years, and it is only natural that some of the spirits would be affected by this experience. Jal Tarosh is a ranger orb who suffers from paranoid delusions. He believes the war against Ixia is still going on, and that the Ixians are behind every major power in the modern world — rulers, churches, guilds, and more. Tarosh has gathered a small cult of unhinged followers who believe in the words of the divine orb, and who have dedicated their lives to eliminating the Ixian conspiracy. The party may encounter lower-level agents of the cabal when they attack a seemingly innocent innkeeper or friend of the adventurers — actually a deadly Ixian spy, according to the cultists — or they may have to deal with Tarosh's orb-bearer. This can prove to be a difficult encounter on a number of levels. The Children of the Orb are mentally unbalanced humans who truly believe they are fighting for a just cause, not vicious goblins or trolls. Is slaughtering them acceptable behavior? Further, while his orb-bearer may be killed,

Tarosh himself cannot be easily destroyed, and if the party interferes with his actions he will certainly conclude they are agents of Ixia. Unless the party can find a way to keep his orb safely hidden, there is always the chance that he will turn up with a new host, seeking vengeance.

### THE HEROES OF KEL TAERA

For a change of pace, your players can assume the roles of a party of orb-bearers channeling the heroes of the forgotten kingdom. The primary question is whether the orb-bearers are low-level characters still growing into their full powers, or if they are advanced characters with access to their full legendary skills. Depending on the power level, there are a variety of challenges that orb-bearers could face:

- Recovering additional orbs or powerful Taeran artifacts from ancient vaults, overcoming the wards and guardians that have preserved these locations for millennia.
- Stealing an orb from an evil wizard who is seeking to unlock its secrets — and threatening to destroy it in the process.
- Tracking down and eliminating orb-bearers whose spirits have been corrupted over the centuries of imprisonment, like Jal Tarosh.
- Overthrowing a tyrant to create a Taeran stronghold; this could be limited to the actions of the party, or it could require major diplomatic and tactical action with the heroes serving as generals and demagogues.
- What if Jal Tarosh is correct, and Ixian liches and vampires are manipulating the world from the shadows? As the last heroes of Kel Taera, the adventurers will have to expose and destroy this ancient conspiracy.

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